



*CONFLUENCES 7*  
DANCE, RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

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## *Confluences 7 – Dance, Religion and Spirituality*

### **Opening address - Gerard M. Samuel**

Preparations for any event of this scale often begin almost immediately after the last one and *Confluences 7* was no exception. Our previous conference in 2011, *Dance, Physicality and Performance* led me to think about other intersections with Dance and thus, *Dance, Religion and Spirituality* was born. As a conference theme it is intentionally broad so as to draw in as many diverse voices and ranges of experience as possible because social cohesion and inclusivity remain issues close to me.

In 2011, as co-supervisor of Masters student, Kathryn Thorp who hails from New Zealand, I welcomed the challenge presented by her topic “Looking at Dance through the *Te whare Tapa wha* Model of Health’. New perspectives of what may seem standards and norms emerge from such research and provide much needed affirmation, in some cases, and rupture in others. Both critiques in my view are invaluable tools to developing discourse. The need therefore to bolster Dance Research in its many forms becomes paramount. I am pleased by the increasing number of UCT students who realise the significance of deepening their understanding and generating new knowledge of Dance. In the academy, this challenge remains, as Dance, for some, may be considered a Cinderella school in relation to the brassy giants of the so called pure Sciences and Economics Faculties. To paraphrase former president Thabo Mbeki’s remarks on the critical importance of the arts: “It is generally agreed that without the arts we run the risk of becoming a nation of houses and taps only” (Lochner, unknown). Thus, research into dance should take its place alongside the teaching and performance of Dance and could be seen as a continuum of intersections of Body, Mind and Soul.

So, how do we respond to those who dissect the body from itself: its placement in the world, its uniqueness and vivid account and sacred manifestation, the body in Performance that dances, that emanates from a religious context that attempts to understand its relationship with a spiritual world and with itself and others? Our conference over the next three days has dedicated itself to explore these collisions, intersections and parallel byways as we share, agree to disagree and perhaps even reject one another’s findings in the privileged setting of academic freedom.

Given the extraordinary lack of freedoms for so many and for so long in this country, concert Dance in South Africa has a proud legacy of speaking of and through the body in performance. An outspoken campaigner for human rights, Archbishop Dennis Hurley, challenged my own thinking when he asked “If conciliation was not the way to oppose apartheid, what was?” (Kearney, 2012:80). As performers and choreographers we have been adept at infusing many socio-political and historic strains into our work. South African concert dance has celebrated its legacy of ballet for a period of over 80 years and with equal vigour shunned its centrality. New forms such as Contemporary Dance, Afro-fusion and African

Contemporary Dance have emerged since the 70s, and already we are seeing the fruits of protest theatre, post-colonial literature and the flickering images of screen dance/ dance made for film.

There are so many African stories that need to be told and a conference such as ours helps focus our attention within the quicksand and complexity of a transforming global village. Kealinohomoku had written provocatively of wider notions of ethnic dances including ballet (Kealiinohomoku, 1983) . In South Africa, Syliva Glasser had challenged assumptions of dominant western cultures in their indigenous and colonial spaces (Glasser, 1991). Glasser was one of the first to articulate the problematics of the moving of sacred practices to the stage which fuelled debates and enquiry in preceding generations of SA theatre makers and choreographers like our keynote speaker, Vincent Mantsoe, Musa Hlatswayo, Brett Bailey and others.

Vincent Mantsoe may be known to many through his captivating solo performances especially during his career with *Moving Into Dance- Mophatong*. He is a multi- award winning artist, whose work and study of dance has taken him from Sweden, to Japan , Canada and Australia. For me he is one of South Africa's favored sons, an artist of integrity who has challenged stereotypical notions of himself, country and nation. Mantsoe is currently, Artistic Director of Association *Noa Cie Vincent Mantsoe*, based in France and has collaborations across the globe. His sensitive enquiry, generosity of spirit both on and off stage makes him the perfect choice to open the dialogues of our conference theme.

Our theme embraces even greater fields as it not only questions 'appropriation and appreciation' but the appropriateness of what for some viewers are considered taboos, never to be seen on the concert stage. Recent works, such as Alfred Hinkel's *Dansmettieduiwels* that tackled the "subject of sexual abuse amongst the priesthood in the Catholic Church" ( Stellenboom, 2012), spring to mind. Held at the Baxter Dance Festival – a platform for mostly contemporary dance expression, the proscenium arch context also warrants comment. I expect that *Confluences 7* will extend complex issues such as the value of dance – what do audiences gain by watching Dance? Can social cohesion be affected in Dance? How do we transcend the humdrum of our daily existence? Does one need a theatre to have such experiences? How are any of these performances akin to religious / spiritual experiences, if at all?

How true does the observation of the receding place of religion in the South African society by Gerald West hold true for other so called 'developing' countries like Brazil? West writes,

Another aspect of this retreat has been driven by our secular state (or, more accurately, religion-neutral state ) and Constitution (West, 2009:81).

What of other religion- neutral states? Could the USA fall into this category? How does the multiplicity of religious practices and views manifest in performance and Dance specifically? Will dance become entirely narcissistic and glorify the exponents of body as super-machine/ the dance technocrats? Or will the power of the body to elevate the minds into a supernatural realm be seen as of greater value? Will such work be defined as spiritual dancing? Who will watch or is this to be for the performers only? Who will determine that such spiritual works are of any quality? How will we know health practices from Spiritual movements?

As dance aficionados we may have witnessed the *duende* in Flamenco, spirit of *Ubuntu* -*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ( a person is a person because of the other) but can these seamless elements of Dance be taught? How can we as dance aficionados guide the reconstruction and development / RDP of the soul<sup>1</sup>?

I reiterate the questions that have troubled me in the initial call for papers for this conference. These include:

- What are the challenges faced by Dance academics and students in the nexus between dance, religion and spirituality?
- where does the [in]offensive line lie in the performance of the sacred , especially in the African context, on the stage?
- If, the healing power of dance is a given, how does one articulate hierarchy of choreographer vs. therapist?
- *When I dance I reach the sublime, man* (anon): Whose feelings of ecstasy are explored through dance ritual, and/or trance dance - the audience or performer?
- What do parallels between Muslim, Jewish and Christian dance reveal?
- How is dance integrated and or excluded in praise and worship?
- How are American taboos associated with sensuality, sexuality and the body different from South Asian taboos? Is there an unwritten notion of global taboo eg. Performance of protest with faeces?
- Who can write the stories of Blacks and women or indeed of any marginal group?
- What is the role of healing through dance as evidenced globally? What is definitive in this aspect within the African diaspora?
- How are Bible stories and/or holy scriptures or texts conveyed, constrained, or advanced through dance?
- When is Yoga as a form of health practice a vehicle for spiritual movement?
- What happens when spiritual dances become homogenised in a quest for nationalism?
- As dance scholars, can we conceptualise universal lenses or a kind of 'ecumenical' dance.

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<sup>1</sup> The need for a cohesive society one that is in harmony with itself is a cherished goal of former president Nelson Mandela and a enduring challenge for a fledgling democracy like South Africa. (West, 2009:99)

- How may Liturgical dance, that is perceived as reserved for virginal young woman, be unbundled?
- Why does one tolerate the custodians of African rituals who are thrust centre stage in dance festivals and touristic platforms?

These and many more questions are likely to surface at this juncture which I am hoping will propel further discussion on this engaging theme. We are in the presence of some of the leading voices and dance scholars on the subject of Dance, Religion and Spirituality. I warmly welcome each and everyone one of you. Ladies and gentleman, it gives me great pleasure to formally open our 7th Confluences programme in 2013. You are all our honoured guests, Sani bona, você é bem-vindo... Namaste, welcome!

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## **Part I – Keynote Speaker**

## **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

### **Vincent Sekwati Koko Mantsoe**

*The philosophical approach in Vincent Mantsoe's work is based on notions that allow for both transformation and preservation of cultures in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the balancing of the differing forces of African, Contemporary and Asian movements. His unique version of 'Afro fusion' or 'contemporary African' dance, is today a form in itself, characterized by its spiritual, highly energetic and physically demanding movement style. His keen interest is to pass this information on to artists from diverse backgrounds. Mantsoe has inspired many dance artists across the globe. In this keynote address, Mantsoe explores the open-minded inclination in his work, which is open to both African traditional and western studies. He regards himself as a student: an observer who is curious about human culture and spirituality. This attitude has challenged his artistic beliefs that are poised on a fine line between cultural traditionalism and western academia: an attitude not always eliciting a positive response from audiences. However Mantsoe insists that it is essential to point out that the challenges are greater than himself; so in creating and finding a better way, patience and time must be invested in order to better understand our individual pathways and to channel the spiritual impulse in a simple, yet effective, manner*

### **NDAA!! 'GREETINGS'**

Ladies and gentlemen, It is with great pleasure that I am able to welcome you all to Cape Town, or as they call it, 'Tafel Bergie". Welcome to the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of Confluences at the UCT School of Dance. And, although Gerard has already done this, I wish to add my few words to officially say that the journey has started. ----- I would like to thank both the School of Dance and the Confluences team for inviting different spirits to share different thoughts and journeys.

Ladies and Gentlemen: we are here today and for the coming few days, to explore, investigate and to discover as well as to open our eyes and ears and make connections in the journeys on which we have embarked or are embarking, to find new paths and to also, 'not forgetting the past', to find a common balance between dance, religion and spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We are here today, to explore the individual's 'WAYS' the ways to communicate in a spiritual sense, through dance or religious belief.

Personally, I am not an Inyanga/Sangoma 'traditional healer', or associated with any religion, and I am not an academic student, but I am a free artist born to a family of Sangomas, hence I strongly say that, 'I am not a sangoma', but I possess the spirituality through dance movements. This process allows my spiritual 'path or way' to accept and learn from others. This way/s: is not to undermine the teachings 'initiations' or beliefs of my elders, but to find the Balance between 'inter-cultural traditions: to embrace, to breach ways to accept, to listen, be patient and honest along my artistic path.

According to Lao Tzu, father of Taoism; *A Good traveller has no fixed plan, and is not intent on arriving.*

My view of dance as an artistic AND spiritual practice, my background and personal path, my work as a soloist and a creator of group works... is to find a 'better' balance in the cultural interpretations based on organic movements. It is essential then to point out that, the challenges are greater than me, so in creating and finding a better way, patience or time has to be invested in order to better understand individual paths and personally to channel the spiritual forms in a more simple yet effective manner.

Dance is, to my mind, a therapy for finding oneself, it can be physical, spiritual or even a religious journey, where one can truly be listening when transformed by the forces of nature, and possibly connect with one's maker; and mine started while in the womb of my mother.

Today! Is a new era, an era where big challenges will transform the balances between the ways of humankind—his or her beliefs. Today, we dance to the new rhythms and cries of 'Political identity 'Religion' Political Culture/tradition (Spirituality) hence these Forces of Nature, form a journey of a society or nation in constant motion.

Hand in hand, both Religion and Spirituality play an imaginative and artistic role in the African, Asian and Western cultures across the board, and dance is connected to all factors of the spiritual and religious path. Although pop culture is centre stage, one cannot be blindfolded and ignore the effects of butterflies being free, flying to capture the senses of 'life', the simplicity of nature, yet her force powerful enough to destroy or repair.

Growing up in Soweto, or anywhere in the world where the underprivileged stay in both dark holes or in light, can shape your 'ena' (soul). In the differing 'South African' cultures, many believe in a spiritual realm. Individuals want/need to believe in something, hence the spirituality of humankind is danced in celebration of weddings, ceremonial paths and death as well as at political rallies.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I am here today as both an artistic creator and simply a 'spectator' or observer.

Throughout the years, many voices, some with philosophical words and some without, have described my work and artistic ideas in different ways. However my personal inclination is to be very open minded to both African traditional and western studies. I regard myself as a student; an observer who is curious about human culture and spirituality. This attitude has posed challenges that have placed my artistic beliefs on a fine line between cultural traditionalist and western academic. The essence of my creative path is set to preserve tradition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, yet balance this with today's ideological ideas --and to therefore move with time.

My creations have resulted from intercultural interest and beliefs based on the knowledge of the Sangomas' spiritual realms. My artistic studies throughout the years have changed with time (much as culture has), but I have preserved my belief in dance as a 'religious and spiritual' communication. The studies or artistic ideas are mostly strongly based on the African 'south' philosophy, with influences from the Asian philosophy and western 'intellect'.

My formal training as a 'western trained dancer' began with Moving into Dance in the early 1990s, under the direction of my mentor Sylvia Glasser. However my curiosity in the cultural and spiritual world came from home, home where culture and tradition had been embraced with dances, ceremonial rituals and songs of the Sangomas. This notion of using sacred



gestures and some movements in a contemporary sense for the western (and even some African) audiences who may or may not have idea/s of what this gestures means and why it is being used, can put people in an uncomfortable position of being unable to grasp the true nature of this process. The challenge has been proving that it can work only if done correctly. But then, on the contrary, it is not about proving but it is about finding the way of balancing different forms.

*Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa wrote, 'I view myself as an non-person, I have no identity, I am nothing, I am simply a gateway through which ancestral spirits pass from the past into the presences and into the future and from the future back into the past' (Zulu High Sanuzi 2001: Ringin Rocks Press)*

I have been fortunate enough to be part of the traditional process from childhood to adulthood; to witness the forces that surround us everyday and I have been fortunate yet again to be given the opportunity to travel and learn about other aspect of cultures. In a western sense, I am trained mostly in Graham technique and other forms of western dance training to some degree, but my curiosity as an artist led me to other philosophical dance forms: Aboriginal Australian dances, Martial arts/Tai-Chi, here and there, some Indian Classical dances, Cambodian dance gestures. And yes the 'Michael Jackson' copycat all the way as well as the smooth moves of The Temptations or the toi toi dance in the streets.

African Traditional dances are mainly based on the philosophy of the Sangoma's forces, ( again, I strongly claim that I am not a Sangoma, but have maybe found a similar way to communicate?) To truly embrace these forces, a ceremonial sacrifice had to be made and with the permission of my elders, I brought these sacred forces to the foreign lands. This allowed me small, but increasing upsurges of understanding of the journey that Sangomas take, a journey that should not be taken lightly in any form.

*I find in Taoist learning something in common with the learning of Samgomas: 'to truly understand life and beyond, one should retire his or her own ego/arrogance and be nothing'*

The wisdom of my ancestors paved a different route for my artistic venture; to 'forge' sacred movements yet retain the original values or purpose. During my formal training with Moving into Dance, I discovered endless possibilities, yet I had to choose the correct one for me. And there is no question that my choices as an artist/creator led to raised eyebrows in some and in others to some curiosity, anger, misunderstanding and often confusion.

Most of the South African audiences today, accept the choices I make and understand how the work I create reflects the South African History/culture 'identity'. Yet there are still reservations as some think, that maybe to some degree, I have gone too 'European'. And for audiences around the globe, there is sometimes the notion (based on the festival director or programmer choices), that the work is too classical/formal, it does not 'fit' into the ideological philosophy of their public. And because of the choice of dancers from different cultural backgrounds and training, the question maybe based on who fits the profile of my work, hence this raises more questions as to who should and who should not do my work. The truth is that no one can move or interpret my works exactly as I do, but the work may still be meaningful in a different interpretation..

Today, I am moving on a 'Fine line'.

This marriage between the African 'meth' and western intellect was formed to create what was then called Afro-Fusion, and now it has been called African Contemporary dance 'to be artistically correct' but in my case, I saw a broader aspect of it, and I called it NOTHING, it is what is, it is a collection of information brought together over the years, with different studies of forms (physical, mental and spiritual forms).

### **A constant debate in motion**

The traditional teachings or learning were never about intellect in the early year of my formal studies, but they were about listening (my grandmother), feeling (the drums, clapping and songs/chanting) watching (aunt and mother, dancing the dance of life, as if death was dancing with them) and taking part in the sacred dances. In western education, all was based on thinking and analysis and given a form, an altogether different perspective on education.

This 'Way' of education had to be balanced between 2 aspects of creation. For this, I created different solo works on myself and for Moving Into Dance while I was Associate Director and Resident Choreographer. Not only working everyday physically, but being patient was one of the things that I had to learn (because as a young man, all that mattered in those days was to some degree 'show-off') but passion and dedication had to be part of my studies and understanding things in a different way.

Sharing my artistic vision, passion and spiritual way, was, and still is, a part of my creative process. Creating different works for Moving into Dance opened more doors for me to create for other companies in South Africa and around the globe, and the teachings that I carried out were based on this knowledge --simply based on the traditional and western studies. Individuals took my way with them and formed their own way. My belief is that even though one may not believe in a spiritual path, through the essence of the work created, individuals gain something (as audience or performer), which forms their own way. And when that beauty and simplicity came to life, I knew that this WAY was a correct one.

During the years of training, creating, performing and travelling around the globe, at some point, my path was interrupted by various occurrences, which caused my departure from my homeland to another land, a sacrifice that happened unsurprisingly for myself and my family and a change of wind did not stop my creative path. I am now based in France, where I continue research based on South African history in general and the ancestral beliefs remains the true base of my work with my multi-cultural company, which was created in 2005. My Company (Cie NOA) and I regularly present new work around the globe and as a soloist, the interpretation of a work, differs from the company work. The intentions however, are always along the same path. One can say that my solo works are more personal, they are closer to me, they come from home. The connections are much stronger, and the interpretations go beyond just movements themselves. They are about living the history of where I come from (culturally, spiritually and politically) they exist inside me, whether I am in Europe, the USA or Asia; they are my way, they make me who I am. They are about an ancient world, a world that I myself don't know how and where it is part of me. Yet I do know that the preservation of this world exists in the physical form of my dance. This form comes together during the Dance of Life (Bupiro-Mukiti), distant wisdom seems to rush inside my veins, like a mother giving birth to a child, beauty and agony marry each other to create nature's power, yet I am not a Sangoma, but I can see and I feel the forces when dancing, I am everyone and I am no one at the same time. My mother said 'Sekawati, I will never again come to see your solo performances. Because while watching life unfolding in

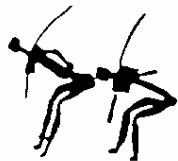
front of her, she sees herself entering a new world as well, she goes into trance, without even dancing. I am crossing paths between the old world and the new aesthetically and philosophically. My company or any other company on the other hand, for which I create work, take a different route. This route is to attempt to channel the dancers to enter into a different world, an 'initiation process' so to speak. Has living in Europe changed the shape and content of my work? NO, I believe that it gives me a different point of view of how to shape things during the creation of the work.

Maybe about 18 years ago, while still based in South Africa, while creating works for Moving Into Dance, the organisms of the work were still very much to do with being young and energetic. At the same time, the preservation of cultural ideas was a strong base and every audience or any public watching from TV, were affected by the honesty of the work and the way in which the work spoke to them. Moving Into Dance gave birth to many of us, I/we created a new language which transformed the aesthetic ideas to how I/we saw the creativity as individuals or collectively.

Today, I think the ideas of cultural identity are very broad as we are now faced with intercultural integration; we speak about political identity more and more, sexual orientation, and yes, cultural and social identity. Because I am still very much bound to this idea/s, yesterday journeys still are today's journeys even if they take a different route. The teachings are very important; they are to be implemented with honesty and an open-minded approach. I have to explain my spiritual path, and how it affects who I am and where I come from. It does not matter whether you are white, black, pink, or brown or whether you think you do not have a spiritual path. Everyone has it; it is in our DNA, only 'a' choice will make a difference as to which path to take.

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## **Part II – Scholarly Papers**

# **DANCING AT THE CROSS-ROADS BETWEEN PERFORMANCE STATE AND SPIRITUAL ENCOUNTER.**

**Anna Morris**

## **Abstract**

*Somatic Movement practices offer a lens through which to examine the similarities of the state of consciousness utilized in dance performance and African spirit possession, this being an embodied state that involves bringing more awareness to physical sensation than to the directive mind. The act of performance and that of incorporating a spirit require an expanded sense of 'presence' not often evoked in daily life. Somatic practices which cultivate a shift of attention from mental activity to kinesthetic and interoceptive processes in order to 'be moved' have shown that in learning to track the sensation and movement in your body, we are better able to distinguish between when we are here and when we are away, thus providing us with insight into the ambiguous and ephemeral state which supports an expanded sense of 'presence'. In this personal narrative inquiry I attempt to answer the question of why one tolerates 'the custodians of African rituals who are thrust centre stage in dance festivals and touristic platforms' by showing that dancers and African healers share an unspoken knowledge of silent level experiences which connect us to a greater spiritual energy. Furthermore, I offer a discussion of the neurological basis of Somatic practices and how they support this greater sense of 'presence', highlighting the correspondences between performance state and spiritual encounter.*

## **Introduction**

This paper is a personal narrative inquiry that explores the question of why the dance community might tolerate 'the custodians of African rituals who are thrust centre stage in dance festivals and touristic platforms' by showing that dancers and spiritual practitioners share an unspoken knowledge of silent level experiences which occur during states of deep embodiment. Embodiment involves experiencing the body through one's kinesthetic sense and is a primary focus of Somatic Movement practices. Attending to the sensations arising in the body helps to bring the silent level into consciousness thus providing a means to examine the correspondences between the state that the dancer enters during performance and that cultivated by a spirit medium, in order to achieve possession. I suggest that kinesthetic awareness is the common thread that runs through each of these practices and is also the means by which we can achieve transformational states.

## ***Background and Methodology***

Writing a personal narrative inquiry allows me to place my experience, or more specifically, the lived experience of my own body, at the center of the research. Chase (2008:64) defines narrative inquiry as 'retrospective meaning making - the shaping or ordering of past experience'. In this paper I will outline the ways in which the experiences of Somatic Movement, dance performance and spirit possession have been woven together in my life over the last several years. Comparing my personal experience, rather than clinical evidence, to examples from research in psychophysiology, I will discuss how each of these practices relies on developing a particular balance in the nervous system and how this can be achieved.

According to Eddy (2009:5) the field of Somatics shares its origins with those of modern dance and indeed continues to be shaped by the embodied approach of dance professionals. Early modern dancers such as Wigman, Duncan and Laban created a revolution in dance performance by 'putting emphasis on cultivation of the innate expressiveness of the natural, unshod body' (Johnson, 2004:3). Going to 'the body as a trusted source of knowledge', Wigman and her student Holm 'created a form of expression and communication that transforms our most basic sense of self' (Vigier, 1994:14). Somatic Movement, as I have come to understand and practice it, is a process of relinquishing rational thought processes, which orient us culturally and direct our activities in the external world, in order to attend to sensations arising from within the body as a 'source of knowledge'. Employing a phenomenological perspective that prioritizes felt sensation over intellectual models and belief systems, we open ourselves to a horizon of an 'indefinite number of perspectival views' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:15) of our physical sensations, emotions and imagery. On a physiological level, the act of attending to internal sensation shifts the nervous system into a parasympathetic state, conducive to regeneration and healing (Bainbridge Cohen, 2008 & Lacey et al., 1963). The shift into a parasympathetic state reveals an intelligence that exists beneath our everyday consciousness, manifesting as spontaneous or undirected movement and sounding. This is what I refer to as the silent level where one knows but is not yet able to put into words.

## ***Continuum***

Continuum is a Somatic Movement practice developed by Emilie Conrad, which focuses on the nature of fluid movement or 'wave motion' within our bodies. If you consider that the fluids in

our cells are just as affected by the gravitational force of the moon as the waters of the oceans then it is hard to discount the effects of the vibrations of our own breathing and sounding which begin in our throats and ripple throughout our bodies. My personal Continuum practice involves using different breaths/sounds which resonate with different experiences of my body so I can feel, for example, depth, width, softening or awakening. I use my hands to direct these sounds and my attention to my body together with loosely structured movement explorations that help me experience my center in relation to my periphery, to the nature of movement in my joints or the distance between my sacrum and my occiput for example. During these explorations I choose to let my everyday consciousness go and allow the consciousness of fluid to dominate my experience, manifesting as rippling movement like the ebb and flow of water at the edge of a lake. My movement exploration or 'dive' culminates in a period of rest or 'open attention' where I can truly experience the silent level. In this state I merely notice the sensations arising in my body; there is a sense of expansion as my experience of physical boundaries dissolves. According to Conrad it is in this primordial state that our bodies regenerate and reclaim their life force (2007:151-152).

In her article about the global influences on Somatic practices, Eddy (2002:56) discusses how Conrad's understanding of fluid movement was inspired by the years she spent dancing in Haiti:

Conrad attributes her initial insights to the knowledge she gained through her Haitian experiences. Somatic exploration and application offers her a mode of communicating this knowledge to a wider audience, but she recognizes the importance of the culturally specific dance of the Haitian divinity Dambala in her internalization of embodied knowledge. Dambala's movement, Yanvalou, is reminiscent of the motion of waves, or of the rippling movement of a snake.

It is not necessary to understand the origins of the practice in order to benefit from it and in fact the move towards a body-based vocabulary is a common trend amongst Somatic practitioners who prefer to focus on the 'universality of the biological experience' rather than referring to a folkloric tradition or spiritual practice (Eddy, 2002:56). Williamson (2009:41) writes: "Awareness of biological intelligence developed through a felt relationship to our deeply material earth-body-substance invokes a greater sense of 'belonging' – belonging to earth, being-of-earth, crafted and shaped by the stuff of the earth."

Somatic Movement practitioners work to create a safe container in which participants can explore, offering the time and ultimately the permission to drop into this deep state of embodiment. As one progresses in the practice one learns to choose not to respond to

stimulation from the outside world and to keep one's attention on sensations arising from within the body ensuring that the sympathetic nervous system is not activated.

The Polyvagal Theory proposed by Porges (2007) explains that activating the sympathetic nervous system precludes us from entering an optimal state of rest and regeneration. According to this theory, the vagus nerve which is a major component of the autonomic nervous system has two branches. The older branch is active when the options of fight and flight are not available and results in a slowing down of metabolism and immobilization of the body. The newer branch, only occurring in mammals, is responsible for healthy social interactions. The vagus nerve is 80% afferent meaning that it sends signals from the body to the brain thus forming a major part of our interoception. Porges (1993) suggests that infants rely on interoception to develop what he calls the social engagement circuit involving this newer branch of the vagus nerve. Furthermore, this newer branch, in the absence of sympathetic activation, co-opts the older branch of the nerve to create a state that Porges calls 'immobilization without fear' (Porges 2011:15). Brown and Gerbarg (2005:193) have shown that the practice of yogic breathing results in the balancing of the autonomic nervous system: 'During the practice of ujjayi, people feel calm but alert and attentive. The proposed mechanism is a shift to parasympathetic dominance via vagal stimulation from vagal somatosensory afferents in the glottis, pharynx, lungs and abdominal viscera', (Brown and Gerbarg, 2005:193). Strubelt and Maas (2008:32) researched the visionary state that arises during initiation rites in Gabon after the consumption of a plant called Iboga comparing it to that of a near-death experience. In both cases the state is attributed to a vagal dominance induced by either Iboga or in the case of near-death, a lack of oxygen. Here vagal or parasympathetic dominance refers to the same process as Porges (2011) describes above where the newer branch of the nerve co-opts the older branch promoting increased emotional activity together with increased parasympathetic activity.

### ***Dance Performance and the Rite of Passage***

While Somatic Movement encourages us to listen and respond to our body's needs, there is much about a dancer's training that requires us to override these needs. A dancer in training learns to ignore pain, fatigue, hunger, personal boundaries and even fear in order to ensure the best possible performance. Having trained under a director whose demands often crossed the line into abuse, I have a tendency as a teacher to be lenient on other people's bodies. And yet I know that the training I had gave me an unquestionable trust in my own ability to deliver a



performance. I have not yet found a way to impart this self-trust in a way that does not involve being pushed to physical and emotional extremes. It is in the extremes of repetition, endurance and strength that we learn to control, to find the balance we need to enter the performance state. It is in effect a rite of passage into the realm of transformation.

In order for the dancer to enter this transformative realm, there are a number of things which need to happen. The dancer has to have mastered the movement to the point that it has become automatic, or alternately in an improvised performance, the dancer needs to have become completely comfortable with creating in the moment and is able to 'listen' for what the space requires. Performing choreography involves in depth exploration and rehearsal as the dancer works through initially imitating a given movement phrase, to embodying that phrase according to how their specific structure navigates the gravitational field. An experienced dancer or improviser relinquishes their voluntary control to the more efficient gravity response, sensing into the weight and momentum of their moving body and the surrounding space rather than thinking about doing specific actions. In his essay on Hubert Godard's theory of Tonic Function, Frank (1995) explains:

[...]movement in relation to the gravity response is set before we move and cannot be changed by direct voluntary control. Only by changing the setting of perception, emotion, or meaning of the situation can we change the setting of the gravity response. We cannot learn by imitation a model of optimum movement to move in an optimal way. The form of the right movement depends on the construct of each person and the way that the person feels his or her body and surrounding space, and the way he or she categorizes the situation.

Frank goes on to say that Conrad's Continuum work is a 'demonstration of how sensory perception changes movement'. In my own performance I also use sensory perception to change my emotional balance to ensure that I am not too overwhelmed by adrenalin to maintain my centre but that there is enough adrenalin to give me the drive I need. At the same time I sense into my 'surrounding space', expanding myself so that my presence moves beyond the footlights and can come into communication with the audience. Sometimes this balancing act within my nervous system begins unconsciously a couple of days before the performance, before I have even begun to attend to the fact that I will be entering the stage, and once again I am alerted to it through my kinesthetic sense.

### **Spirit Possession**

My first possession experience happened when I was 21. I was attending a Zimbabwean water spirit ceremony for the first time and was blindsided by an influx of uncontrollable energy after being embraced and welcomed by one of the spirit mediums present. Despite having no context within which to understand this experience, having opened my senses to it there was no going back. I have carried these sensations with me on the back burner of my life with varying degrees of frustration since then. Thirteen years later I embarked on a Master's degree in Somatic Movement and immediately the sensations and movements I had learned to associate with spirit possession took center stage once more. At this time I was living in New Orleans and had been asked to perform as a dancer in a public Vodou ceremony for an annual Halloween event. I was to dance the role of La Siren, the mermaid spirit in the Vodou pantheon. I explained to priestess Sallie Ann Glassman who presided over the ceremony that this might be problematic for me and she invited me to her weekly ceremonies to practice. My first Vodou ceremony was indeed an intense experience, my spirit arrived screaming and sobbing with frustration and grief. I remember not knowing what to expect, being fascinated by the elaborate ritual and so happy to be moving to a drum again. It had been a long time since I had experienced the synchronicity that can occur between movement and drumbeat, both arising together, not one in response to the other. And then there I was, pitched forward screaming, dropping onto hands and knees as my legs gave way and became tail. The snake-like movement in my spine reverberated down to my toes where the *manbo*<sup>1</sup> were wetting my feet with water to honor the presence of the *lwa*<sup>2</sup> they call La Siren. By the time I came to perform, however, I had gained more ease, and the possession when it happened was far smoother.

It was only after I performed this event for the second year that I realized what I had been missing in all my efforts to understand the possession experience. I have more trust in myself as a dance performer than I do in any other arena of my life and when I enter the performance state, I enter my fullest sense of "self". I allow my kinesthetic sense to dominate my thought processes and I expand myself into the space around me, becoming fully embodied. In his explanation of the fears surrounding spirit possession, Louis Martinie (1992:55-56) writes:

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<sup>1</sup> A *manbo* or *mambo* is a Vodou priestess.

<sup>2</sup> The *lwa* or *loa* are the spirits in the Vodou pantheon.

Personality is such an acceptable and pervasive expression of self in Society that it is frequently unexamined; it is often mistaken for Self...Quite often what people fear most in ritual possession is a weakening of the hold of personality on the Self. Personality is a small cage but it is at least familiar. The greatness of self can seem foreign, forbidding.

What I came to realize in performing the process of possession is that the personality or the way in which we identify ourselves is in fact the cause of resistance to the process. Possession does not happen because you hold a particular belief or see yourself in a particular way. In fact it will happen regardless but it is more likely to be difficult or even violent if you cannot step out of this 'small cage'.

Landry (2008:58), in his work on Haitian Voodoo, suggests that 'sacred space' is not defined by the ritual space but rather by the body of the practitioner. Indeed in my experience, the process of possession is a silent level experience facilitated by a state of deep embodiment and is independent of the cultural beliefs and practices that surround it.

### **Conclusion**

As I develop my Somatic Movement practice I am increasingly aware of the overlaps that this work has with my experience as a performer and as someone exploring what it is to embody the 'other'. The recurring themes include the permission to shift states whether this is provided by a Somatic practice, the ritual set up of a possession ceremony or the preparation for a dance performance which could also be seen as ritual. Secondly there is the sense of safety that is cultivated either as a choice to favour internal sensation over external distractions, the trust in one's body knowledge to take care of the choreography allowing the space to perform or the understanding that when I fully embody my "self", I access intelligence beyond the scope of my everyday consciousness. These states are different from one another but all rely on accessing the kinesthetic sense and interoception in order to create a shift in our nervous systems. Having examined this shift of state through Somatic Movement I am able to draw the parallel between the dance performer and the spiritual practitioner, knowing that they work with a similar sense of embodiment. At the same time I suggest that as a result of our culture's silent level understanding, dancers and spirit mediums often occupy the same arena.

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## **BELOVED OF THE SOUL -“THE ART OF CONNECTION”**

**Balu Nivison**

### **Abstract**

*This is the story of a South African Jewish woman who, for many years, grappled with finding her place and meaning in a largely patriarchal, divided world, and in search of a meaningful way of connecting to her Jewish heritage through dance, music and prayer. Determined to explore and awaken my Jewish soul, together with spiritual mentor Sara Evian, I devised ‘Beloved of the Soul -The Art of Connection’, a workshop which offers a meaningful encounter with Kabbalistic teachings using dance, music, meditation, ritual and prayer. This experiential workshop offers a safe space to learn, meditate and express one’s emotions through dance - leaving one feeling joyous, alive and intimately connected to source and self. I share the story of my soul’s journey of upliftment and awakening and the rationale behind my passion, purpose and offering. The use of music and dance as vehicles for spiritual expression and connection goes back to ancient biblical times, and transcends religion, culture, space and demographics. Kabbalah teaches that there are five levels of every soul, from the most physical, vivifying aspects, to the most lofty, transcendent one. The workshop offers a unique experience that expands our consciousness, while gaining life-enriching jewels of knowledge. Soulful music, expressive movement, peaceful meditation and evocative prayers are all used to arouse and uplift the soul*

### **Background**

For the past 28 years, I have been deeply passionate about teaching, connecting and giving of service. I returned to South Africa in 1985 with the intention of creating an integrated dance troupe that might work toward healing the scarred and divided South African psyche. I was a leading force in the 1986 ground-breaking production --Abamanyani (Unity), which played a part in irrevocably changing the socio-cultural landscape of dance in South Africa. This heralded a spate of important struggle productions with which I was integrally involved. I was struck by the transformational power of creativity and physical expression to make major paradigm shifts. After studying a wide range of dance disciplines and means of expression, I wanted to consolidate and integrate the myriad benefits of these creative and artistic disciplines into a healing, growth and transformational program.

### ***Dancing at the edges of my soul***

I began to work with integrating the disciplines of art, poetry, dance, music and performance as a holistic therapeutic modality: thus was born the ‘MovingArt’ programme. *MovingArt* is a creative synergy of body, mind and soul through movement, art, journaling and music. By incorporating several techniques derived from diverse disciplines, I developed a dynamic programme which taps into the healing power of body wisdom (talk-and-move technique) and higher purpose visioning. The programme was based on the notion that our bodies and minds hold a vast range of stored

memories and experiences that, when accessed, carry potent divine energy. *MovingArt* emanates from the premise that within each of us is a rich vault of capacity, ability and brilliance waiting to be uncovered.

*MovingArt* is about moving your soul to life, accessing your inner, ancient wisdom, so that you can find what wants to move from within you, breaking down those inner barriers that hold us captive – so that we emerge more alive, more awake and more ready to take our next step in life. All that I had studied had been profoundly informative, to the extent that it shaped what I had become, but I sensed that an authentic, sustainable practice for life and teaching was missing. Although *MovingArt* had initiated and facilitated many life changes in people, it was time for me to go back to the drawing board as I had run out of material to teach. I needed a sustainable reservoir from which to draw, and a workable methodology. I needed to connect with something much bigger than myself, to have faith in something beyond my limited humanness.

I began to tap into the Kabbalistic blueprint which was deeply ingrained in my Jewish roots. *I was dancing at the edges of my soul* and thirsty for a meaningful path which integrated and honoured Judaism as part of the deep underwebbing of the great mystical traditions which speak of the knowing and accessing of soul joy in metaphors - that hold the song-dance, deep silence, and rhythmic patterning of soul experience.

### ***My struggle***

I soon realised that I was part of a generation that I call the 'orphaned' or 'exiled' Jews, who over time had somehow become distanced from their religion of birth, or had never even connected with it from the start, and sought other disciplines to satisfy their souls' thirst. I struggled to find what could make sense to me. Somewhere in my tormented world of isolation, something kept calling me back - a glimmer of an erstwhile flame continued to flicker and burn inside me. As a woman with children, a demanding career, somewhat alternative, a bit of a hippy, a clothing designer, a dancer and teacher who was 'oversubscribed', I went in search of teachers who could show me a way that would resonate within: so began my journey of recovery and discovery of *soul space*. With a deep sense of knowing, I was longing for something sustainable to live and to teach by, to share and pass on. Aware of my hovering Jewish heritage, I was drawn to open a long secreted treasure chest of learning, which offered life-enriching jewels of knowledge. Missing pieces of the puzzle of ancient wisdom began revealing themselves.

Over this period, I suffered a number of personal losses, including the tragic passing of my precious mother at a young age. This was a profound and life-shattering moment. Through a multi-disciplinary and synergistic approach to her illness, my mother had defied all odds and gone into remission. She began praying, re-learned her Jewish observance and embraced her faith in G-d. Tragically, she allowed herself to be coerced into undertaking a life-threatening medical procedure which was ultimately to be the cause of her untimely death. Having defied the odds, by devising her own healing programme, she sadly was unable to follow her reclaimed power and faith, and surrendered out of fear to modern medicine which has lost the very concept of synergy. I knew that the procedure was taking things too far and that it was unnecessary, but did not have the wherewithal to resist the medical professor who played G-d. Plunged into despair and guilt for not stopping the process, and 'saving' my mother, I landed on the road to many years of panic attacks and deep sorrow.

But what was my mother doing when she was praying?

### ***Finding mentors***

I was in search of answers that would help me to make sense of life's struggles. I met many knowledgeable and wise teachers but there were none with whom I felt sufficiently validated in the inflexible world of the 'right' way to be a Jew. Somewhere hidden in the many big books, texts, synagogue halls, Torah scrolls and haunting melodies lay waiting a beautiful, ordered, magical, refined, and exquisite system of ancient wisdom, a reservoir of joy, love, unity and connection which was ultimately to become a therapeutic balm.

For over 30 years, I had heard the oft repeated words, '*Aseh Lecha Rav*' - to 'make for yourself a Rabbi'. I subsequently learnt that this has a twofold meaning. We always need someone from the outside to assist us in making informed decisions, receiving an outside perspective. So, in deciding on important life directions, how does one find the balance between making oneself knowledgeable and picking a path (halacha), and choosing someone who will be in harmony with you and help you to navigate your path.

On the one side, you are the Rav, and on the other side, there is someone to be your complement on your halachic path, which is a deeply personalised journey. It is not a monolithic, individualised one-size-fits-all situation. I spent many years learning from all sorts of people who crossed my path. Teachers of exceptional calibre like Rabbi Simon Jacobson and Rabbi Laibl Wolfe found a way to bridge the divide between orthodox and secular Jews. The student was ready, desperate in fact, and



almost ready to give up the search. The turning point came when I found my own spiritual mentors, Sarah Evian and Yehoshua Looks.

Albert Schweitzer said:

In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.

I connected deeply with Sarah Evian, a berobed hippy, artist and teacher of Jewish Mysticism for many years, who loves nature and the outdoors, lights incense and candles and sits on the floor, and owns her own Torah. Having been guided into my life, she proceeded to redeem the place of women in Judaism, by showing me a path that was possible to emulate. In the process of her teaching me about Kabbalah and the workings of the Siddur prayer book, I learnt about G-d, life and purpose. My newfound understanding of the depth of Hebrew words triggered a profound emotional response.

Rabbi Yehoshua Looks, a businessman, Harvard graduate and Torah scholar, became a critical role model. So began two years of weekly Skype learnings which involved an ongoing, dynamic, interactive and honest exchange. His teachings became integral to the answers I had been seeking. Torah was being taught to me in a way that I could relate to for the first time. As spiritual mentor, Yehoshua guided me by simply sharing words of wisdom and meaning from the weekly Torah reading. There were healings and pathways with the teachings from the Torah which made sense to what had seemed unliveable.

According to Rabbi Simon Jacobson

Torah speaks in the language of mankind. Beneath the literal meaning in the Torah narrative, lay layers upon layers of deeper dimensions. Within the 'body' of the story lies its 'soul'- profound spiritual and psychological insights that illuminate the nature of our psyches, and provide direction in how to deal with the challenges of life. Every character in Torah, every episode of its narrative, parallels a facet of our personalities.

### ***Ancient, holy wisdom***

I tapped into a reservoir of ancient, holy wisdom and discovered a 16<sup>th</sup> century Kabbalistic poem called '*Yedid Nefesh*' (Beloved of the Soul) which focuses on the intense love one must feel for G-d.

*Beloved of the soul*

*Draw Your servant  
To do Your will,  
To run to You swift as a hart,  
To bow down low  
Before your majesty,  
Finding Your love  
Sweeter than the honeycomb  
And every tempting savour.*

*Exquisitely beautiful  
Is the splendour of the world.  
My soul pines for Your love.  
O G d, heal it, I pray You,  
By showing it  
The delight of Your splendour,  
Then it will grow strong and be healed  
and rejoice evermore.*

*O Mighty One!  
Manifest Your mercies  
and have compassion  
upon Your beloved child  
For Oh how long  
have I been consumed with longing  
to behold the triumph of Your might  
These things my heart desires  
take pity and hide not Yourself*

*Please my beloved  
reveal Yourself  
and spread upon me the shelter of  
Your peace. Hasten show love  
For the time has come.”*

The ancient philosophers divided the world into four realms - earth, plants, animals and man - with each realm being more evolved than those beneath it. Mankind transcends his bounds by reaching outside of him or herself with written words and dialogue.

As the flame clothes the black sooty clod in a garment of fire, and releases the heat imprisoned therein, even so does prayer clothe us in a garment of holiness, evoke the light and fire implanted within us by our maker, illumine our whole being, and unify the lower and higher worlds. **Zohar**

***Song, dance, joy connect prayer***

In becoming acquainted with Tehillim (psalms) and Tefillot (prayers), I found that music, song and dance were not separate from prayer, as is evidenced by many biblical references. From images of Miriam leading the women across the Sea of Reeds, to numerous references throughout the Psalms, it is clear that dance was an expression of joy, awe, victory and worship.

“The voices rose above the winds and the waves as tambourines keep the beat, skirts swirled, and hair blew in the breeze. ‘Come!’ A voice rings out above the singing. ‘Come sing and dance. Sing praises to the G-d who has freed us.” Miriam leads the song and dance, and she leads the Israelites in their first service of worship as free people.

*“At evening one lies down weeping*

*But with dawn a cry of joy;*

*Hashem be my helper*

*You have transformed my lament into dancing for me*

*You undid my sackcloth and you girded me with your gladness*

*So that I may sing to you my glory and not be silenced*

*Hashem my Elohim I will thank you”.* **Psalm 30**

*“[...] all my limbs shall proclaim...”* **Psalm 35”**

*“Praise with the blast of the Shofar... with lyre and harp... with drum and dance... with organ and flute... with clanging cymbals...”* **Psalm 150**

*“All you nations join hands... Make music for G d, make music, make music for our King, make music. For G d is King of all the earth make music, O enlightened ones ...”* **Psalm 47**

*“ [...] all inhabitants of the earth, open your mouths in joyous songs and play music. Play music to Hashem on a harp, with harp and sound of chanted praise... The sea and its fullness will roar, the world and those who dwell therein. Rivers will clap hands, mountains will exult together.” Psalm 98*

*“Hallelujah! Sing to Hashem a new song... let them praise His Name with dancing, with drums and harp let them make music to Him. Let the devout exult in glory, let them sing joyously upon their beds. The lofty praises of G d are in their throats.” Psalm 149*

*“To the chief musician*

*With wind instruments*

*A psalm of David*

*To my words, give ear, Hashem,*

*Consider my meditation,*

*Listen to the voice of my cry,*

*My King, my G d*

*For to you I pray.” Psalm 5*

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Hassidic movement focused on joy and passion, seeking connection to G d through song and dance. As in biblical times, dance once again became a form for religious expression. The movement’s leader, the Baal Shem Tov, and his followers danced in circles with increasing fervour, seeking a kind of ecstasy through their repeated movements. Sometimes the Rebbe would dance on his own before the group, creating new movements for the circle to pick up and integrate.

There is a certain point at which one’s consciousness expands to such a great degree that it can no longer be contained by the heart and mind alone, and one’s entire being needs to be utilised to capture the moment. (Unknown)

### ***Music is the key connector in dancing the soul awake***

Music offers a space that is beyond the physical limitations – a space where hearts can be opened, souls can soar and unbridled joy and love can be felt and expressed. It is a place where the heart and head come together in harmony. Dr David Servan Schreiber calls this ‘*Heart Brain Coherence*’. Through dance and music, connection to prayer is experienced in an even more holistic and integrated way. Rabbi Lisa Barrett, a reform Rabbi who had spent 15 years in orthodox Judaism, lived with me for three months and connected many dots. Unable to find the music of the prayers

that would help me to chant the melodies (the men's domain), Lisa helped me to give expression to the prayers through the chanting of the melodies. I had not known that it was possible to chant in Hebrew. I had up until then only known chants in Sanskrit from my Kundalini yoga classes.

Jewish women generally do not have access to an experiential way of embracing and embodying their spiritual practice in a ritual, communal way. While the ideal is to have a lively, spirited experience, communing, praying and chanting in unison, to have a *real* conversation with G d when praying, the more usual experience - on both sides of the *mechitza* (barrier between men and women) is prayer by going through the motions, a very non-spiritual process. The spiritual malaise is not just among women; the original emphasis that the Baal Shem Tov had on joy and passion has largely been lost.

### ***An awakening of the soul***

All this provided fertile ground for the seed of what ultimately became the '*Beloved of the Soul*' ritual experience. It is the embodiment and consolidation of many spiritual threads into an interactive workshop that enables women to experience what has been described as an 'awakening of the soul'. The Beloved of the Soul tapestry touches an archetypal pulse that is deeply known and sensed by women. It reclaims the feminine way of prayer by connecting in beautiful spaces, amongst kindred souls in community. By moving through the five different levels of the soul – *Nefesh (life force of the physical body)*, *Ruach (life force of the emotions)*, *Neshama (life force of the intellect)*, *Chaya (life force of the unique soul)*, *Yechida (oneness with G-d, infinite light)* - and the associated prayers, one is able to follow a sequential order of experience from the most physical, base aspect to the most lofty, transcendent one. Soulful music, expressive movement, peaceful meditation and evocative prayers are all used in this journey to arouse and uplift the soul.

We usually associate 'awareness' with the soul. Yet Jewish mysticism teaches that the *body* too was created by G-d. It therefore contains unique Divine energy of its own. Indeed, the body carries enormous power, stemming from the essence of G-d, which is superior in some ways to even the energy of the soul. After suffering trauma, memory seeps into the body and stays there until processed. The conscious mind may find it hard to deal with the memory, but the body remembers. Psychological feelings do not remain in the mental domain; they seep into the body, causing all sorts of physical reactions. Anxiety oozes toxins into the body. Strong traumatic experiences tie up the body in knots.

Therein lies the true power of therapy and growth: to help individuals work on 'untying the knots' and allowing him or herself to access the soul that he had to hide away so long ago.

Even when the soul may be unable to hear the message, the body has its own voice that speaks to us. Hence the power of a MovingArt technique called *'Talk and Move'*, a powerful practice which simultaneously processes and heals stress and trauma out of the body. Likewise, the use of movement and dance whilst engaging in any form of spiritual practice - bringing together mind and body in harmonic flow, is part of the daily sequence of prayers.

When awakening the second level of the soul, the life force of the emotions ('Ruach'), the powerful Ana B'koach prayer is recited, which asks for release of our 'entanglements'. This level is literally danced and shaken out, releasing all the 'knots' from the body, in order to make space for the soul's higher levels to be reached, and oneness and alignment to be attained. Once released, and a 'lightness of being' is felt, we visualise the planting of blessings and gratitudes for the day, making positive use of the newly opened space that has been created in the body. Even when the soul cannot be reached, the body can.

### ***Are we listening?***

A year into conducting this workshop, the feedback confirms the broad reaching need for an integration of teachings, movement and meditations. The collective energy of women from diverse backgrounds comes together in unity to achieve a sense of gratitude, joy, wholeness, love and well-being. The workshop entails embracing a series of prayers and meditations which activate essential affirmations and reminders of what we need for daily restoration and activation, in order to live out an important Kabbalistic teaching of the 'garments of the soul', namely, thought, speech and deed. We are reminded of the Kabbalistic view of prayer: "prayers affect the mystical forces of the universe and repair the fabric of creation". This ancient spiritual wisdom understands and addresses human fallibility in a carefully crafted system of words and guidance. These words, together with music, movement and visualisation, assist in the upward ascent of the soul.

Thus, we have many voices available to us. In healthy situations, and in many instances, it is the voice of our souls that we should be heeding. Yet, at times our bodies carry important messages for us.

Are we listening?

### ***The Larger Connection***

The psychologist Abraham Maslow was the founder of the new school of psychology often referred to as the 'Human Potential Movement'. At the end of his study of healthy, psychologically balanced people, he concluded that the final stage of personal development comes when the 'actualized'

individual begins to turn towards others. He talks about becoming a 'servant' while insisting on the importance of self-fulfillment .

In the art of connection to the whole of humanity, Judaism teaches that it is in our deeds, in the actions that we take, what we DO, that we actualise our mandate as human beings. It is imperative to fine-tune our own instrument, but ultimately it is how we harmonise with the grand orchestra of humanity, that our song is truly sung. Whilst the melody of many flutes together sounds beautiful, there is nothing more harmonious than a range of finely tuned instruments making music together.

When we sense in a visceral way – emotionally – our connection to those around us, our physiology automatically achieves coherence. At the same time, when we help our physiology bring about coherence, we open the door to new ways of taking in the world around us. This virtuous circle described by Maslow is the gateway to realizing the self without stress, anxiety or depression (Servan-Schreiber, D).

When two guitars lie side by side, and one string is plucked on one guitar, the same string resonates on the other one. This is a powerful metaphor for how we resonate one to the other, and the potential that this holds for human to human resonance on a large scale.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that altruism is at the centre of all great spiritual traditions. Indeed in his discussion of the neural origins of ethics, Dr Damasio emphasized that altruism is, first of all, an experience in the body. Joy in helping others is an emotion felt not only by Taoist and Hindu sages, and by Hebrew, Christian, and Moslem prophets, but also by millions of anonymous humans, many of them atheists (Maslow in Dr Servan- Schreiber ,D).

### ***Epic Journey***

When embarking on this epic journey, I had an inkling of the extent of the exile of my people, particularly Jewish women, but I had no idea just how dire the situation actually was. It was only when I began the search and research, that I encountered just how parched the souls were, and just how disconnected from roots so many contemporary Jews were. I was one of them. *Beloved of the Soul* was birthed not only as a method of presenting a beautiful system of the five levels of the Soul with their associated prayers, through music, dance and meditation. It was also birthed as a deep call for all women to come together in unity.

I have found that whilst the knowledge being shared comes from a deep well of Jewish wisdom, because of its universality, it calls to anyone with a body, heart, mind and soul who is open to exploring their connection to the chief musician ('*Lamenatzeach*'). Echoing through all the great spiritual traditions is a single common refrain. These are the clarion notes which sound across aeons of time, resonant with truth and purpose, which speak of the essential Unity of all Being. As we learn

to re-connect with ourselves through our re-connection with the Divine, as we seek to bridge the divides within our fractured souls and psyches through the healing synergy of the creative arts, so we are able, and indeed compelled, to re-connect with our greater humanity, with others who share in the re-awakening of their soul force.

Yet, critically, Unity or Oneness is not a loss of soul-self to monolithic indivisibility. Rather, it is the glorious constellation of a myriad soul-selves who come together in a surging crescendo of harmonic progression towards the Sublime. In this age of leaden materiality, too many religious traditions and structures have become ossified in irrelevance and alienated from their community. They are perceived to have lost both their relevance and their capacity to water the soul thirst. Beloved of the Soul seeks to re-discover the ecstatic within ancient Judaic spiritual practices through its luminous choreography of dance, music, art and prayer. Separate strands weaving a tapestry of renewal.

Dance is fundamentally about movement - movement towards wholeness, towards growth and soul-joy. Deep cellular healing takes place as the knots of buried trauma are released and joyous life-force again feeds the soul. The eloquence of Music is as ancient as time itself. Through the ages, music has played an integral role in celebration, contemplation and soul-expression. It has the ability to touch the sublime and to stir forgotten pools of Knowing, to sob with passion and to sing with the stars. Visualisation has the profound ability to bypass the controlling conscious mind and re-awaken to power of imagery and visual symbols - potent forces for healing. And Poetry - where words are allowed to capture the distillation of experience and articulate some of our deep soul-learnings - is an essential part of our expressive communication.

Prayer takes many forms. Contemplative, meditative prayer, joyous cadences of praise-giving, anguished cries of soul-grief, rhythmic patterning of thanksgiving and communion. All these can be brought to quivering new life if we are able to integrate our five levels of Being and open our bodies, hearts, minds, higher self and supreme G-d consciousness to renewal through a dynamic fusion of soul-awakening practices.

### ***A Deep Call***

May we heed this call, dig deep, reclaim the bedrock of ancient, wise guidance, to connect our heartfelt prayers and devotion, to ignite the flame of the soul through a full-bodied, full-blooded resonance, pulling the vibrational threads from within and without to extract the gold that lies buried within us as being of creation. And to sing out amongst the nations of other exquisitely tuned instruments, beating to the same universal drums, strumming hearts and soul chords of peace, love,



humility, tolerance, redemption. To live out our purpose as beings who are called to make a difference, to make 'Tikkun Olam' by taking responsibility to make the world a better, safe and beautiful space for all of its inhabitants.

I wrote:

*Through the ashes of Auschwitz, and the concentration camps of death,  
burning black holes in my heart, my roots, my people,  
I dance!*

*Through the rubble and remnants of apartheid separation,  
injustices, damage, wreckage,  
I dance!*

*Through the pain and depth of unliveable suffering of loss upon loss,  
wounds of what I did and did not do,  
I dance!*

*Through my captivity and imprisonment of my femininity at the hand  
of male unpredictable, father tyranny,  
I dance!*

*I dance on my precious mother's brave grave of faith, with  
compassion, humility, courage,  
gratitude, love and peace;*

*I weep on my father's forgotten life and legacy;  
On the path of reclamation of the soul, of me and of you,  
together, in unity,  
we dance!*

*Sim shalom*

*Tovah u'vracha*

*Chaim, chein,*

*Vacheses v'rachamim.*

*Shalom, Salaam, Namaste*

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# FROM “OTHER WORLDLY” TO “WORLD SPECTACLE”: AN EXPLORATION OF IDEAS OF THE “SACRED” AMONGST CHOREOGRAPHERS OF *DANÇA DOS ORIXÁS* IN SALVADOR DE BAHIA, BRAZIL.

*Doreen Gordon / Elena Calvo- González*

## **Abstract**

*This paper is being submitted as a joint paper in which the trajectory of dança dos orixás (“orixá’s dance”) in Salvador da Bahia is examined. The body movements that would later evolve into dança dos orixás were originally limited to the religious sphere, as part of the rituals of possession of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé. In this context, each candomblé follower, under a state of possession, dances in a different way according to the god/goddess that “rules” their head. During the second half of the twentieth century, dança dos orixás became progressively detached from this religious context. It was increasingly brought into the public sphere through several stylistic and choreographic adjustments, as one of the many “Afro” symbols on which the state of Bahia built its tourist and cultural policies. In spite of the fact that the dances are still present in current day candomblé religious rituals, dança dos orixás has become a subfield of the dance field in its own right and is increasingly displayed on stage. While it still depends on the idea of religiosity and “Afro culture”, it has nonetheless attained a certain independence and institutionalisation as an artistic field separate from the field of religion, as exemplified by its inclusion in the curricula of the State-level official dance programme, as well as by its centrality in folkloric performances such as those of the Balé Folclórico da Bahia (Bahia’s Folkloric Ballet) that represent “Afro” culture in shows performed locally, nationally and internationally. By examining the trajectories of some of the leading dancers and choreographers in the field of dança dos orixás, we not only explore its history and the process of its institutionalisation as a “dance” subfield, but also the connections between religious experience and the art field, pointing at the continuities and discontinuities between religion/art both in terms of individual trajectories as well as a wider social context*

## **Introduction**

This paper examines notions of “sacred” and “religiousness” within the field of Afro-Brazilian dance in Salvador de Bahia. Some of the body movements included within this field were originally limited to the religious sphere, as part of the rituals of possession of the Afro-Brazilian religion *candomblé*. When under a state of possession, followers of this religion dance in a different way according to the god/goddess that “rules” their head. During the second half of the twentieth century, Afro-Brazilian dance got progressively detached from this religious context and became, through several stylistic and choreographic adjustments, one amongst the many “Afro” symbols on which the state of Bahia built its tourist and cultural policies. In spite of the fact that the dances are still present in current *candomblé* religious rituals, Afro-Brazilian dance has become, in itself, a subfield of the dance field. Although it still feeds from the idea of religiosity and “Afro-Brazilian culture”, it has nonetheless attained a certain independence and institutionalisation as an artistic field

separate from the field of religion. This is exemplified by the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian dance in the curricula of the state-level official dance programme, as well as by its centrality in folkloric performances such as those of the Balé Folclórico da Bahia (Bahia's Folkloric Ballet) that represent "Afro-Brazilian" culture in shows performed locally, nationally and internationally.

At the same time some voices arose opposing the use of sacred elements in profane, artistic realms. Amongst these voices were not only some *candomblé* religious leaders, but also artists themselves, with some of them arguing for a radical exclusion of sacred symbols and other, more moderate ones, defending the partial exclusion of some symbols and the careful use of others. By exploring how some of the leading choreographers in the field of Afro-Brazilian dance deal with this controversy around the use of the realm of the "sacred" within dance, how they signify what belongs to the realm of religion, and what belongs to the realm of art, we point at ways in which the individual trajectories affect how these fields are continuously re-signified. We argue that the meaning of "sacred" for these choreographers is related to their wider involvement with religion in general and *candomblé* in particular.

### ***Salvador de Bahia: The Black state of Brazil***

The presence of religious manifestations of African origin in Brazil can be traced back to the forced arrival of around four million enslaved people (Albuquerque and Fraga, 2006), many of whom entered the country through the main slave port located in the city of Salvador. They brought some practices that, in the new continent, were to be re-shaped and re-configured to form what is presently known as *candomblé*. Although African religious practices were officially prosecuted during the times of slavery and after its abolition, in practice the prohibition and repression coexisted with a certain degree of negotiation that permitted their reproduction (Reis and Silva, 1989). During the 1930s *candomblé* was increasingly embraced as representative of local culture, and it was incorporated into the national imagery of Brazil. In that period, as Teles dos Santos (Santos, 2000) shows, the economic model of de-centralised industrial development was linked to the idea of profiting from local particularities for economic growth. Since Bahia was seen as 'the Black state' of Brazil, where African "roots" and culture had been kept alive, the idea was to turn 'Black' religion (i.e. *candomblé*), folklore and everyday life into the basis for the development of a tourism industry. This type of public policy had an impact in the visibility of *candomblé* and other cultural practices linked to African heritage, such as *capoeira* (a Brazilian martial art). The decades that followed saw the appropriation and re-working of some of its symbols into

other cultural and artistic areas, such as the visual arts with the work of artists such as Carybé, or, in the 1960s, dance.

It was within this context that *dança Afro (Afro-Brazilian dance)* emerged. Movements associated with the Afro-Brazilian gods (*orixás*) - previously found only within *candomblé* rituals - were introduced, along with other choreographic elements. We consider it relevant at this point in the paper to present a general description of what *candomblé* is and the role that dance plays within it.

### ***Man dancing in search of God: dance and the orixás within candomblé***

*Candomblé*, a magical, non-proselytising religion, is based on independent communities (*terreiros, or temples*) composed of both initiated and uninitiated followers that worship several deities named *orixás*, led by a priest or a priestess (*pai/mãe de santo*). *Orixá* deities are associated with characteristics and processes of Nature - such as the wind, thunder, forest, fire - as well as human traits, such as motherhood, justice, sickness or warfare. *Candomblé* communities are both symbolic, in the sense that they identify as a cohesive religious group under the spiritual guidance of a single leader, as well as spatial, taking place in *terreiros* (temples) - a word that refers to the physical lands and houses in which the community's rituals are undertaken.

Initiation rituals can be split into two groups: one for persons who have the ability to undergo trance and incorporate the *orixá* that "controls their head" (i.e. that occupies the body when undergoing trance), and the other group for persons who do not undergo trance. For those who undergo trance, the initiation rituals include the bodily management of trance, alongside the delivering of religious "secrets" shared with those who do not undergo trance. This bodily management of trance includes the learning of songs, religious prohibitions (such as the avoidance of certain foodstuffs), as well as learning the specific dance movements associated with their "head" *orixá* and the dances of other *orixás*. Each and every *orixá* has specific dance movements that are related to their characteristics and mythological specificities. Thus, for example, *Iemanjá*, a female *orixá* associated with the seas and fertility, motherhood and caring instincts, brings into her dance movements themes related to the flow of sea waves, as well as gestures related to food preparation or objects such as a hand mirror. Meanwhile, movements associated with *Xangó*, a male *orixá* associated with justice and thunder, are strong, precise and energetic, a marker of his mythical power and virility.

Learning the different dances of the *orixás* is necessary for traditional *candomblé* rituals, both for the circle of dancing that precedes trance (*xiré*), and for trance itself. During the *xiré*, the initiated dance to the sound of drumming and chanting led by initiated men who do not undergo trance, with each *orixá* having a specific drum rhythm and chants. Training in these dances is part of the process of allowing the *orixá* into the body and permitting the flow of movement under the state of trance. These two bodily techniques - that of learning all the *orixá* dances and that of allowing the body to “let the *orixá* dance” - are, in spite of being based around the same movements, of a different kind. There is a difference in terms of conscience and also in terms of the rhythm of the movement: slower and less outgoing in the case of pre-trance, when the initiated is dancing, and more boisterous and energetic under trance, when it is the *orixá* dancing. We will return to this point when discussing how our interviewees understand the frontiers between what is considered sacred and not sacred.

### ***The history of Afro-Brazilian dance and the controversy over notions of sacredness***

Afro-Brazilian dance emerged as a specialist area of dance in Brazil in the 1960s. The dancer Mercedes Baptista is considered the “mother” of this genre of dance in Brazil. After returning from her studies abroad, she decided to follow Katherine Dunham’s example and develop African-derived dance on stage. In Salvador, a number of folkloric groups emerged, such as Viva Bahia and Olodum. They presented to the public their representation of African culture in Bahia, which included body movements from *candomblé*, *capoeira*, and *samba de roda*, among others. There were other sources of inspiration as well, coming from the development of folkloric music, such as the teacher Rosita Goes at the Instituto Normal Isaias Alves (ICEIA). When Rosita Goes started a folkloric group in 1962 within the institute, she would call upon those knowledgeable about *candomblé* (such as the researcher Edson Carneiro), to teach her a few dances of the *orixás*. That is how “*dança dos orixás*” as a specific part of Afro-dance began to evolve.

Folkloric groups were the first groups to really perform these kinds of dances. At first, they were mostly composed of people who knew the folk dances but were not formally trained in dance. Viva Bahia was one such group, and became the source of inspiration for a process of professionalization of Afro-Brazilian dance that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. With the explosion in tourism, other folkloric groups emerged, and some groups like Viva Bahia and Olodum incorporated professional dancers that changed the aesthetics, organization and presentation of Afro-Brazilian dance. Dancers – principally coming from Rio de Janeiro, such

as Carlos Moraes and Domingos Campos – imprinted their own styles on these groups that were different to the folkloric groups that had dominated before. These productions went international, principally to Europe, with the intention of selling a product that was well executed on stage.

During the 1980s in Salvador, there was an increase in the number of schools offering the public courses in Afro-Dance, as a technique. At the same time, controversy and debate became more prominent in terms of presenting sacred aspects of the dance in folkloric shows, films, theatre spectacles and carnival, referred to as the “folklorization of religion.” Indeed, there is the argument that “*orixás* on stage” should be administered exclusively by religious entities such as FEBACAB - Federação dos Cultos Afro-Brasileiros, SECNEB – Sociedade de Estudos da Cultura Negra; CONTEC – Confederação Nacional da Tradição dos Orixás e Cultura; and CEAO, Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais.

Thus, the field of contemporary dance and the onset of the sub-field of Afro-Brazilian dance that included movements of *candomblé* religious practice were far from being free of disputes. The debates outlined in the previous section centred around the exclusion of certain symbols and practices, of re-signifying movements taken from a religious context in non-religious ones such as theatre stages, and the public and private discussions on what symbols and practices, if at all, could be brought into the realm of the arts and which should be restricted to the realm of the sacred. What is clear in these debates is that there is no consensus on whether all symbols or practices that arose within the realm of religion should be transported into other realms without breaking its “sacredness”. As such, we argue that these different understandings on what the “sacred” is, and the inclusion of elements in artistic realms that are originally from the religious field is linked to a wider understanding of religion and its role in everyday life. Therefore, if we are to understand the ways in which *Afro-Brazilian dance* as an artistic field, feeds from Afro-Brazilian religion (and especially *dança dos orixás*), we need to understand the meanings given to religion by some of its key players, mainly choreographers who contributed to the popularisation of this field.

We will look into how three key choreographers from within the field of Afro-Brazilian dance that incorporate elements from religious *orixás* dance understand their practice, how they signify what belongs to the realm of religion, and what belongs to the realm of art, pointing at ways in which individual trajectories affect how these fields are continuously re-signified. We argue that the meaning of “sacred” for these choreographers is related to their wider involvement with religion in general and *candomblé* in particular.

### ***Mestre King: origins and institutionalisation of Afro-Brazilian dance***

Mestre King, born Raimundo Bispo dos Santos in the year of 1943, is considered one of the earliest choreographers to fuse movements of *dança dos orixás* with contemporary dance moves, resulting in a new form of dance that is commonly termed Afro-Brazilian dance. King's trajectory within the realm of dance is an interesting one. Adopted by a Catholic family of Arab descent, who provided a rigid education, King had no exposure during his childhood either to the world of dance or to *candomblé*. In fact, his contact with cultural practices of African origin would only take place in his late teens, when he was introduced to the world of *capoeira* by a friend he met at a Catholic choir group. It was through this contact with *capoeira* (during which he received his nickname "King," for his noted capacity to attract people to *capoeira* practice), that he met a noted professor of musicology and folklore, Emília Biancardi. She noticed his talent at *capoeira*, and introduced him to *candomblé* and the world of *dança dos orixás*. It was during these years that King decided to apply for admission for a university degree in Dance, the first man to apply since the inception of the course at the local federal university in the 1950s. During his university studies he furthered the contact he had with *candomblé*, as well as practicing and studying classical and modern dance techniques. After his graduation, he started teaching at several schools in Salvador, not only modern and contemporary dance, but also the Afro-Brazilian dance technique that he himself had helped to create. Many famous choreographers of Afro-Brazilian dance, such as Tânia Bispo, Rosângela Silvestre, or the tragically recently deceased Augusto Omolú were, at some point in their careers, students of King. They belong to a long line of students that extends to present times, given that King, currently 70 years old, still teaches a four hour long weekly dance class and is choreographer for a dance group.

When questioned about his involvement with the realm of the sacred, and how it is intertwined with dance in his life, King points at how all folkloric dances have a "touch" of the sacred:

Catholic festivities, Saint Anthony, for example, that we are celebrating these days, you have the religious part, the sacred part, but there is also dancing, there are dances, there is samba, there's a mixture of sacred and profane. Because, you know what, the essence of what is sacred and what is profane, is in the intention, and not in the practices (Interview with King, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

King considers that, amongst the sacred dances, that of *orixás* are aesthetically the most beautiful. When he started teaching these dances, he would teach the movements in exactly



the same way as he had witnessed them during *candomblé* rituals. After a while, he realized that he could actually transform and “stylize” these movements, so as to create new dance movements, inspired by the *orixás* dances. It was during these initial years of merging *orixás* dance movements with contemporary dance that King received some of the strongest criticisms, mostly coming from Black movement activists, who argued that he was merely “selling Black culture” for a “white” audience, as well as some followers of *candomblé* for whom certain movements should not be taken out of its religious context.

King dismisses the former criticism, arguing that what he has done for *orixás* dance is to rescue it from oblivion, from its secrecy, and show its beauty and value to the rest of the world:

What I don't agree with is to leave *candomblé* in the dark, in secrecy, because you know what? I was raised believing that communists ate children, and guess what? I then learnt that it is just a philosophy, a way of seeing the world, of projecting a future for the world. The same with *candomblé*, I want to show its culture to the world, I respect the religion aspect, I sometimes frequent cults, but my main aim is to value the dances, the culture (Interview with King, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

Regarding the need to circumscribe certain movements to the sphere of the religious, King agrees that with his increasing knowledge *candomblé* (and especially after he became close friends with a *candomblé* priest), he has come to accept this and leave out certain movements and music that he previously included in his choreographies. Religion, King argues, always has to maintain a certain sense of secrecy, which applies not only to *candomblé*, but to all religions in general: “Look, there are also secrets within Catholicism, some sort of secrecy is inherent to any religion”.

Although King does not consider himself a follower of *candomblé*, his knowledge about the religion over the years has contributed to his dance practice. In spite of leaving out certain movements and music, sometimes he has to deal with religiosity coming into his dance class. For example, some types of *candomblé* music can sometimes cause an *orixá* to present himself in class. When this happens, those knowledgeable in how to deal with the situation are called upon:

There used to be a *candomblé* priest amongst my group of dancers, and he would deal with the situation, and when he wasn't around, you know, you somehow deal with the situation, with what you've learnt here and there...you deal with it (Interview with King, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

What we can see in King's trajectory, of having been raised “with no knowledge of my own culture, of Black culture”, and his way of understanding how the sacred intertwines with the

profane in his dance practice, is the development of an ongoing practice that is constantly being elaborated and in dialogue with the formal religious sphere. This is mediated by his role as a “researcher, not a practitioner” of *candomblé*.

Although King maintains the realm of religion as separate from that of dance, he accepts that there are some limits and no-go areas of religious practice that should be left out of his choreographies if the realm of religion is to be respected. The knowledge he has acquired about the religious field came out of his trajectory within the world of dance, but he is open to considering that, when dealing with religion, some things are better left out.

### ***Vavá Botelho: Afro-Bahian dance as spectacle on stage***

Vavá Botelho is the Director of the only professional folkloric dance company in Brazil – Balé Folclórico da Bahia - which was formed in 1988 and has achieved considerable success both nationally and internationally in its short history. This dance company now receives state sponsorship and is located in a well maintained, colonial-style building in the historic city centre of Pelourinho. Performances are held every evening in the company’s theatre, called the Teatro Miguel Santana, with a 38 member troupe of dancers, musicians and singers. The company draws from a wide ranging repertoire of dances - including slave dances, *capoeira*, *samba*, and movements that celebrate carnival. Many of the dances are heavily inspired by religious themes. For example, “Origin Dance”, a piece of choreography by Augusto Omolú, is based on a folk legend depicting the creation of the Universe as interpreted by Afro-Brazilian religion. In many ways, the theatre represents what has been selected by artists, intellectuals and state officials as being “typical” and therefore representative of Black Bahian culture.

Born in 1961, Vavá’s life trajectory reflects a long and deep involvement in the arts and theatre. He described himself as coming from an upper middle class Catholic family. He was greatly influenced by the intellectual and artistic circles in which he grew up. By the time he was an adolescent, he was making some of his first appearances as an actor, along with well known Bahian personalities such as Manoel Lopes de Pontes and Lucia di Sanctis. At the age of 14 years old, he participated in an animation group for children, producing various events in different neighbourhoods. In this period, he became interested in dance, eventually taking up regular classes and attending the Escola de Dança at the Federal University of Bahia. Opportunities to continue being involved in theatre arose at the Teatro Castro Alves, one of the most prestigious theatres in the country that is located in Salvador. In 1978, he was involved in mounting the theatrical piece, “Boca do Inferno,” which involved many

important Bahian actors and actresses. Soon after, he entered the group Viva Bahia before going on to create the Balé Folclórico da Bahia.

Vavá had been accustomed to visiting *candomblé* temples since he was a child, through his close association with intellectuals and artists in Bahia. Although his family was Catholic and he had undergone some of the major rituals of this church, they did not attend regularly. By this time, *candomblé* had started to gain in status and prestige in national discourses. Vavá visited *candomblé* temples such as Gantois and Fazenda Grande – however, he noted that he did not have a deep understanding of the religion. This only began when Vavá was introduced to a Pai de Santo through a close friend. This period of time coincided with a time in his life when he was trying to figure out personal and career goals. He visited the temple for at least 5 years, eventually becoming initiated into the religion. At the same time, he also enrolled as a student in Anthropology at the Federal University of Bahia. For him, Anthropology gave him a deeper understanding of religion, so that he could look at it objectively. Thus he described himself as having both a scientific and lived experience of *candomblé*.

Vavá brought to his artistic work an intimate understanding of the Afro-Brazilian religion and belief system. He became skilled at discerning what was “of *candomblé*”, and therefore of the spiritual world - or “not of *candomblé*,” belonging to a more public sphere. For him, the distinction between what is private and what is public guides how he negotiates his close relationship to religion on the one hand, and his technical role as a Director of a dance company that borrows from religious traditions and practices, on the other hand. He initially experienced this as a dilemma, especially in terms of the extent to which one should retain religious meaning in the practices/ beliefs being represented on stage. For example, he strongly felt that the music should be a true representation of what you would find in a *candomblé* temple.

However, he has since found it useful to distinguish between what is sacred and belonging to a private sphere, and what is public and belonging to the sphere of performance. In the sphere of performance, one has artistic license to create an image of the religious experience and to interpret a particular phenomenon in various ways, so that by definition it does not – and should not – try to replicate an “authentic” religious environment. Yet at the same time, he acknowledged that the lines between private and public are not always easily drawn. For example, he believes that religion is both private and public, and that there are

some aspects of religion which should not be hidden. He underscored the importance of context and timing in how these boundaries are negotiated.

For Vavá, the sacred in *candomblé* is the same as in any other religion – it is a private space exclusively for people who follow that religion. It includes secret or guarded knowledge, and there exists a moment for this. It is outside of the public sphere. Thus, there is a moment when the initiate is in spiritual communication and others cannot participate in this, because they haven't been properly prepared or trained to do so.

As to whether the sacred realm ever encroached on the realm of performance, he said that this had occurred on some occasions with his dancers and with members of the audience when they watched his company perform. He stated that there were some dancers involved in *candomblé* and on occasion some of them have become possessed by an *orixá* or *orixás*. Those who know about *candomblé*, and are trained to deal with it, are usually called to deal with the situation. They have to tell the *orixá* that this is not the place for him. To the dancer, when they are out of trance, Vavá explains that they have to learn to control their *orixás*, to realize that this is a performance and they must be able to exercise control over their bodies, to discipline the body and the *orixás*.

On occasion, it has happened with the public. Company dances are very energetic and emotional and the audience might get involved. For example, a well known actor once came on stage as if he was possessed by an *orixá*, but Vavá did not think it was of *candomblé*. Judging by his movements and actions, Vavá felt that his response was more psychological and emotional rather than spiritual. He also noted where tourists and foreigners in the audience also say that they feel something. He thinks that this is possible, as *candomblé* is a universal energy.

One of his more memorable company tours was a trip to West Africa. He stated that the company was well received there. They were praised for bringing African-based dance to the world stage, something that many had not been able to do because of a lack of resources. This trip to Africa – and the response of audiences there – seemed to reinforce Vavá's view that his dance company was closely representing African-based culture.

***Nem Brito: living religion, living dance.***

Born in the mid 1960s, Nem Brito's life has always had the closely connected presence of spirituality and movement. During his childhood, he was immersed in a highly spiritualised home. He witnessed and took part in his mother's religious trajectory - from the world of

spiritual medianism, *umbanda* and *giro de caboclo*, to her initiation into *candomblé* and later establishment of her own *candomblé* temple. He supported her both emotionally as well as practically and involved himself spiritually all along.

As a teenager, Nem remembers dancing at his house, away from everyone else's gaze, experiencing a flow of movement as if he was "taken away" by some sort of spiritual energy. The opportunity to explore these movements in public, and immerse himself in the world of dance, came through his participation, aged 15, at a local Black Beauty contest. He won the contest and was crowned "Moço Lindo do Baduaê", in front of an audience that included artists such as Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil and Moraes Moreira. Dark-skinned, tall and with a muscular physique, it wasn't long before he received job offers as a model. Nem's profile was in high demand during the 1980s in Salvador. The end of the military dictatorship and the resurgence of Black social and cultural movements, as well as carnival Afro-entities, such as Ilê Aiyê, meant that the notion of "Black beauty" was being increasingly present and in demand for fashion shows. During these shows, Nem would sometimes improvise choreographies, bringing dance movements to the fashion world. When he was elected, aged 17, the Carnival King of the Afro ensemble Ilê Aiyê, he had already a couple of years' experience in dancing publicly. Nevertheless, he had never studied dance formally, his choreographies were all improvised:

All the movements, it was all coming from within me, it was all spontaneous, it was the energy of the *orixás*, that was within me. I was parading during Carnival, the first black dancer to head a Carnival parade in Ilê Aiyê, and all the movements of my dances, which were Afro dances, were improvised, if you asked me to repeat a move, I couldn't (Interview with Nem, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013).

Nem would only come into contact with the world of formal dance after auditioning for a place at the international Dance Brazil group, aged 18, where he secured a place in the New York based company in spite of not having any formal training in dance. With the audition, came his move to New York where he received formal dance training, with the prestigious Alvin Ailey dance company. He learnt classical and modern dance techniques that he utilized in his work with Dance Brazil. The ten years he spent in New York not only brought him recognition within the dance field, with critics from newspapers such as the New York Times and the Village Voice praising his performance of *orixás* dances, but also some financial resources, from his work as a dancer and sporadic jobs as a model. This allowed Nem to help his mother build her own *terreiro* back in Salvador. His dancing was praised for the strength of emotion he brought to the stage, strength that was considered by Nem to be related to the spiritual connection he had, and not to a mere technical expertise.

After his mother's initiation in *candomblé*, Nem came increasingly closer to that religion, frequenting more rituals and observing the *orixás* dances with more attention. However, he does not consider that the strength of his performance as a dancer while in New York, or as a choreographer nowadays, leading an Afro-Brazilian dance group, comes merely from his frequenting the rituals. His personal involvement with the spiritual world, which he claimed was all along within him, and the progressive attention given to that spiritual side of his bodily energy is what he considers the base of his trajectory. Thus, more than being a process of merely adapting the dances from a sacred to a profane environment, Nem's trajectory points at a more fluid, continuous line between sacred and profane, based on a notion of embodied spirituality that needs to be constantly re-worked. The learning process would lie in learning how to channel that energy adequately in different contexts, and allowing it to express itself in different ways in those contexts:

When I am dancing, and I feel a flutter in my heart, I know, I am a song of Xangó, I know what that means, and since I have learnt to recognize that sign, I can stop dancing, have a drink of water, breathe deeply, and return to dancing without allowing that energy to take over the stage (Interview with Nem, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013).

In fact, after a career of 30 years within the world of dance, as a dancer, choreographer and teacher, Nem is planning to take a break from the world of dance to devote himself to *candomblé*, undergoing several rituals that demand a period of reclusion and distance from the mundane world. He will undergo these rituals after he choreographs a piece to celebrate his career, a solo that he is preparing to dance himself. For him, this demonstrates how religion and dance is inextricable: "After I dance that show, I will devote myself to religion for a while. It will close the circle, of 30 years". The circle he is referring to is the junction between dance and religion, the ways in which dance in his life has always been tied to religion, be it in the beginning of his career, when he would "let go" of his body to channel dance movements, to his success during his stint in New York, where he was highly acclaimed for the energy he brought to the performance of *orixás* dances, to his returning to Bahia after his period abroad, partly to help his mother establish and run her *candomblé* community. A community to which he will now devote some time, although he would not stop his teaching side while doing so: at his mother's *terreiro*, he is in charge of teaching and training the initiates in the dances of the *orixás* that will be danced before undergoing trance. Nem's experience, and the way dance and religion is interwoven in his life, tells us that the line between what is sacred and what is profane is not fixed in terms of practices or contexts, but in a combination of both.

### ***Conclusion: on life, religion and dance***

This paper focused on three key choreographers who have been instrumental in the development of Afro-Brazilian dance. Each have quite different trajectories and are positioned in slightly different ways in relation to Afro-Brazilian dance and religion. For example, Vavá is deeply embedded within the formal structure and is part of the Bahian intelligentsia, directing a company that is patronized by the state and is seen to represent Bahian culture to the nation and to outsiders. Nem, on the other hand, has worked outside of this formal structure, including time spent abroad, and his trajectory is closely tied to the spiritual influence of his mother and her upward mobility within *candomblé*. All three have a relationship to religion, though in different ways. Their diverse views on what is considered off-limits or “sacred” and what is allowed to be transported from a sacred, religious context, into the profane world of dance classes and staged public performances is tightly linked to the overall relation established with the world of the spiritual and spiritual practices. From Mestre King’s “re-discovery” of his “cultural roots” through formal dance training, to Vavá’s highly intellectualised differentiation between the private (“sacred”) realm and public performance, to Nem’s much more fluid notion of “energy” stemming from within him and blurring the boundaries of the “sacred” and the “profane”, we can point at how different actors in the same dance field interpret and weave the notion of religiosity into their dance practice. By looking at their different life trajectories, and how these three individuals ended up becoming noted choreographers within Afro-Brazilian dance, we can argue that there isn’t a single hegemonic standpoint as to where the limits between the sacred and the profane lie when it comes to Afro-Brazilian dance. From this, we can conclude that a neat, clear division between the realm of the “sacred” and that of the “profane” is merely an analytical tool. Thus, if we are to understand the ways in which notions of religiosity and sacredness are deployed within the field of dance, we need to look at the ways in which individuals weave religious meanings into their lives as a whole, foregoing the notion of pre-set, enclosed realms of “sacred” and “profane”.

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# **LIFEWORLD OF THE KAROO PEOPLE EXPRESSED IN THE RIEL DANCE – A GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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## **Abstract**

*People have danced both to music and without music through the ages. Dance movements may be without significance in themselves, or could have a gestural vocabulary or symbolic meaning. Traditional dances are often part of a broader cultural context as the music and movements have particular meaning, for example in warrior dances, rain dances, dances of love, dances of welcome, religious dances, friendship, courtship, fertility and celebration. African dance is mostly participative and rich in ritual meaning. This is also the case with the rieldance. that is part of the Khoisan indigenous knowledge heritage and is used by them, as a social, cultural and educational tool.. Today it is practised by the predominantly Afrikaans-speaking Coloured people living in the arid regions of South Africa. Evaluation of the significance of the dance includes visual interpretation, decoding of choreography and dress of the dancers as well as evaluating the meaning for the participants. Data for this investigation is gathered through participant observation, focus group interviews and a survey. The rieldance reflects the interrelationship of people with their environment (including animals) and represents the local cultural setting.*

## **Introduction**

The geographical and social context of dancing is important as dancing is part of a cultural tradition (Thomas 1995) and lifeworld (lebenswelt) in which not only the culture but also the environment is significant. Describing the physical actions of dance is a beginning step in studying dance and making sense of movements can be compared to literary analysis (Hanna 1987:xiv). She argues that dance is not only physical behavior with particular movements and muscular release of energy, but also cultural behavior reflecting values, attitudes and belief systems in the style, structure content and performance. It can reflect social organisation and relationships between individuals and groups; but dancing can also be a psychological experience as cognitive and emotional experiences can also be expressed. Dance can be part of an economic experience as it costs money to develop the skill and to perform, but on the other hand it can be performed to earn money. Dancing as political behavior can be used as forum for articulating political attitudes and values. Dancing is communicative behaviour and part of visual communication. Movements in dance often become standardised and patterned symbols so that members of a society may understand that particular symbols are intended to represent experiences in the external and psychic world even though movements are not necessarily understood in the same way by all dancers or spectators. According to Hanna (1987:4) "dance is a physical instrument or symbol for feeling and/or thought and is sometimes a

more effective medium than verbal language in revealing the needs and desires or masking true intent.” Revill (2004:206) explains that the dancing body communicates and speaks volumes in response to others. He sees the dancing body as constituting a multiplicity of formal and less formal systems of communication (Revill (2004: 207). Even though there are some generalisations regarding the communicative nature of dance, each individual dance culture has unique characteristics. We would like to investigate the riel dance as a system of communication, a system of symbols and meanings for a particular unique context and how the natural environment is reflected in the movements of the dance by identifying how animals are represented.

The aim of this article is to investigate the significance of the riel dance for the participants and the objectives are to document some of the characteristics of the visual statements made in the dance, music and dress; and to investigate symbolism with regard to the work situation and life world of the farm.

The ‘rieldans’ is a type of social dance originating from the arid regions of South Africa. It has its roots in the San and Hottentot culture influenced by colonialist culture. This dance is rich in history and tradition; and grew as a result of the confluence of earlier indigenous tribes with colonialists in the previous centuries. The people who practiced this dance historically were laborers on sheep farms in the Karoo regions of the Western Cape, Northern Cape and Eastern Cape provinces of South Africa’s strong agricultural economy. Today it is practiced by the predominantly Afrikaans-speaking Coloured people living in the Karoo region of South Africa.

The dance may at first seem to be void of rituals, sacrifice or religious connotations and mere entertainment. However, when one delves into the dance ethology, one realises the cultural setting reflecting places and spaces of economics, politics, morals, ethics and spirituality. The riel dance reflects the interrelationship of people with their environment. In the process the dancing body is socialised by the onlooker. The dance moves communicates the historical, cultural, economic and societal contexts which gives meaning to the onlooker. The landscape and socio-political context of the spatial location is depicted, expressed and re-enacted in symbols reminiscent of a rural lifestyle.

### ***Research Methodology***

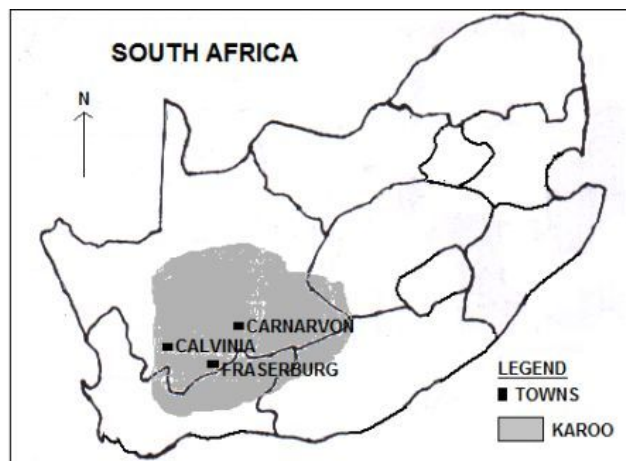
An ethnographic approach (Hofstee 2006, Mouton 2001) was followed in order to collect qualitative data with the aim to provide an in-depth description of the riel dance. This study took into account the lifeworld of the people in their Karoo environment as social agents who thinks, reasons and reacts with that environment. The riel dancer’s world view is socially constructed through a

colonialist past, and current challenges of the unforgiving Karoo landscapes. People's subjective experiences were noted when searching for richness and depth in their stories.

Data for this investigation is gathered through participant observation, a survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. Photographic evidence and video material was collected to illustrate dance movements. Data was collected in the form of survey questionnaires; 11 in Carnarvon and 11 in Fraserburg. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were held in one focus-group session in Fraserburg with 15 veteran riel dancers. One focus-group interview session was held in Calvinia with 10 young riel dancers. In order to supplement existing data, 3 one-to-one interviews were held in the form of extensive in-depth, open-ended questions. This paper forms part of a broader three-year study, where participant and direct observation methods have been used to gain invaluable insight and perspectives into the subject matter. Data collection was sourced in the indigenous language of the region and the participant's mother tongue, namely Afrikaans.

### ***The 'Rieldans' of the Karoo***

The Karoo is located in the central high-plateau of South Africa on an average altitude of 1200 m in an arid, semi-desert area with an average rainfall of less than 200 mm per year. It is not uncommon to have temperatures of above 35 degrees Celsius in summer. Sheep farming is an important economic activity in the Karoo region of South Africa.



**Figure 1. The location of the Karoo region in South Africa**

The riel dance of South Africa's Karoo region reflects relationships with nature that are characteristic of a rural agricultural way of life. It includes symbolic representations of animal species within the environment of the arid regions of the South African landscape. The environment that was shared by

the people and animals reflects the vastness and isolation of the locational and spatial environment. Wild and domesticated animals play a vital role in all aspects of the lives of the people.

### ***Characteristics of the riel dance***

The riel dance is a social form of an expressionistic dance which has been constructed by historical, environmental, social, economic cultural and political landscapes of the dancers. Dancing in essence is a particular form of social interaction (Giurchescu 2001:109) in which the dancing person as an individual and as a member of a socio-cultural community expresses his physical and socio-cultural environment. The dance fulfils a purpose and function connected to internal meanings which are determined by an outside social structure that is responsible for the criteria of its creation and performance (Rubinelli and Cantoni 2005:347). Giurchescu (2001:111) explains that dancing serves several purposes: strengthening ethnic identity, pre-marital interaction, social integration, re-enforcing traditional rules of behaviour, teaching children to dance, showing social and prestige status, and entertainment.

The riel dance is very similar to the 'Namastap' dance. The 'namastap' is practised by the Nama people found in the Northern Cape province of South Africa and parts of Namibia and Botswana. The Nama people are also of Khoisan origin and speak indigenous 'Nama'. The Nama name of the riel dance is !Khapara. The name 'rieldans' as we know it today was termed and known as the 'hotnotsriel'. This name has fallen out of favour because of the derogatory racial connotations associated with the former part of the name, 'hotnot'. The word is shortened from the word Hottentot. The name 'hotnotsriel' was given by white farmers for this dance because it was the dance performed by the Khoisan workers. With time there was talk of the 'hotteriel', just a shortened expression of the 'hotnotsriel'.

Today the riel dance is practised by the coloured community of South Africa, the direct descendants of the Khoi and San people who lived a nomadic existence across parts of Southern Africa. Remnants of the dance text from the Khoisan are found in the dance movements. Due to this genealogical link to the Khoisan, the riel dance is regarded as the oldest dance form in Southern Africa. The riel dance has its roots in the shamanic or trance dances of the Khoi and San people. The trance dance is the San's most important religious ritual (Lewis-Williams 1990:28). Traditionally it is danced in a circle with strong symbolism of animals and the landscape. Lewis-Williams (1999) explains that the dances of the San have been captured in their rock art in Southern Africa for thousands of years. The trance dances were performed after good hunting by San and Khoi and at times of festivities or rituals. The confluence of different cultures leads to meaningful exchange also influencing the traditional dances

of the Khoisan. Further research into the origins and development of the riel dance is necessary in this regard.

The riel dance is an energetic and lively dance. It displays a high tempo and the dancers produce nifty and skilled footwork. The dance text allows freedom and space for the individuals to be expressive in the dance repertoire. The dance moves and expressionism of the individual dancer can symbolise anything from work activities, household chores and animal mimicking. Individual dancers challenge each other's 'dance movements' and 'dance style'. It was an orderly dance with very definite techniques and dance movements, yet open to innovation and creativity.

**Table 1. Variations of the Hotnotsriel or Rieldans**

Name of dance movements	Characteristics
Kortriel	Sometimes the musician is asked to liven up the party with a 'kortriel' which is faster in rhythm and music. It is energetic and danced at a faster tempo.
Langriel	The 'langriel' was slower dance. The dance tempo and music is slower.
Platriel	The 'platriel' originates from the Cederberg Mountain regions, around Wuppertal. Dancing the 'platriel' means the feet is almost flat and close to the ground. There is little animal mimicking, or extravagant, or wild movements of the body.
Sakriel	The 'sakriel' is also called 'sakdans' in the Britstown, Prieska and Strydenburg regions. It depicts many animal symbolisms from the region.
Bokriel	The 'bokriel' is a slow, low tempo dance where feet are not lifted far off from the ground and the body movements are subdued. One can easily notice the symbolisms depicted in this dance. This dance variation is more prominent around Middelpoos and Sutherland.
!Khapara	The Nama name of the riel dance is !Khapara. Here the dance encompasses all the elements of the riel dance such as the 'agtersteek', 'voorsteek' and 'askoek'. Dance text from the 'namastap' is evident here with strong animal symbolisms used in Khoisan dances. It is a name that was used for this dance in the

	Richtersveld and Namaqualand regions from Vanrhynsdorp to Concordia and Kakamas.
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An interesting story was told by Katrina Goliath (80) from Fraserburg, that in preparation for such an event before visitors was expected for festivities, the 'dansbaan' (dance arena) was prepared at least a day in advance. Cow dung was collected by the children on authority of the adults. It was collected in the 'kraal' (shed). The cow dung was mixed with water and a paste was made to prepare the dance arena. This was merely an area of most probably 16m<sup>2</sup> outside of the farm worker's abode. The thin paste was smeared with sheepskin on the ground to prevent the Karoo dust from spoiling the party. Over time it became a thick layer of the floor. (Interview, 9 May 2013, Fraserburg)

Belinda Fisher (53), the co-ordinator from the 'Calvinia Sitstappers Junior Rieldansers' from Calvinia, explains that her parents use to buy the stomach of the cow, commonly known as offal from the butchery. They emptied the stomach of the cow, mixed it with water, and applied the paste with thatched broom. The cow dung outside was also picked up on the farms and mixed with the contents of the cow's stomach. The mixture was applied to the floors inside and outside of the houses. This was a regular chore that had to be done and it became quite hard and dry. (Interview, 31 May 2013, Cape Town).

Sometimes after a while of dancing the dust on the dance arena would be kicked up again. In this event it became too much and a light sprinkle of water was required. The atmosphere was jolly; outside in the presence of a fire whilst food are being cooked and prepared on the fire. The riel dance was a social circular dance around the fire or in the immediate vicinity next to a fire. Alcoholic beverages were present at times to those who consumed alcohol. The alcoholic beverages were either bought. Common at the time were 'vaaljaapie' a cheap, sweet/ semi-sweet/ sour, white wine. Beer was bought and home brewed beer prepared on the farm was consumed.

Such gatherings also made it possible for males and females to meet husbands and wives. Elements of the riel dance are sexually suggestive and courting displays between males and females is a central theme.

The dance was quite vocal, consisting of making sounds; especially animal sounds. It also consisted of the dancers challenging each other, motivating each other, essentially bringing the dance floor 'alive'. There were many manoeuvres and arm movements, staring each other 'down' and mimicking. It was comical in many respects with a jolly atmosphere.

## ***Instruments***

With a lack of media resources, music and producing music was very important to people on the farms. Farm workers had lots of free time on their hands as many of the tasks were seasonal. Whilst herding farm animals, farm workers had free time during the day while tending to the animals grazing. Possibly also boredom and the plenty of free time many farm workers started to make instruments by hand. The musical instruments in themselves were quite basic, but the music which evolved from it, was complex. The players of these instruments were not educated and could not read music. They were self-taught musicians who captured their lifeworld in music, song and dance as they navigated through their Karoo environments.

Instruments included the 'blikkitaar' (tin guitar), 'trekklavier' (accordion), 'blikviool' (tin violin), 'konsertina' (concertina), and the 'mondfluitjie' (harmonica). The banjo and harp were also used to produce music.

Jan Tafel, a musician born on 22 October 1952 in the Carnarvon region on the farm Kranspoort, explains that he used to make his own 'blikkitaar' (tin guitar). At the age of seven he attended school for one day only and the following day his father was persuaded by the farmer that he would be useless after school because he would not be employable on a farm. Currently he is a musician for the 'Rapystone Junior Rieldansers' from Fraserburg. He made his guitar from discarded syrup can and attached a branch from a tree to it. The rubber tube from old tractor tyres was used as strings. Later on, he learned how to make his guitar from the five litre-type Castrol oil cans which farmers threw away. He then used the intestines of sheep to make the strings and then rubbed the glue/gum from the 'rapysbos' (a common Karoo shrub) on the strings which influenced the quality of the sound. 'Rapysbos' is a common Karoo shrub which is fed on by domestic and wild animals. Whilst he did not play the violin, other farm workers made their own by violins by bending a branch from any tree and using the strands of horse's tails as the strings. (Interview, Fraserburg, 10 May 2013)

## ***Music and lyrics***

Cook (1998:126) explains that music is a way of creating and representing meaning. He explains that we can see music as a means of gaining precisely the kind of insight into the cultures and subcultures including their histories. Music communicates across cultures and over the barriers of cultures. It is the riel dancers who use their music and lyrics as a means to negotiate their cultural identity.

The songwriters composed their own music and today we can hear that characteristic sounds still being echoed in many parts of the Northern and Western Cape provinces of South Africa. Carson (in Leonard 2005:523) notes that a traditional musician, as in the case of Jan Tafel, does not 'take his tune as read...[but] plays the tune as heard'. Thus the music and lyrics represents an authentic and real riel dance culture. This reflects their own construction as indigenous musicians of what constitutes their lifeworld and identity.

Music is a human construction, a product of culture, and accordingly vary from time to time and from place to place (Cook 1998:17). According to Jan Tafel, a musician, who worked on several farms in the Karoo region, notes that the music has not changed in any significant way, if at all (Interview, Fraserburg, 10 May 2013). Music does not take place in a cultural or physical vacuum (Cook 1998). The music and accompanying lyrics is unique to the Karoo region and its people. The lyrics are satirical and many are extremely melancholic as the songs express the emotions of the people and social ills of the region. These songs give a voice to people caught up in complex web of oppression.

### ***Dress***

Research by Driscoll-Engelstad (2005) amongst the Northern Copper Inuit in the Central Canadian Arctic confirms the importance of clothing, be it traditional or contemporary, and how it expresses cultural values. She notes that through clothing people pass on ancestral traditions, which guides society's manner of living in the world.

The dress code was traditional farm worker-type dress which was standard issue within the agricultural sector. It also consisted of 'Voortrekker-type' dress worn by the 'Voortrekkers'. There was no separate or specific type of dress code for a riel dancing gathering. It was the everyday clothes of that time. People at the time much like today had their works' clothes which they wore during the week, the weekend clothes, and the Sunday clothes. In all respects these were poor farm labourers who wore ordinary day-to-day clothes when they attended a family gathering where there was going to be a party. The men wore basic pants, shirts and a jacket. Additionally they wore a hat and also had a 'knobkierie' (cane). The men's hat played a central part in the performance of the riel dance. A blue overall jacket or a full blue overall which was standard issue to farm workers; were sometimes worn.

Jan Tafel, comments that as a young man he would travel by bicycle or a donkey-cart to a neighbouring farm on a weekend for a party. He would wear his best clothes, 'Sondagsklere' (Sunday



clothes) or 'kisklere' (kist clothes) to the host family. He explains that if he received his new work shoes or work clothes from his employer, then he would keep it for that upcoming weekend.

The men's trousers was tied or kept up by suspender braces. It was pointed out to the researchers on several occasions by several different people, in different location across the region who lived on these farms for decades that men were very fond of a white shirt. The men wore a standard suite or a jacket with a 'onderbaadtjie' (waistcoat).

The women wore dresses and a Voortrekker 'kappie' (bonnets). The traditional 'kappie' is characteristic of the 'trekboers' (semi-nomadic pastoral farmers) and Voortrekkers who settled in South Africa. The women also covered their heads with a 'kopdoek' (head-scarf) and white socks with 'veldskoene' (leather shoes).

Belinda Fisher, explains that the women wore motley-coloured dresses, skirts and blouses with different 'voorskote' (aprons) daily. The apron was a standard garment worn over the dress every day of the week. Even on a Sunday the women wore a more beautiful Sunday apron than the apron worn on a Saturday or even the rest of the week. These aprons were worn at home, when shopping, when working and when visiting family. (Interview, 31 May 2013, Cape Town).

The riel dance of the Karoo people engages a lifeworld constructed in very challenging social settings. Research into this highly politicised dance form is warranted and the development of it seems complex and interesting. In researching the riel dance, a thorough understanding of how dance anthropology is viewed is crucial, including its purpose and function.

Dancing is primarily a non-verbal medium of communication which establishes contact between humans, or between humans and the supernatural world. Considering the social level of interaction, movement patterns and style (way of performing), as well as the use of space and proxemics, function as symbols for social relationships between individuals, between individuals and groups, and between groups (ethnic, religious, social, etc.) with respect to gender, age, kinship, marital status, profession, outsider or insider, and other criteria (Giurchescu 2001:112).

### ***Dance symbolism:-work situation and labour conditions***

Agriculture remains a dominant economic sector in the Karoo. Men were employed to do sheep-shearing, tend to sheep, goats and cattle, putting up fences and construction. Essentially the women were employed in the main farm house and tended to the farmer's household and helped looking after the children. However, the workers themselves had a patch on the farm where they could keep animals and grow crops.



**Figure 2. Sheep-shearing in the riel dance**

**Photograph: Hylton Howard Arnolds**

In **Figure 2** the 'Korbeel Rieldansers' from Carnarvon is depicting a scene from their sheep-shearing dance act. Sheep shearing is the most important task on a Karoo farm (de Jong 2012:96). In his work on the 'Karretjie People' (itinerant sheep-shearing nomads) of the Karoo, de Jong (2012:3) notes that the sheep shearers are the least protected source of labour in South Africa's economy, yet an indispensable service. The Karoo is sheep country and it remains the predominant agricultural product that can be farmed successfully. The sheep can digest the dry Karoo bushes and withstand the long periods of scarce rainfall. In **Figure 2** the women are on their hands and knees positioning themselves as sheep while the men are displaying the shearing act in the form of dance. These dance forms played itself out at many events and gatherings across the region testimony to the impact sheep farming in the Karoo had on the lifeworld of the people.

Basic domestic work is being mimicked in the riel dance such as washing and polishing floors, and washing of clothes. The work that the females performed daily on farms to the 'baas' (master) and 'miesies' (madam) as domestic workers was as important then as it is today.

The farmer's family and the farm workers' families lived in close proximity, often with intense relationships of loyalty, reciprocity and mutual expectations that transcended the workplace situation to include matters such as housing, education, health, transport, religious practices and even friendship (Atkinson 2007:44).

It is thus no surprise that dances depicting ordinary household chores is displayed in dance acts at riel dance cultural heritage events. These dance displays have been present for many decades in the riel dance as it symbolises the importance that the farm worker themselves may have placed on their duties. Atkinson (2007: 46) states that the farm system entailed the mutual recognition and acceptance of all obligations, rights, benefits and duties associated with the farm community. For the farmer, it accorded the respect due to him because of his authority; for the farm worker, it was

the knowledge that the farm worker could feel entitled to favours and assistance (Atkinson 2007:46).

***Dance symbolism:- lifeworld on the farm***

The symbolism of the courtship display is seen as a significant set of body movements done in response to some stimulus (rhythm and music) and on the social level, normally performed with one member of the other sex.

The courtship display is very important in the riel dance. The male's hat is used to entice the female into a dance, possibly even to a relationship. The dance is full of sexual innuendos and is suggestive. The dance is displayed when a man enters the dance floor with his hat on. Men traditionally wore hats wherever they went in their daily activities. Whilst dancing there may be one or more females or other males dancing. If he likes the female or possibly been watching her for some time, then during the dancing he throws or places the hat in front of her. She has to consider entering the dance arena and picking it up. If she picks it up, then she will continue the dance together with him. She will place it on his head. This gesture by her will signal possible interest in him to pursue her. The male hat symbolism is therefore very important in this riel dance.



**Figure 3. Corbelled house depiction (left). Corbelled house (right)**  
**Howard Arnolds**

**Photograph: Hylton**

In **Figure 3** the 'Korbeel Rieldansers' from Carnarvon are displaying an architectural monumental piece after which the dance group is named. They depict the building of a 'korbeelhuis' (corbelled house) (**Figure 3**) which is found extensively in the region. The 'Korbeel Rieldansers' use this

particular symbolic dance text to signify their identity and place when they take part in riel dance competitions. This recent addition to the riel dance is not historically part of the riel dance. However as the dance develops and evolves so has the ideas regarding depictions of their environment. Corbelled houses are unique to the central Karoo where this dance group resides, and it is relevant that they should use this architectural structure to symbolise their place to audiences.

The corbelled buildings in the Karoo are identical in detail with those found in Europe and it would be an exceptional coincidence if in two regions so far apart the same structures should have arisen independently. Furthermore, corbelling is a difficult building technique and there is no indication of experimentation and development which one would expect if a method of building had been newly invented. On the contrary, the earliest Karoo buildings evince considerable skill and one is forced to the conclusion that the first corbelled building in this area was erected by a craftsman from southern Europe who was already familiar with the technique. It is even possible to determine from which part of Europe the builder most probably came, for there are regional characteristics. It is only in Portugal that stones are left as projecting steps and it is very probable therefore that the first corbelled building in the Karoo was erected by a Portuguese artisan who eventually trained coloured builders, for it is frequently asserted by farmers in the area that some of the huts were built by coloureds, and they do in fact still build such huts today. Whatever their origin, which only further research will elucidate, the corbelled buildings in the Karoo represent one of the most interesting regional developments in South African vernacular architecture (Macguire 2007:63).

The depiction of the corbelled houses which are generally attributed to the early 'trekboers' (semi-nomadic pastoral farmers). in the Carnarvon, Loxton and Fraserburg area of the Karoo (Kramer 2007:5) is a wonderful way of how the revitalisation of the riel dance in South Africa can bring about awareness of a region and its historical importance. Schramm (2000:347) argues that the adaptation of the dances to the context of national culture does not mean that they lose their relevance and expressive power in their original environment. Innovation and creative renewal have always been inherent to traditional dance culture.



**Figure 4. Donkey-cart depiction**

**Photograph: Hylton Howard Arnolds**

In **Figure 4** there is a depiction of people dancing as if they were travelling on a donkey-cart. The two men in front represents the donkeys and the third person behind is steering. The females dancing behind the males would be the passengers.

Donkey-cart travel in the Karoo has been in effect for decades. It was and still is the mode of transport for many of the poorer people in South Africa's Karoo. Rural labourers travelled on weekends to neighbouring farms to visit family and friends for parties and festivities. They also went to markets to do shopping. De Jong (2012:50) who had researched the 'Karretjie' People of the South African Karoo explains that members of the '/Xam and Khoenkhoen' (part of the generic Khoisan groups) were co-opted into farm work. These sheep-shearers travelled by donkey-cart just like their resident colleagues who decided to remain on farms.

De Jong (2012:2) refers to the the use of the donkeys by iterant people of the Karoo in the following comment:-"The donkey cart affords them the mobility that allows them to optimise the sporadic opportunities that present themselves in the form of shearing assignmnets." The donkey-cart was the only mode of transport for many of the poorer farm workers and still remains so today throughout the region.

The re-enactment of the 'askoek' (bread) is quite popular in the dance. Here the riel dancers jumps and lifts the one leg and slaps the bottom of the foot to the inner thigh. This fast movement seems a popular dance theme with many riel dancers. It is also a favourite theme at the ATKV Rieldans Competition by almost all the groups. The reason is that this is such a strong part of the culture and heritage of the people living in the Karoo.

The 'askoek' is an extremely popular depiction within the dance, mimicking the baking of bread on hot coals. The 'askoek', refers to the ash ending up on a bread being baked over hot coals or an open fire. The dough after being kneaded is put on the coals and is then baked, turning it around every so often. The bread is baked for a few minutes on each side, and turned regularly. Ash from the fire settles on the bread. On it being turned, the ash is knocked and blown off. This hot bread being handled and turned quickly, have found its way into the symbolism of the riel dance. The 'askoek' was danced in a circle of females at times.

In an interview with a group of veteran riel dancers (Interview, Fraserburg, 10 May 2013) from the town of Fraserburg, it was explained that they danced around the fire whilst the 'askoek' was on the coals. They used to jump and knock their feet together every time the bread was being turned and the ash knocked off. This depicted the turning around of this bread every time it is being turned on the fire.

### ***Dance symbolism:- animals***

The riel dance is most probably more popular for the animal expressions seen during the dance. The riel dance depicts and imitates animals from the Karoo region which was observed by farm workers. These include baboons, butterflies, millipedes, scorpions, snakes, jackals, surricates, birds and some domesticated farm animals.

The sounds of the region's unique animals were mimicked at times. George Revill (in Leonard 2005:517) has argued, 'the sonic properties of music are centrally involved in the production of cultural geographies', not because the sounds themselves have any fixed or universal meaning but because the properties of sound are 'temporally and spatially specific'. Revill (in Leonard 2005:517) points out to the active role of sound in performance 'creating geographies of inclusion and exclusion, [and] inviting communal identification'. The interrelationships and struggles of the animals' lives are dramatised in dance. The performance includes animal displays of predator and prey; fighting; aggression; stealing food, stealing a mate and territorial disputes.

The animals were not a source of life to the coloured people at the time. The people were not dependent on the wild animals of the region, but instead owned farm animals. The people themselves were not hunters or gatherers, but were workers who bought food.

Whilst doing research we could find no spiritual relationship, or sacred connections with religious symbolism in the riel dance. The dance did not depend or involve the religious sacrifice of animals.

Animals were being slaughtered and cooked, but merely for nutritional and festive purposes in preparation for a meal and to fill the bellies. No animal seem to have been depicted more often than the other, and no one animal occupied a special 'place' in the riel dance. In fact, any animal that was in sight and that came to mind could be depicted. Interesting to note is that no animal skins are worn in preparation to perform the dance in a ritualistic form.



**Figure 5. Baboon depiction**

**Photograph: Hylton Howard Arnolds**

In **Figure 5** the mimicking of the chacma baboon (*Papio ursinus*) is very typical across all the rieldance communities. The chacma baboon is found extensively in the Karoo regions. It is a comical animal and it is little surprsie that it appears in the dance. No cultural, religious or spiritual connotations are linked to this animal. Neither are there any uses or even symbolism that is extended of this animal to the dance. The depiction is merely that of baboon depictions and mimicking its'call.

The ostrich (*Struthio camelus*) is an animal which is often mimicked. This flightless bird is native to Africa and is found throughout the Karoo. Ostrich farming spread throughout the Karoo where the meat and feathers became an important export product.

Many of the riel dancers may have worked on ostrich farms around Oudtshoorn. The domestication of ostriches started in 1863. The ostrich is popular particularly for its feathers, which are decorative and are also used as feather dusters. Its skin is used for leather products and its meat is marketed commercially.

An animal indigenous to the Northern Cape which is also being depicted, is the meerkat or suricate (*Suricata suricatta*). It is a small mammal belonging to the mongoose family. Meerkats live in all

parts of the Kalahari Desert in Botswana, in much of the Namib Desert in Namibia and southwestern Angola, and in South Africa. Meerkats forage in a group with one 'sentry' on guard watching for predators while the others search for food. Sentry duty is usually approximately an hour long. The meerkat standing guard makes peeping sounds when all is well. If the meerkat spots danger, it barks loudly or whistles. These animals play an important role in a few of the riel dance themes. It is a popular animal in the Kalahari and the Karoo. This animal is an important symbol, even in a tourism sense to the region. Testimony to this is the recent naming of a global radio telescope after this animal. The 'MeerKAT array', currently taking shape in South Africa's Karoo region, is a world-class radio telescope designed to do ground-breaking science. It will be the largest and most sensitive radio telescope in the southern hemisphere until the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) is completed around 2024. Meerkats are agile fighting animals. Depictions of meerkats in the riel dance, fighting with snakes and birds are popular.

Katrina Goliath from Fraserburg explains that the symbolism of the chicken was central to the rieldance. Mimicking chickens in the dance, consisted of dancers displaying rooster and hen-like behaviour in the form of jumping, pecking and kicking close to each other. Accompanying the dance, sounds of 'crowing' and 'clucking' is made. Later on during the night or in the event if the party went into the following morning, a dancer would even make a characteristic 'crowing' sound to indicate it is late and possibly time to go home. It would even result that more people would sound this alarm at dawn. (Interview, Fraserburg, 10 May 2013)

The snake is a popular depiction in the riel dance. Sanna Jooste (53) explains how they as children formed a row to depict a watersnake. The person dancing in front had a 'kappie' to represent the head of the snake. They would dance in a snake-like movement. In a different depiction a child would sit on top of the shoulders of an older child or adult, and they would dance and move as such with the guitar playing on the side. They would move in a snake-like form around the dance arena. They did not dance holding onto each other but dance loose behind each other individually. (Interview, Fraserburg, 10 May 2013)

Interestingly, during interviews the veterans were quite vocal that the dance of the snake is not the same as the way they performed it and witnessed it decades ago. A girl would dance one side between the reeds in the water, the rest of the group would somehow dance around her. (Interview, Fraserburg, 10 May 2013)



## ***Discussion***

Dancing is situated in a 'bounded sphere' of social interaction (Thomas 2002:56). The dance event and dance form is not separated from its context as symbolic meanings are not expressive in themselves. They merely constitute an indispensable setting, a necessary background to performance and, in this way, contribute to expression. The relations between music, dance and society are viewed as complex networks of interdependence through which a given act embodies temporal and emplaced experiences that structure social processes (Birx 2010:2). It thus makes sense that to understand the dancer and the dance requires investigation of the contextual factors that shape the dancer and his environment. As the environment changes with time so does the perception of the dancer and the meanings associated in the expression of dance. The dancer is communicating his art, emotions, circumstances, dreams and struggles in his dance.

The animals depicted in the riel dance appear not to have a vital or spiritual role in the lives of the people and seem more a comical re-enactment of animals. The re-enactment is from observations of animals and mimicking behaviour in the veld as herders. The riel dance seems to be a dance performed for enjoyment and entertainment. However, it is the historical roots and socio-cultural context of this dance and its revival post-1994 South Africa that signifies its relevance. On closer inspection of the dance ethnology one realises that it takes place in a complex cultural setting with strong influences of place, and in spaces of economics, politics, morals, ethics and history. Thus, the dance in itself also produces the socio-political context. Whilst being marginalised politically, culturally, economically and in the workplace, it was the gatherings over weekends, public holidays and days off where empowerment was expressed in the presence of the group. Culture and heritage were important for these groups and remnants of their roots are found in their music, song and dance. Recent events regarding the revitalisation of the riel dance is regarded as a new form of empowerment and identity amongst the Khoisan and coloured riel dance groups of the region.

George Slaverse (59), co-ordinator of the 'Korbeel Junior Rieldansers' from Carnarvon gives a perspective of the perception of the riel dance prevalent in the latter part of the previous century. He says that a feeling prevailed, especially amongst the educated coloured people, that the riel dance was a degrading dance. Some coloured people could not associate with the riel dance because of the political connection to the name, 'hotnotsriel'. Subsequently, the riel dance was performed on farms only. He explains that at times the riel dance was used as entertainment for farmers and their visitors. Farm workers received payment in the form of alcohol in order to perform the dance as entertainment for the farmers. (Interview, 11 May 2013, Carnarvon). This personal perspective from

George Slaverse has been broadly expressed to the researchers on various occasions by other riel dancers.

Extensive interviews by the researchers to veteran riel dancers who knows the dance for up to seventy years, expressed no dissatisfaction with the development of the current dance texts and movements. Everyone agrees that the dance has changed. During interviews, veteran dancers were asked if they were satisfied and comfortable with the change. At the time of the interviews they displayed or expressed no concerns. However, the feeling is that the traditional way of dancing was more subdued than we see it today in competitions.

### ***Conclusion***

This study introduces the riel dance, a traditional dance which forms part of the traditional cultural heritage of the Khoisan (Van Wyk 2012). The significance of the riel dance for the participants and some of the characteristics of the visual statements made in the dance, music and dress were investigated.

The rythms of music, lyrics and dance of the coloured people expresses joy, happiness, sadness and emotions of love (Van der Ross 2005). The dancing body is always communicating messages; and in the case of the riel dance in the Karoo, the symbolism of life and labour on the farm is being depicted. The animals and the environment is a central and inescapable theme in the dance text.

The regional geography of the interrogating landscape is evident on closer inspection in the riel dance. Essentially, the riel dance is a dance which is practiced by the rural coloured labourers of the drier regions in South Africa within the agricultural sector. The visual statements made through the riel dances are not only made with the intent to entertain, but also to communicate various interesting messages that the visually aware observer can interpret in order to understand something of the lifeworld of the dancers.

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## **FROM TADASANA TO SAVASANA: WHAT ARE WE DOING WHEN WE DO YOGA?**

**Ilona Frege**

*Yogas chitta vritti nirodhah*

*Tada drastuh swarupe avasthanam.*

*Yoga is the suspension of the fluctuations of the mind.*

*Then the Seer abides in his own nature.*

*(Patanjali's Yoga Sutras 1.1-1.4)*

### **Abstract**

*In this paper, I examine some of the processes we are involved with when we are on a yoga mat: the manner in which the experiential nature of the practice enables deep internal processes to unfold that ultimately have the potential to guide a dedicated practitioner towards better balance in all aspects of life, even towards a state of transformation and wholeness. Yoga as it is primarily practised in the West today, is predominantly a physical practice, incorporating asanas (postures), pranayama (breathing techniques) and meditation. I examine whether these elements, collectively, may hold the key to explaining its current immense global popularity. Perhaps the practice itself contains within it a blueprint for initiating individual change on all levels of our multi-faceted existence. Often these shifts extend off the mat and into the rest of our lives, an increased self-awareness bringing about greater consciousness of our environment and even influencing the quality of our interpersonal relationships. For some practitioners, yoga is a map leading inwards towards a clearer sense of Self, for others it is a way to commune with God; some practice it simply to obtain better health and harmony in their lives. Whilst yoga is not a religion, it is essentially a spiritual practice but one which is neither prescriptive nor dogmatic. It is concerned instead with integrating all aspects of our existence- physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually in often subtle and almost intangible ways.*

Based on my personal experience as a yoga practitioner, my observations, readings, and exposure to several established and highly experienced teachers over the years, I have come to identify certain recurring features that occur in a primarily *asana* (posture) based) yoga practice. These, repeated over a period of time, become effective tools for initiating internal shifts that extend beyond the mere physical, leading to what is generally regarded as a state of transformation. The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word *yuj* and means to unite, to yoke or to join (Saraswati, 1969:1). Some of the questions I face when I step onto my yoga mat, are "What exactly is yoga uniting for me, what makes this practice such a potent agent for personal change, what is going on here that is so hard to explain in a purely rational, intellectual way ... how does this (often sweaty) space of body and breath allow *it* to happen, whatever *it* is?"

Whilst I certainly do not pertain to have all the answers, I am nevertheless of the firm view that it is infinitely worthwhile to ask the questions anyway, that interrogating these in an attempt to gain more insight and clarity is in itself meaningful, especially if it leads to an increased understanding of what it means to be human – the good, the bad and the ugly! The parameters of this paper do not allow for a detailed discussion of the many variables and myriad subtle shifts that occur, but will attempt instead to identify and discuss some of the central experiential aspects of a yoga practice and suggest how these assist in creating a space for transformation:

### **We become still.**

Generally, most yoga practice begins from a place of physical stillness, whether we start in a seated posture, in child's pose, lying down on our backs or standing tall in *tadasana* (mountain pose). This, in turn, allows us to turn our mental gaze away from external stimuli, possibly the rush through traffic to get to class on time and the numerous distractions we face almost constantly. We begin instead to gradually engage in a kind of inner dialogue with ourselves in which we enquire how we are feeling on a physical, mental and emotional level, noticing what the body and the mind are presenting to us at that particular moment. It does not become an exercise in delving into our personal narratives or a means to analyse all the possible reasons why we are feeling a particular way; we merely *observe* ourselves, as calmly as possible, noticing our internal landscape. We observe our bodies from the inside out and we take cognisance of the physical parts that may feel dull and painful or alert and strong. We furthermore take note of our overall state of wellbeing, whether we are feeling tired or energised, for instance. It is by no means even really necessary to be able to label whatever it is we are observing! In time, over several practices, this process begins to unfold into an awareness of oneself as *observer*, what Patanjali calls *the Seer...abid(ing) in his own nature*. This is clear given that, as the body becomes still, so too, does the mind. This is what essentially makes yoga a practice in mindfulness.

In addition to becoming still, it is common and accepted practice for a class to begin and end with chanting the Sanskrit sound of the mantra *Aum*, of which much has been written over the centuries, particularly with regard to its symbolic value and vibrational significance, but suffice to say that, for the purposes of this paper, it creates a particular vibrational resonance in the body which very effectively imbues your practice with an intention and focus.

Whilst chanting *Aum*, the hands are held in a position of prayer at the sternum, called the *anjali mudra*. This prayer position is threaded throughout the practice and serves to calm and centre the practitioner, whilst further supporting an inward focus. It is a universally accepted gesture, both of

respect towards another person, and a gesture of devotion to the sacred. From a yogic perspective, it is believed that this hand gesture integrates the right and left hemispheres of the brain, as well as the masculine and feminine aspects of ourselves.

### **We consciously engage our breath.**

We notice the rhythm of our in- and exhalation, and become sensitive to the momentary pause at the top of both the in – and exhalation, without applying any force or manipulation. As we start to do this, we begin to invite a deeper breath into our body, always with a gentle, unforced approach. Often the teacher will guide this process with cues like *breathe into the bottom of your pelvis, feel your rib cage expand as you breathe in, breathe all the way into your lower back, breathe expansiveness into your whole body...* The effect of engaging the breath in this manner starts to slow us down internally, away from *rush hour* and *deadlines*, to a landscape in which we are unhurried and feel a deeper connection to what we are experiencing in our body.

On a physiological level, by breathing in and out through the nose and particularly when *ujjayi pranayama* (victorious breath) is employed, the parasympathetic nervous system is more dominant. In this breathing technique, the epiglottis at the back of the throat is slightly closed, thereby allowing a long slow passage of air to flow, with control, in and out of the throat. This, coupled with diaphragmatic abdominal breathing, results in the breath effectively becoming a *bridge* between the mind and the body.

As you begin the more physical asana practice, a fluid and dynamic duet ensues between the body and the breath, uniting internal and external processes. What is referred to as *connecting with the breath* enables you to remain more fully aware of your level of ease as well as discomfort whilst doing the postures, particularly those which are held for a length of time or that require specific strength and control. I would venture to state that conscious breath work helps to keep you safe from injury by preventing over effort and strain and serving as a valuable indicator for when to move out of a posture. Mark Stephens describes how

connecting the rhythmic flow of the breath with the rhythmic expansion and contraction of the body within and between asanas allows students to experience their asana practice as a moving meditation (Stephens, 2010: 101).

### **We experience the active asana postures and sequences in a distinct way and with awareness.**

Just as a practice begins with stillness, so the more active section of the class follows a general trajectory from standing, to seated postures and finally to lying down (prone), ultimately returning



to stillness once more in *savasana* (corpse posture), in which you lie on your back and consciously let go of your effort, relaxing your muscles as much as possible.

Yoga has evolved to become a hybrid of various styles and traditions, some following a set (pre-determined) sequence such as Ashtanga or Bikram, others enabling more individual sequencing and personal choice, such as in Vinyasa flow, which is largely shaped by the personal preference of the teacher.

Standing postures tend to energise and invigorate, whilst building strength and stamina. The sitting postures instil calm and restore equanimity. Twists cleanse and tone the internal organs, whilst backbends are immensely invigorating, often referred to as *opening the heart space*. Inversions, such as handstands, headstands or even a simple forward bend (*uttanasana*) have numerous benefits on a physical, mental, as well as energetic level, calming the whole system. Balances increase concentration and promote a sense of personal control on a mental and emotional level. It is difficult, for instance, to think about being angry about something or with someone if you have to stay focused in a balancing posture for several breaths! Supine postures (lying down) are soothing and generally lead the practice into the final posture of *savasana*, which is an essential component of each practice. After *savasana*, the teacher guides you back from a state of relaxation by increasing your awareness once more of your body and your surroundings, usually by starting with small movements such as moving fingers and toes, rotating wrists and ankles and eventually stretching out through the whole body and slowly returning to a seated position, usually sitting in the same position in which you began. If the practice began with chanting *Aum*, it will generally repeat it now again. If one were to observe a class, it would appear to be like watching a slow, sustained adagio with the breath providing the score.

In time, practitioners begin to realise that the practice itself makes it possible for you to engage with yourself as a multi-faceted being *every time* you step onto your mat, and *always in the present moment*. The asana becomes a metaphor for this meeting, with no holds barred. This may take the somewhat unsuspecting practitioner by surprise, as it can be very immediate and powerful, even revealing aspects of yourself of which you are unaware, in denial about, or at best would like to avoid! For instance, if your habitual way of dealing with pressure is to become aggressive or competitive, you will most likely approach a challenging pose in the same way, except that the only competition you will have is with yourself! This increased self-knowledge usually results from dedicated practice and becomes a most rewarding experience.

We thus realise that the actual *structure* of the class itself comes to represent unity, of having gone full circle, of returning (safely) to where you began, only now more aware of the essence of who you are, beyond skin and muscle and bone - even beyond mind and thoughts and feelings, to what Stephens refers to as

this experiential process – not the religious worship of a deity or insistence on precise form in held poses – is what makes asana practice itself a spiritual practice (Stephens, 2010: 98, 99).

**We work hard, but with a self-nurturing attitude.** This is one of the main factors that distinguishes yoga from most other types of formalised physical activity, from gym to sport and even dance, which are generally more goal-orientated. Yoga's approach to your personal progress is to encourage self-acceptance, irrespective of how successfully or not you execute the postures. Your mat becomes an autonomous space where you determine the extent to which you wish to challenge yourself in a posture, or whether you wish to move out of it and do another one, like child's pose, obviously remaining respectfully within the general structure the teacher has prepared. What may be termed your own *inner teacher* becomes your guide, even above that of the actual teacher giving the class. Your mat delineates an actual physical area in the space on which you can feel grounded, contained and secure, which is something of increasing value in a world of accelerated change and uncertainty.

This non-competitive aspect further supports the notion of yoga as an inward practice. In my opinion, this may indeed be one of the reasons for yoga's sustained popularity, in addition to its ability to give you a measure of self-control, even as you are challenged and pushed to an *edge*, physically and mentally. Your focus, too, supports this notion by being introspective, the eyes being sporadically closed, or alternatively fixed at a specific point, either in the space or on your body; this focus is called a *dristi*. Given the competitive milieu in which most urban Western societies function, there nevertheless exists at times an element of competitiveness, subtly discernible within a group doing Western yoga, although this is almost never articulated!

Whilst there are schools and traditions that are very strict and authoritarian in their approach both towards the practice and its practitioners, the inherent danger in this is that it elevates the teacher to a position of unhealthy authority and power over the participants' development and reduces the individuals understanding of his or her self-worth by relegating it to an external source. The practitioner's experience thus remains outward-focused, with little introspection or self-analysis possible.

Ultimately, it is the unique and personal way in which we process the information, skills and insights we obtain in a yoga practice that ultimately lead us to the realisation that, beyond the parameters of

age, gender, body shape, innate ability and physical imperfections, we are in fact already *whole*. For most Westerners accustomed to *duality* as their dominant paradigm, present in all aspects of their lives, and usually the source of much conflict and tension, the concept of *wholeness* may at first be quite challenging, even shocking, until it becomes as simple as the realisation that an inbreath alone cannot sustain life without also the presence of an outbreath.

By now it will have become clear that contemporary Western yoga is generally an asana-based practice, as may be seen in most yoga studios all over the Western world. Needless to say, its immense popularity has led to an explosion onto the market of commercial yoga products, from clothing to mats and props, even yoga holidays, usually called *retreats* and often at beautiful or exotic locations such as tropical islands. There is no doubt that yoga has become big business. Consider for instance the catchy sounding names of some of the popular brand names for yoga clothing, names like *Lululemon*, *Yogafunk* and *Yogaschmoga* to name but a few. In most urban environments today one has a very wide choice of styles from which to choose, all designed to suit your personal preferences and needs. It may appear, somewhat cynically, as though you can tailor make your own path to enlightenment, whether heated or not, looking your best in your brand name clothing on your brand name mat, whilst breathing deeply into your core and embracing the universe.

This appears to be a very far cry from more traditional yoga, such as is practiced in an ashram in India, where the primary focus of the practice is devotional and expressing reverence for the sacred, and whether or not you own a yoga mat makes little difference, because your yoga practice is *not about the trimmings, but about your inward journey and devotion to God*.

How is one to reconcile this more authentic kind of yoga with one that offers mainly a good work out and a feel-good experience? This leads one to ask whether the latter should, in fact, even be called yoga? *Is all yoga equal?* When we consider the rampant commercialisation and resultant commodification that has come to classify so much of our perception of yoga in the West, we may be justified in suspecting it of being a market-driven fad, packaged as a quasi-spiritual practice, promoting a kind of "bubblegum" spirituality.

Perhaps the most useful way to gain some clarity on this dilemma is to interrogate critically the extent to which the teacher, or ethos of the studio, weaves into their teaching at least some understanding and application of the ancient *philosophy* of yoga. A teacher dedicated to the path of yoga in all its aspects, will usually successfully elevate their teaching beyond a purely physical practice to a practice in mindfulness. A yoga teacher who does not personally integrate the yoga

philosophy, at least to some degree, presumably only teaches the postures as exercise and one could debate whether or not this should indeed be regarded as yoga.

In around 200 BC, the Indian sage, Patanjali, wrote down what became known as the *Yoga Sutras*, which are aphorisms explaining how yoga helps to harness the restlessness of the mind. He describes yoga as an eightfold path (called *Ashtanga*) leading towards achieving enlightenment, of which the postures themselves are only a small component, their aim being to prepare one for meditation. Patanjali did not invent yoga; it already existed as an ancient practice when he wrote it down and codified it for posterity. What are referred to as the eight limbs are essentially guides to right living and self-realization, still largely relevant today. They are as follows:

- *Yama*: the practice of universal moral principles;
- *Niyama*: the practice of personal disciplines;
- *Asana*: the practice of physical postures, cultivates inner perception;
- *Pranayama*: the practice of breath control, increases the flow of prana or life force;
- *Pratyahara*: the practice of the withdrawal of the senses, toward silence;
- *Dharana*: the practice of focused attention;
- *Dhyana*: the practice of sustained awareness and meditation;
- *Samadhi*: enlightenment, returning to original silence (Farhi, 2000:7).

If we regard yoga as a tool for how to live your life, as a way of finding a still point in the midst of the noise and chaos, and not merely a series of postures executed for increased muscle tone and vitality, then the great divide between the various practices and styles all over the world becomes less acute and more a matter of diverse expressions of a similar fundamental base.

It seems appropriate to conclude that, when we are doing yoga we are engaged with a constantly evolving, hybrid form of activity with an ancient lineage and cultural roots that differ from many of its most ardent followers globally. Nevertheless, yoga has the innate ability to transcend its own cultural and religious roots to become an embodied practice for anyone who sincerely wishes to explore and to study it further, irrespective of their individual, personal belief and culture. As Swami Satyananda Saraswati explains

Yoga is not an ancient path buried in oblivion. It is the most valuable inheritance of the present. It is the essential need of today and the culture of tomorrow (Saraswati, 2009:1).

To some, yoga may therefore represent a gateway to communing with Self, an essentially inward spiralling path; to others it may bring them closer to God as an external deity, an outward spiralling path, irrespective of their particular faith, whilst some may experience it as simultaneously

representing both an inward and an outward spiralling path, integrating their concept of their own spirituality and as a means to honour that which they regard as sacred. Then again, for some it may simply remain an exclusively physical activity, one that makes them feel better about themselves as complex multi-faceted human beings. Underpinning all this is the unique ability that a dedicated yoga practice has to *connect* you more profoundly, be it with yourself or with that which you regard as eternal and unchanging, whilst simultaneously rooting you firmly in the present, *this* moment, *this* body and *this* breath.

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## **POSITIONING CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN A HYBRID WORLD**

**Jacki Job**

### **Abstract**

*This discussion intends to show how the epistemology of hybridization has to be taken into account in a description of Contemporary Dance. It notes how outside of the classical conventions and Western hierarchies, ongoing processes of appropriation have contributed to the dance form. This essay will braid the multifarious agendas and aspects of South Africa, Britain, Europe, America and Japan from selected periods of the 20th Century. Accordingly, I note how multi-disciplinary collaborations between artists and their alliances with patrons, politicians and the media, as well as socio-political environments and economics have historically shaped the pathways of Contemporary Dance. In addition, spiritual philosophies, drama theories and political movements have contributed to different expressions of dance. One of the broad aims of this essay is to show how colonialism and its power plays are intertwined with the development of Contemporary Dance in this country. I have no intention of claiming colonialism as the sole determining marker of history. However, I believe that colonialism has brought a marked hierarchy on the dance scene. Its legacy of slavery, and consequent economic and political inequality merits special attention. Having lived in Japan, I continue to explain how diverse factors such as Japan's geographic distance and political motivation have contributed to creating a dance form, called Butoh, that I believe bears relevance to South African society today.*

*I have found the tools to explore and recreate my identity by assimilating and fusing the discipline of Butoh with my own techniques. In conclusion, this essay includes a description of a performance work that demonstrates my hybridity in dance. The work attempts to articulate a diffusion of essences that can stand alone as a dance language.*

**Key Words:** *Butoh, colonialism, contemporary dance, hybridity, identity, performance, rainbow, slavery, South Africa, spiritual.*<sup>1</sup>

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In the novel, "*Midnight's Children*", British-Indian author, Salman Rushdie, said, "To understand just one life, you have to swallow the world" (Rushdie, 1981:109). This quotation has indicated my approach to the subject of Contemporary Dance<sup>1</sup> in South Africa. In order to situate my arrival at certain values and expressions of the subject, my journey as an artist and recent positioning as a dance researcher, has taken me to Britain, Europe, America and Japan. This essay will braid some multifarious agendas and aspects of these countries from selected periods of the 20th Century. Rushdie also said "transformation...comes [from]

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<sup>1</sup> With Contemporary Dance I am referring to a particular type of theatrical performance that has responded to Classical Ballet since the beginning of the 20th Century.

combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies [and] songs” (Coomes A. in Barker, Hulme, Iversen, 1994:89). Accordingly, in my research process I have noticed how multi-disciplinary collaborations between artists and their alliances with patrons and politicians, as well as socio-political environments and economics have historically shaped the pathways of Contemporary Dance. In addition, spiritual philosophies, drama theories and political movements have contributed to the way it has been and continues to be expressed. I have set about my research in what might be described as an all-inclusive manner as I believe that one cannot avoid the epistemology of hybridisation in a description of Contemporary Dance. It might serve one to note the ongoing processes of appropriation that have widely contributed to the dance form. I am a South African woman, from a mixed background of languages, religions and nationalities, and I believe that in order to locate my work in post-modern Contemporary Dance, my hybridity and the reasons for it have to be taken into account. With this in mind, I will show how elements of “hybridity, impurity [and] intermingling” (ibid) are encompassed in Contemporary Dance. Further, encouraged by British historian, Peter Burke’s, explanation of syncretism and the church as a hybrid organization, my performance work intends to “investigate [the blend between] the different elements” (Burke, 2009:54) and assimilate it with my own techniques.

In preparation for this body of writing, it became evident how the socio-political values and dance techniques of Western countries in particular have largely impacted on the dance environment in South Africa. Considering that “Britain and [Europe controlled] over 85 per cent of the earth in the nineteenth century” (McClintock A. in Barker et al., 1994:257), mapping the history of South African dance inevitably invites a discussion around colonialism. In South Africa, partial strategies of racial separatism, which were intensified by the Apartheid regime in South Africa, were rooted in colonialism<sup>2</sup>. One of the broad aims of this essay is to show how colonialism and its power plays are intertwined with the development of Contemporary Dance in this country.

I believe that colonialism has brought a marked hierarchy to the dance scene and the body. In 1910 South Africa was recognized as a union but did not receive complete autonomy

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<sup>2</sup> In 1652, the Dutch took occupation of South Africa. It remained under Dutch rule until 1814 when it was handed over to the British. During this time, slavery was commonplace, as thousands of local and imported people, defined as black, were violently subjugated. Nearly a century passed before South Africa was recognized as a union in 1910. Even though slavery had officially ended in 1838, the legacy of inequality remained as power was handed over to a white South African government, who were instrumental in formalizing and advancing Apartheid. In 1913, this inequality was further endorsed by the Natives Land Act, which allowed for only 7 per cent of the country to be owned by blacks.

because they became members of the British Commonwealth, still headed today by Queen Elizabeth II. In dress, religion, language, and in the performance arts, the link to a British cultural system was thus perpetuated. Furthermore, colonialism's legacy of slavery, and consequent economic and political inequality merits special attention.

In 1994, the installation of Nelson Mandela as the first black president of South Africa signalled the formal end of Apartheid. The era and philosophies following political autonomy, as experienced in India in 1947, and South Africa in 1994, is referred to as post-colonialism. Much like post-modernism acknowledges modernism, the term post-colonialism bears strong reference to colonialism. With this in mind, and considering my positioning as an independent dancer and choreographer, I have embraced the definition of post-colonial theorist, Graham Pechey, in my writing. He claimed that

The stronger sense of 'postcolonial' emerges when we consider... that it takes...self-scrutiny of the political we now see on many sides [to be] one of the clearest signs of...postmodernity.<sup>3</sup>

I also understand hybridity as another progeny of colonialism, and will explain how this is reflected in the many strains of Contemporary Dance. Within a South African framework, Contemporary Dance may be likened to a hybrid form that could be placed between Classical Ballet and African Dance. For example, Classical Ballet, which was introduced to South Africa by way of British settlers, is positioned in the Western framework, as the most important dance and teaching form. And according to dance historian of Black dance, Lynne Emery, African dance styles on the other hand, are relegated to "comic" entertainment or "exotic primitive" (Emery, 1988:241) images. Contemporary Dance, seems to be set in between, and could be directed to either expressing a classical or African focus. This could result in the surfacing of issues relating to superiority or inferiority. In South Africa today, this problematizes the country's intended positivisms around constructs of difference and diversity. I feel that the relationships between perception of self and hierarchies in dance, and how its standards may then directly correspond to our sense of self, has to be examined. I feel it is imperative to explore how and why we choose to express ourselves in Contemporary Dance.

To recapitulate, this essay aims to root Contemporary Dance by tracing aspects of western colonialist history and its subsequent hybrid and post-colonial offshoots. As far as possible, I have attempted to thread my thoughts to a personal interpretation of dance as a

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<sup>3</sup> Graham Pechey as cited in Hulme, Iversen & Barker,. (Eds)., *Colonial discourse/postcolonial theory*.



contemporary artist, with the intention of germinating new questions that I hope to answer in my future writing.

### **Money and English**

One quotation that I find illuminating, is that of inter-cultural theatre practitioner, Richard Schechner who said that “To really exercise power a person has to speak the two world languages – money and English” (Schechner, 1991:10). The importance of money in terms of dance has always been very clear. The predecessor of contemporary dance, Classical Ballet, achieved status and success due to the patronage of French King Louis XIV. He was instrumental in putting dance structures in place that still exist such as the proscenium stage and the professionalisation of ballet. Another impresario was a Russian, Serge Diaghilev, who dance historian, Lynn Garafola, described as a “broker of the century’s most remarkable marriages between dance and the other arts” (Garafola in Nadel and Strauss, 2003:233). Composers such as Igor Stravinsky and Maurice Ravel, painters like Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, and choreographers like Marie Rambert and Enrico Cecchetti, were all engaged with him at some point. These are still recognisable names. Rambert and Cecchetti, especially, were instrumental in providing “skills needed to encourage ballet to take root” (ibid:108) in Britain.

In South Africa, the discovery of diamonds in 1860 and gold in 1880, resulted in the country being fairly rich. The British as well as “a trickle of Jewish fortune-seekers...traded locally and in Europe” (Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007:276), thereby containing the wealth in a small circle. In terms of dance, the British settlers ensured that Ballet would take root through their forms of entertainment and by importing teachers from England. In order for the settlers to maintain an affiliation with the motherland, balls and even parties in large homes, which were Eurocentric in nature, were held. As for the teachers, as opposed to offering specific Ballet technique classes, they taught deportment<sup>4</sup>. This could be seen as a mechanism to discredit the indigenous population, devalue their form and assign them with idiosyncratic notions. In fact, after the Industrial Revolution (1820-1870), Britain “accelerated a cumulative multiplication of ...power that ... challenged the existence of traditional societies”(Koot, 2006).

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<sup>4</sup> Even Dulcie Howes, founder of UCT Ballet in Cape Town in 1934, taught deportment instead of Classical Ballet technique.

Both America and South Africa were hit by an economic depression in the 1930s but its effects were unevenly spread. For one, entertainment became even more of a means of escapism in America. In Hollywood, dance films flourished. However, the movies and other forms of commercial presentation largely perpetuated negative stereotypes of black people. I would like to point out one black American dancer/teacher/choreographer, Katherine Dunham, who set out to challenge the pejorative mindsets. She focused on “establishing a well-trained ballet group [and developing] a technique that [would hold equal importance] to the white man...and the Negro” (Emery, 1988:256). That Dunham achieved her aims was confirmed by dance critic, Arthur Todd, in 1962, when he stated that “she put Negro dancing on the map...”(ibid:259). In point of fact, Dunham became one of the pioneers of a movement system. Her style, called the Dunham Technique, combined “classical ballet with body isolations [drawn from] West Indian and African dance” (ibid:256).

Dunham was an anthropologist, and this more than likely formed her world view of dance. I find it curious, however, that Dunham chose to stand up for black people’s rights by utilising Ballet, generally seen as the value system of white people in terms of dance. This leads me to question whether her dance was only influential because it was performed according to recognisable standards and therefore described in conventional terms. It seems as if the “xenophobic ideology”, labelled “homogenism” by Blommaert and Vershueren, may have been at play. “This ideology is characterised by [tolerating differences] that do not disturb the established order” (Baines, 1998:6). I wonder whether Dunham might have had the same effect if she ignored the prevalent policies and created a dance language that stemmed from her imagination instead. For me, hybridity entails the pulling together of multiple threads that result in a new form. Depending on the context of the viewer, such as the historical background or artistic and socio-political perspectives, this new form may or may not have easily recognisable parts.

As for the other world power, English, many indigenous and Asian societies are excluded from its assumption of power. I hold that in order to get the full picture of the world, one has to take non-Western societies into consideration. One country that I am particularly familiar with, excluding South Africa, is Japan, where I lived for a period of 7 years. In the 1960s, evocative performances that rejected the Western aesthetic of dance arose in Japan. This avante-garde dance form was called Butoh. It was created by dancer, Hijikata Tatsumi, who had particular concern for using dance to articulate the Japanese identity and peculiarities, and Kazuo Ohno. Butoh found expression for, amongst other things, the

poverty, physical deformation and death Japan experienced from America's atomic bomb attacks at the end of WWII. The technique instills qualities of introspection, and contrary to general Western mindsets, challenges and fosters creativity through the discipline of restraint. Butoh's methods were in stark contrast to even the most unconventional experimentalists in the Western world and had a character that could not be described in unilateral terms. According to Sondra Fraleigh's book, *Butoh: Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy*, Butoh was "imagistic, often meditative, and sometimes wild" (Fraleigh, 2010:51). It "[saw] beauty in weakness and disorder, [was] metamorphic, [existing in both] light and dark [planes]"(ibid:54). Indeed, in Contemporary Dance terms today, Butoh could be seen as a hybrid form of dance, simultaneously embodying multiple identities.

One of the main aims in Hijikata's creation of Butoh, was for the body to find liberation and hope by investigating the source of one's individual physical expression. I believe that Butoh gives its practitioner the ability to alter their physical and mental image, without the constraints of Western codes, that for example, exist within religion and dress. Hijikata was originally trained as a Contemporary dancer and in his search for a new form, he combined his technique with Japanese aesthetics of beauty and nature, as well as Surrealist ideas expressed in French literature. Yet, his expression of Butoh remained (and still remains) powerfully Japanese in its expression. I am convinced that an assimilation of the technique, fused with elements specific to individual heritage and everyday life, could create a hybrid dance that is South African in its flavour.

### **South Africa and its Rainbow**

In South Africa today, we are increasingly required to embody multiple identities. The idea of the multiplicity of South Africans is captured in the image of a rainbow. And in terms of dance, I am interested in seeing how this concept might be reflected. Rainbows are comprised of various hues that blend into each other. Currently, within Contemporary Dance globally, there seems to be a kind of rainbow feeling and several crossovers between genre are ongoing. There is the example of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui - himself of hybrid roots –

“born of Flemish/Moroccan, Catholic/Muslim parents in Belgium” (Sadler’s Wells, 2008), who created a groundbreaking work, called *Sutra*(2008), with Chinese Shaolin Monks. The British choreographer, Akram Khan, makes work that combines Indian Kathak and Modern Dance. In 2008 he created *Sacred Monsters* in collaboration with French Classical Ballet dancer, Sylvie Guillem. In the same year he also partnered with French actor, Juliette Binoche, in a piece called *in-i*. These crossovers are indicative of a multicultural society that Baines described as needing “...open cultural borders for those who wish to cross them”(Baines, 1998:7).

There are counter-arguments to the value of Contemporary Dance’s hybrid expressions. One may be that as it celebrates the principles of fusion and fluidity, it is a specific dance form that cannot be passed on directly, whereas in African Dance and Classical Ballet, stories and forms are clearly transferred. In answer, I agree with Elinor Fuchs, Professor of Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism, who described the vision of post-modernism’s “end of character” (Fuchs, 1996:175) in holistic terms. In reference to the Buddha, she claimed “..that there is no such thing as a continuous self, and that all suffering arises from human grasping for permanence”(ibid). Embracing this thinking might just aid us in seeing ourselves as part of the whole and continue in breaking down borders through collaborations. Another objection to the multi-genre approach of Contemporary Dance might be that it reduces the possibility of producing original work. If all work is a mixture of everything and nothing is pure, then how can there be an essence or truth? Artaud mentioned that “Theatre...should be: ...the equal of life”(ibid:174). And as we are living in an “...age of mass migration and disintegrating borders” (Mulrooney, 2002:265), it might be contemporaneous to follow the advice of the late theoretician, Edward Said, and search “for a corresponding aesthetic form”(ibid).

I believe that Contemporary Dance offerings can still maintain unique flavours when attention is paid to the arrangements of the mix. In life, we are all products of complex choreographies and choreographers, and different situations dictate the aspects we may then decide to highlight or suppress. The same would apply in making performance works. South Africans are not culturally isolated anymore, as we were during the time of the cultural boycott<sup>5</sup> that lasted from the 1960s to the 1990s. We have become part of a global multicultural society. I believe this comes with its own set of issues and am aware that

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<sup>5</sup> A political group, called the African National Congress (ANC), were radically opposed to the country’s Apartheid regime and in the 1960’s they called on the world to boycott South Africa culturally. This raised a global awareness of the discriminatory and oppressive situation in the country.

collaborations are inherently power based when hybrid identities come together. Further problems feature when one might understand hybridisation in terms of relationships between South Africa and Europe and not between South Africa and the rest of Africa.

Professor Baines of Rhodes University wrote that in South Africa, everyone has to “...[re]negotiate their identities from a different position within society” (Baines, 1998:7). This again takes us to the theme of my presentation, hybridity, and re-iterates the thoughts of Edward Said who said that “No-one today is purely ONE thing” (Mulrooney, 2002:144). Hybridity for me, is the fusion of various elements. It requires notions of collaboration, and I believe, has the ability to create and imagine something new. It is my observation that Contemporary Dance certainly embraces many streams of thought and encourages difference, but I have asked myself, how does one insert oneself in all of this difference? As a solo artist, this question has particular resonance with me.

### **My Butoh**

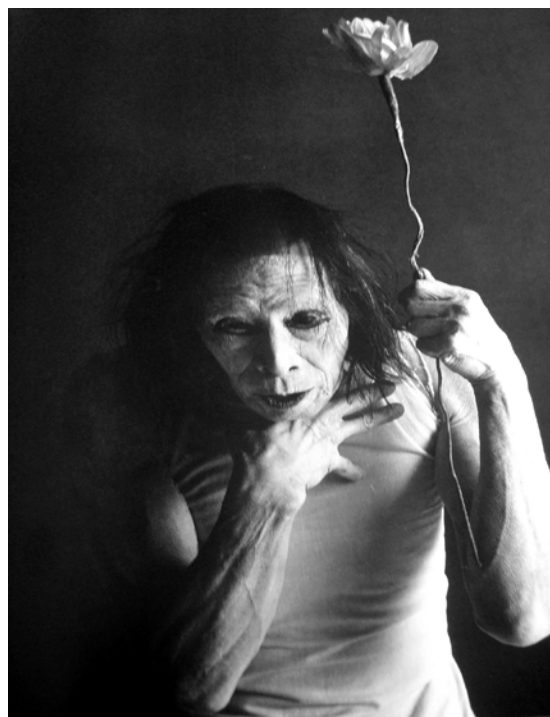
I have found the tools to explore and recreate my identity by assimilating and fusing the discipline of Butoh with my own techniques. On the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2012, I created a performance that also constituted one of my examinations in the Honours degree course. The work was performed in the first St. Phillip Church built in 1888 in an area in Cape Town called District Six<sup>6</sup>. On the one hand, I chose to perform in this long abandoned church to assert my position as a post-modern performer and break the convention of performing in typical theatre spaces. On the other hand, this space, officially named the Lydia Williams English Church School, metaphorically linked the audience and myself to our heritage of slavery. Lydia was part of a group of emancipated slaves who flocked from the countryside into the relative freedom of colonial Cape Town in 1838. Every December 1<sup>st</sup>, she celebrated Emancipation Day and would show the scars on her back, left by the sjambok of her master, and remembered her horror of having her child taken away from her. Anglican Reverend and Dean of St. Georges Cathedral, Cape Town, Michael Weeder, who has conducted extensive research on the subject of slavery related, “Lydia was like a griot and used her

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<sup>6</sup> District Six was located close to Cape Town’s city centre and was originally established as a mixed community of freed slaves, merchants, artisans, labourers and immigrants. In 1966 it was declared a White area under the Group Areas Act of 1950 and its residents were forcibly removed. They were relocated in an area known as the Cape Flats, located on the outskirts of the city. Since the official end of Apartheid in 1994, processes of repatriation have resulted in the return of some families to the neighbourhood. However, the general community remains impoverished.

body to tell her story of slavery” (Interview with Reverend Michael Weeder, 22 September 2012, Cape Town). Despite her sorrow, she remained loving, gentle and inspirational and was affectionately called *Ou Tameletjie* (Afrikaans for a small, sweet, nutty cake).

I felt that Lydia’s story and our legacy of slavery continued to be manifested in the surrounding community. Beyond the church walls, individuals were shackled to poverty. In addition, unclaimed and un-lived visions of a bright future in the “new”(sic) South Africa were prevalent. Many mothers and fathers had lost their daughters and sons to drug addiction and their bodies seemed to tell stories of hopelessness and “perennial enslavement”(ibid). According to the University of the Western Cape’s history professor, Ciraj Rassool, communities like these were enslaved to a “state of relationships of domination that got set in place after emancipation” (Interview with Ciraj Rassool, 22 September, 2012, Cape Town). The community seemed (em)bittered and in dire need of a little bit of sweetness. However, the circumstances were not entirely bleak. Symbols of hope were especially evident as the building was under renovation. The title of the work, “*Love Is*”, aimed to encompass these social, political and spiritual dimensions of a particular community as well as focused on its personal implications.



Kazuo Ohno in *Mother* (1981)

Photographer: Eikoh Hosoe

Assuming that contemporary artists are commentators on society, I had to wonder how I would convey all of this information in dance? An accumulation of thoughts lead me to believe that dance could not only be one recognisable thing. By way of explanation I would like to once again make reference to the rainbow image. One fact I enjoy is that no two people are able to see the rainbow in the same way. In fact, its appearance is always changing and what one sees is entirely based on an individual perspective. This characteristic, combined with its borderless aspects and subjective quality, is something that I would like to capture in dance. I am investigating whether it is possible to create a dance form that is hybrid of itself and constitutes a mixture of indistinguishable parts. This idea might be likened to the construct of creolisation, broadly discussed in linguistic studies.

My Butoh<sup>7</sup> may be described in number of ways. Explicative words of my style may be: extreme, introspective, erratic, and still. Further, it requires an emotional landscape and a specific articulation of physicality. In *“Love Is”* I extended the theme of hybridity by metamorphosing a seemingly informal performance into an emotional and highly structured theatrical work. I collaborated with a sound-scapist, Garth Erasmus, and in keeping with the often non-choreographed nature of Butoh, we consciously and completely improvised a 50 minute work. Similar to Hijikata and Ohno’s Butoh methods, Erasmus and I have attempted to challenge the material and perceptible constitution of performance and utilise more phenomenological and metaphysical approaches in our creations (Fraleigh, 2006). As such, we have often used the word spiritual to describe the nature of our communication and relationship as co-artists. For our September performance, I also spoke words in Japanese and concluded by drawing on one of the religious and cultural traditions of the Coloured community in Cape Town – I offered the audience a sweet cake.

I am wondering whether it is possible to create a technique/method that articulates a diffusion of several essences and can stand alone as a dance language? Lehmann said post-modernist dance most clearly reveals “...new images of the body...” (Lehmann, 2010,:805) and that it has the ability to release “...hidden energies [in order to become] its own message...”(ibid). At this point in my career, an assimilation and fusion of Butoh’s philosophies and physicalities into my training in release-based Contemporary Dance, seems to substantiate the potential of making this a reality.

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<sup>7</sup> Tatsumi Hijikata constantly encouraged his followers to find an individual expression of the technique. He always asked, “What is your Butoh?”(Interview with Yoshito Ohno, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2011, Tokyo)

## **Conclusion**

Recently, I learnt that “Greek thinkers such as Thales, Solon, Democritus, Plato, Socrates and Pythagoras, were all educated in Egypt... [and] taught by Africans” (Nussbaum, Palsule, Mkhize, 2010:168). Considering that so much of our cultural role models are still based in the northern hemisphere, it is my hope to once again see Africa in a position of offering the world something. By continuing to explore and apply the concepts of creolisation and hybridisation in teaching, performance and academic writing of Contemporary Dance, South Africans may very well be in the best position to re-write such notions to the world.

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To view a short excerpt of the September 2012 performance --

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abaT15rPUsY>

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**DANCING THE BODY THROUGH THE CITY: MOTILITY, RITUAL, FREEDOM AND SPECTACLE IN  
THE MINSTRELS CARNIVAL, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Abstract**

*This paper looks at questions around the nature of the Minstrels Carnival in Cape Town and ritual in relation to dance and the moving body. Carnival is the means through which people return to an annual celebration with a build-up and fervour beyond that of the everyday. It involves the choreography of bodies and their entering spaces into which they would not usually go, through the occupation of the streets. As a form of dance and self-expression, Carnival invokes a sense of euphoria and freedom, and yet is also carefully choreographed and controlled. Questions are asked regarding theoretical relationships between the body as an archive, including trauma, and the re-enactment of history, the tracing of the past through routes in the city, and modes of linking persons and past as well as future, through enabling an individual sense of visibility through performance. The moving body and its different dance forms is explored in relation to notions of and expressions of 'freedom', as a street performance, that is also competitive and works en masse, as compared with other forms of street display and mass choreographies of bodies in art performance.*



**Women Minstrels**

### ***Introduction: Dancing between structures, moving between spaces***

I start, not with Carnival, but a dance event, at 'Infecting the City' festival, 2013, an annual free arts festival in Cape Town, incorporating performers, music, film, visual art and dance, mostly in the Cape Town City Bowl, spectators walking between the performance space and venues. The event was a choreographed dance piece in the open air, 'Mine!' <sup>1</sup> by 'iKapa Dance Theatre'. It involved three dancers acrobatically moving in and out of a metal cube structure, with the aim to 'utilise[s] the idea of different spaces being attached in a multi-dimension through large steel cubes that not only act as a set but also as props for the dancers' and, consequently, to question, 'what is 'my space' what is 'shared space', or is it just a space?'<sup>2</sup>.

As I watched the three dancers metaphorically transgressing boundaries of the city, self and relationships to music, against a backdrop of city skyline and night stars, I wondered if one could make comparisons and analogies to this performance with the Minstrels' Carnival (otherwise known as the *Klopse*<sup>3</sup>), involving around 50,000 participants and estimated to be watched by at least 30,000 others (Minty 2006). I had worked with the Minstrels in 2012 and 2013, bringing a team of artists to collaborate with adults and children of the 'Fabulous Woodstock Starlites' Minstrel troupe<sup>4</sup> to create 'special costumes' for their New Year 'Exhibition' competition<sup>5</sup>, one of many of their Carnival Board's competitions at Vygieskraal Stadium in the 'suburbs' of Cape Town.

How perhaps could one also think about the Minstrels Carnival in relation to conceptually moving in and out of 'boxes' in the city? What divides and spaces of difference, visibility and existed through the performative displays of troupe members? What were the perceptions of bounded-ness and non-bounded-ness for the moving, choreographed and 'danced' body of Carnival? If Carnival implies a sense of 'freedom', where and what does this sense of freedom come from for the Carnival participant, moving through the city as part of collective performances in stadiums and streets? If the Minstrels carnival is ritualistic, what does this mean, is it also 'healing', particularly in light of theories of embodied history, in which the performing body has been argued to constitute a historical archive (Taylor 2006a; 2006b; 2007)? Within the choreography of the moving, dancing

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<sup>1</sup> Choreographed by Theo Ndindwu and Tanya Arshamian. 30 minutes. 14 March 2013

<sup>2</sup> See [ikapadancetheatre.co.za/gm-event/2012/06/my-space-artscape/8](http://ikapadancetheatre.co.za/gm-event/2012/06/my-space-artscape/8) acc. 20.06.13

<sup>3</sup> Previously known as the 'Coon Carnival', now considered a derogatory term in Cape Town, although members still often refer to themselves as the 'Coons'.

<sup>4</sup> Connections were originally made through Greatmore Studios in Woodstock where I am a part-time resident artist, through the Great Walk and More Greatmore-run local festival in 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Main artists, including myself, were Janet Ransen, Kobus le Grange, Kitty Dorje, Angeliqe Kendall, Imraan Samo, Alejandro Cruz, Gary Frier and Jacqui Frier. The competition emulates a mini Olympic spectacle the stadium for want a better description, and is takes place alongside the Best Band competition.

body in the Minstrels Carnival, how do people move in and out of the 'boxes' of their lives, and the city, navigating and negotiating perceptions and experiences?

What, too, made the iKapa Dance Theatre performance an 'art' form considered of the highest calibre, and what was the difference between this outdoor performance, and the Carnival? Could the Minstrels Carnival itself be thought of as a huge city 'artwork' in its own right, albeit collectively constituted? To what extent, within these intricately woven and complex theoretical threads, are also entangled the limitation, invisibilities, silences and contestations concerning Carnival practices in Cape Town?

This paper looks at the moving body and ritual in relation to several areas –the choreography of bodies, ritual, trauma and healing and notions of 'freedom' incorporated in the moving body.

### ***Taking Part in the Minstrels Carnival, 2012 and 2013***

The Exhibition competition component of the Minstrels Carnival, and the making and display of 'special' costumes is covered in depth in another paper (Gibson, 2013) in relation to the materiality and visibility of Carnival. Knowledge of the Minstrels Carnival was gained from several sources, much of which involved my participation in various aspects of the Carnival.

The Klopse competitions are run by several Carnival 'boards'. The two main boards hold competitions at Athlone Stadium and Vygieskraal Stadiums, sited close to each other in the 'suburbs' of Cape Town. I took part in making costumes at the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites 'klopskamer' or rehearsal headquarters in 'The Lab', a disused theatre space in Woodstock, and the eventual Exhibition competition at Vygieskraal.

I also took part in a number of other events and competitions. These events included the New Year's Day competitions, including the 'Klopse Jol' competition at Vygieskraal Stadium, and 'Road March' in Woodstock, the main Tweede Nuwe Jaar (2<sup>nd</sup> of New Year) Road March in central Cape town, which started at the edge of District six and ended in the Bo-Kaap, and in which troupes of both boards participate<sup>6</sup>. I took part also in several more informal road marches and 'tafels' (or 'tables', where sponsors provide food in return for a parade in their street) that occurred on competition days, and after the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Year Cape Town march. To do this, I travelled with the Fabulous Woodstock

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<sup>6</sup> There are currently around 80 troupes in total in the Western Cape, and around 60 between the two main boards, a troupe at minimum being required to have 250-350 members or more (sometimes they have over a thousand) in order to join the board, and according to Carnivalists, the numbers of troupes are growing, with new troupes being formed 'all the time'.

Starlites Klopse members in hired buses to the streets and stadiums, and as they dropped off passengers in different areas.

As a spectator, I attended and observed competitions (such as the 'Grand March Past' and singing competitions, in both Vygieskraal and Athlone stadiums. As well as taking part in the preparation for and performance of the Exhibition Competition, I took part in the 'Klopse Jol' competition on New Year's Day (2013). Additionally, I interviewed a female executive of the 'Heideveldt Entertainer' troupe (a woman-run troupe) in 2012 on the role of women in Carnival while the troupe assembled in Heideveldt, and attended their road march and 'tafel' in Athlone. I also took part as a troupe member in the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites 'Klopse Jol' competition at Vygieskraal stadium competition and held formal recorded interviews with Captains and Executives, as well as general members of the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites.

Consequently, as both participant and researcher, I was able to experience and observe the different aspects of the Carnival, as well as engage with different Carnival participants, from an insider perspective, working towards and contributing directly to the outcome of one of the final competitions<sup>7</sup>. Making costumes with community members, who were also troupe members, was invaluable in building relationships between myself and the troupe members, as a consequence of which I was able to gain a deeper insight and a sensitivity to the role of Carnival in their, and indeed, my own, lives. The experience of taking part and being an integral part of the competitions was invaluable in relation to directly experiencing the embodied aspect of Carnival, as a participant, a 'dancer', a competitor, and consequently, a worker towards the overall outcome of the Carnival.

### ***Ritual and the Minstrels Carnival***

Carnivals are often historically linked to religious or seasonal annual celebrations. Rio and Trinidad Carnival (Liverpool 1998) for example, are derived through Christian Lent celebrations, introduced through colonialism and taken up by previous slaves. Notting Hill Carnival masquerade in London, occurring on Bank Holiday in summer, is derived from Trinidadian Carnival practices (Cohen 1980, 1990; Jackson 1987), starting as a secular community festival, but rapidly becoming a masquerade competition of the British West Indian Trinidadian community, who introduced Trinidadian Carnival costume techniques and organisation (Cohen 1980, 1982; Jackson 1987). Carnival is diasporic – it travels, and festivals such as Carnival appear to be a universal aspect of society (Ehrenreich 2006).

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<sup>7</sup> I was also previously an ongoing mas' participant and volunteer costume creation assistant for five years in London for Notting Hill Carnival.

Turner (1969; 1982) claims there is a heightened vitality within ritual performance, which he describes as a 'liminal' phase, between the past and the future, a means of release and return to the ordered structure of society. Others, however, argue that, rather than a 'liminal' phase, festivity, including ecstatic states of intense emotion, often associated with dance, trance or spirituality, is an intrinsic feature of society's structure. The writer Ehrenreich (2006) has suggested influence such as Calvinist and Protestant reform, the industrial revolution and the increase of organised war resulted in the suppression of much of Europe's proclivity for festivities. Additionally, colonial perspectives what were seen as native 'rituals' deliberately distanced the West by labelling such events as 'wild' or 'disturbed', associating such practices with psychological disturbance, animalistic overly sexualised expressions, and the 'out of control' 'expressive' nature (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Ehrenreich 2000).

However, much research has indicated that ritual practices, even those of 'possession' or 'trance', are highly organised and controlled events, requiring preparation, rehearsals and planning, often involving the preparation of food, special costumes and objects, as Turner put it, 'special types of attire, music, dance, food and drink... often masks, body painting, headgear, furniture and shrines' (1982; 12) in which even ecstatic ritual states manifest in culturally specific body movements and reactions, occurring at the appropriate times in the sequence of events, rather than being 'out of control' (Hannah 1988, Reed 1998, Farnell 1999, Desmond 2000, Turner 1969; 1982; Ehrenreich 2006, Warren 2010). Furthermore, rather than being a 'release' for society, they may bring about change, while affirming societal bonds and cohesion. Cohen's (1980, 1990) work on Notting Hill in London argues the Carnival enabled the mobilisation of the West Indian Community, through a means of claiming a space and a presence in the streets. Carnival, he argues, is complex in nature and engages with multiple and shifting contexts over time, as a 'bivocal form, an ambiguous unity of cultural and political significance' (81).

The threat of the power of Carnivals is one which others have often sought to suppress, confirming their political and social power, particularly in their association often with masses of the 'other' as far as the hierarchies of society are concerned – the working class (Ehrenreich, 2006), slave populations (Liverpool 1998) or ethnic groups (Cohen 1980, 1982, Martin 1999, Bruinders 2011). Part of this fear is the ability of carnivals to unite people in the 'here and now', creating a sense of shared unity and 'oneness' through a phenomenon Turner (1969) labelled as 'communitas' – 'A strong, total communal experience of oneness in which an individual senses (even if momentarily) a merging of awareness' (182-183). Consequently, applying Csordas' (1996) claim that the self is 'a repertoire of capacities for orienting in and engaging the world' (101), Carnivals effectively embody

space and time for those who take part in them, providing histories of engagement and interaction through which memory, and society, is evoked through and within the moving body.

This fear of the 'out of control' masses in the streets, incorporating a race and class 'distancing' has been applied to the Minstrels Carnival in Cape Town. The Klopse Carnival in its present form emerged from a number of historical and social contexts. Detailed histories of the Minstrels Carnival are available from sources such as Bruinders (2011), Martin (1999), Baxter (2001), Jeppie (1990), Mason (2010), Swarr (2004) and Meltzer et al (2010). The Minstrels Carnival is a means through which many of the local, historically 'coloured'<sup>8</sup> people of Cape Town return to an annual celebration, incorporating competitions and parades, with a build-up and fervour beyond that of the everyday, incorporating the choreography of bodies on a large scale – through streets and in stadiums across the city. As in other carnivals, involving forms of creative expression, spectacle and dance, the Minstrels Carnival invokes a sense of euphoria and freedom, and yet is also carefully choreographed and controlled.

A component of three interlinked musical festivities over the Christmas and New Year period in Cape town, the Malay Choirs, Christmas Bands and Minstrels (Klopse) which Bruinders (2011) terms the 'ghoema musical complex', in that all three exhibit a particular syncopated rhythm emblematic of Cape Town (Bruinders, 2011), the Klopse historically formed as a consequence of the merging of colonial New Year and Christmas celebrations and the celebration of the emancipation of slaves on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1834, which eventually became a 'New Year' series of celebrations.

The Klopse 'uniform' is derived from the influence of travelling Minstrel troupes visiting South Africa from the US in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a practice which was taken up locally and, interestingly, also in Trinidad, which has a traditional Minstrel masquerade costume component, although on a much smaller scale. Most of the Carnival costumes are Minstrel 'uniforms' which vary according to design and combinations of colour every year, where troupes compete for the 'best dress' prize. There are also a number of 'special costumes' and marches without uniforms, which will be discussed later.

The impact of apartheid on the Carnival, which traditionally took place in the District Six and Greenpoint areas, as a result of forced removals after the declaration of these areas as 'white' under the Groups Areas Act (1950, amended 1963 when it was applied to District Six) was devastating. As Martin (1999) describes it, the Carnival nearly came to an end, with the dispersal of the majority of 'coloured' communities from central Cape Town to residential areas in the Cape flats, far from the

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<sup>8</sup> Notions of a 'coloured' identity are historically contentious but it forms a political identity in the New South Africa. See Adhikari 2005.

centre and from each other. This also, he claims, impacted on the success of the rise of the gang structure, which had previously been what he termed 'friendly', to large, 'dangerous' gangs, along with the structuring of Carnival organisation into increasingly commercialised competitions, the standardisation of the uniforms, as well as the association of shebeens, drugs and money laundering with the klopskamers (Martin 1999, Baxter 1996). Although as Martin (1999) points out, the Carnival in its earlier days involved local politicians and intellectuals, the apartheid emphasis on the Minstrels as a 'coloured' carnival also led to a strong dissociation of the 'coloured' middle and intellectual classes from Carnival activities. They distanced themselves from the concept of the Carnival participant as 'unruly', 'foolish' and 'derogatory', and from the association with perceptions of a caricatured 'coloured character', viewed as siding with the apartheid government segregation policies in accepting being represented as a 'coloured' carnivals. Bruinders (2011) claims perceptions of Carnival festive practices as juvenile and a matter for ridicule, are misconceptions created largely through media caricaturisation and apartheid segregation.

In recent years, the number of troupes has risen dramatically, gang links have diminished and those that did dissociate themselves. Another dramatic change has been the increase in women and children participants over the last ten years, from a male dominated carnival to one that now has an enormous number of female adults and children participants in competitions, bands and marches, and as executives and captains within troupes, including, as in the case of the school principal who runs the Heideveldt Entertainers, female 'owners'.

### ***Choreographing the Body in the Minstrels Carnival – Large scale movement across the city.***

Although the studies above look at historical, social, political, musical and gendered aspects of the Minstrels Carnival, there has been little focus on the embodied experience of the Carnival, particularly in relation to the moving of the body through the streets and within stadiums. Emphasis, however, has been placed on the significance of the road marches (Bruinders 2011; Martin 1999) in linking a 'dispossessed' community after forced removals – the reunion of friends, previous neighbours and families across a dispersed society fragmented by the impact of apartheid.

The Minstrels Road March on 2<sup>nd</sup> New Year is estimated, as aforementioned, to involve around 50,000 participants (Minty 2006) and at least 30,000 observers. There are also road marches and 'tafels' which occur on a less formal basis around the 'suburbs' of the city which link areas, the troupes travelling in buses from place to place, where they disembark and march through the area. For example, on 2<sup>nd</sup> New Year 2013 I travelled with the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites from Woodstock to central Cape Town for the main road march, then to march in Delft, Bellville South



and Lentegeur, arriving back again around 1am. Consequently, the Carnival represents a large movement of bodies.

Fabulous Woodstock Starlites members claim that the numbers of troupes has risen dramatically over recent years, estimated by one executive as shifting from around 28 troupes in total in 2005 and now around 80 troupes across the Western Cape in 2013. Consequently, although not necessarily visible to the inhabitants of Cape Town's City Bowl, there is a continual shifting and movement of dancing and parading bodies which takes place through tafels and road marches, which begin in the previous June or July as a non-uniformed march around Cape Flats areas to 'announce' the troupes participation in the following year and to 'recruit' members. Consequent road marches take place again in December, then from New Year's Day and on stadium competition days, held on consecutive Saturdays following New Year into February or March, depending on which dates the competitions are organised.

This represents a mobilisation of the population moving between what might be considered 'boxed off' areas from June/July to February/March of the following year – a continual movement organised by up to 80 troupes spanning 8 or 9 months in total. This contrasts considerably with the emergence of the recent City Council funded 'Cape Town Carnival' with Brazilian costuming and organisational influences, which is seen by Klopse organisers as directly competitive with the Minstrels Carnival and 'linked to business' from the 'top down', and which involved only one road March, in March, ironically along Somerset Road to Greenpoint Stadium, starting from the area of Prestwich Street Memorial, where the over a thousand skeletons are stored, excavated as a result of building work in the area of Prestwich Street which unearthed a previous cemetery of the poor, many of whom were most likely slaves (Shepherd 2007) as well as being the truncated component of the Minstrels 2<sup>nd</sup> New Year road march that used to continue to Greenpoint Stadium.

Spatiality is a social product, and in return social spaces construct society (Soja 1989). If the body is a 'mediator' between the self and the world' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:90) then the moving body plays a particularly important role within the world. It occupies space and engages with the spaces it constitutes and is constituted by. A burgeoning amount of research has emphasised the importance of considering the role of embodiment and movement in relation to society, including that of dance, within social and anthropological research (Reed 1998; Hannah 1988, Hastrup 1995). Canclini (2009) suggests that, 'we should think about the city as simultaneously a place to inhabit and a place to be imagined.... Cities are meant to be lived in, but also to be traversed... These journeys through the capital represent modes of appropriating urban space as well as sites from which to launch imaginaries.' (43). In writing of dancehalls, he claims they are places that 'mark specificity... where

one can dance, and “feel at home”, as public places that ‘largely function as if they were private, as spaces appropriated by certain groups’, and which therefore are ‘simultaneously semipublic and semiprivate’ (42-43).

In the case of the Minstrels Carnival, the city becomes the ‘dancehall’, a space of ownership and a ‘home from home’, in which, through physically walking and dancing in the streets, people feel they ‘own’ the city and, simultaneously, feel they ‘belong’. The road marches celebrate presence – not merely as ‘spectacle’ as in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Nuwe Yaar Road March, which a few Fabulous Woodstock Starlites members described as ‘for the tourists’ but also as a means of linking band members’ houses and territories, of creating a sense of ‘whole’ from dispersal. As a consequence, the moving body is in a manner an archive, it reconstitutes a time and space of the past, an alternative map of the city that, as Taylor (2007) describes in her study of the Americas, is constituted more through relations of people, the ancestors, of family and social relationships, than of physically demarcated geographies of separate spaces and places. These relationships are continued, not merely on competition days, but over time – including practices, rehearsals, venues, venues, marches, competitions and planning over extensive time - much of which activities remains invisible on the surface of the city.

Moving through the city, one is exposed to sight, smell and touch (Urry 2004) and thus the physical experience of the city becomes embroiled with one's memories. Memory too is stronger when a strong emotional response goes hand in hand with memory formation (Carter 2010). Consequently, the memory of carnival becomes an emotionally expressed experience within the human body and mind, due to its associated emotionality. The fervour of impending competitions is a serious force within the city for Carnival participants, to the extent that Minstrels describe the intensity of the competitions as a sport.

The act of dancing and performing in the Minstrels Carnival transforms relationships and networks, and establishes a sense of belonging in and across city spaces that otherwise would be ‘boxed in’ and difficult to transgress, even in today’s South Africa, where divides remain, of economy, class and segregation, and the spatial ‘imprint’ of apartheid (Watson 1998) is argued to be intensified by factors such as continued economic divides and the increase in gentrification (Visser and Kotze 2008, Christopher 2005). These factors align with Simone’s (2004) claim that. ‘The city is the conjunction of seemingly endless possibilities of remaking. With its artifice of architectures, infrastructures and sedimentation channelling movement, transaction and physical proximity, bodies constantly are ‘on the line’ to affect and be affected... they are the products of specific spatial practices and complex interactions of variously located actors that reflect manoeuvres on the part of city residents to continuously resituate themselves in broader fields of action.’ (9).

'Cities,' write Bridge and Watson (2004) 'are not simply material or lived spaces – they are also spaces of the imagination and spaces of representation' (2). Lefebvre (1991) wrote that 'the city is an oeuvre, closer to a work of art than to a simple material product. If there is a production of the city, and social relations in the city, it is a production and reproduction of human beings by human beings, rather than a production of objects' (101).

There is a distinct difference between the expressiveness of the 2<sup>nd</sup> New year Road March and the less formal road marches in the 'suburbs'. The 2<sup>nd</sup> New Year Road march is a barricaded and formalised event, with promotional soft drink sponsored stands, a City Hall seated viewing area, and a designated walk from the border of District Six, past the Slave Lodge and up to the Bo Kaap, a truncated version of the former walk to Greenpoint stadium, where competitions used to take place until the designation of the stadium for a refurbishment for the 2010 World Cup, after which the boards split and moved to separate stadiums. The crowd was separated from marches by the barriers, and committee executives and captains kept the troupe 'in line' and in their sections, led by the band and the troupe banners, by walking alongside. At times the Minstrels broke into the 'snake dance' forming a winding dancing column that weaved in formation two or three abreast, down the street, as on joined mass.

Perhaps another form of choreography was the way in which people composed themselves for photographs while moving or when static. For example, a group of Minstrels would be talking and immediately compose themselves into a group for the camera, anticipating the experience of the tourist for a 'happy, lively, comic minstrel'. These postures and expressions 'to gain attention' in photographs are those that the more middle class 'coloured', who prefer to dissociate themselves from the carnival, as 'derogatory and foolish' in which they do not want to be laughed at. For those who are photographed, there is an element of fun and humour, and a certain pride in being able to compose themselves into an aesthetic compositional image.

### ***Flows and Barriers Across the City***

The informal road marches around Cape Town covered diverse areas. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> of New Year march we visited Delft, Bellville South and Lentegeur, providing an expansive engagement with the people of the city. At each stop we climbed out of the bus and walked and the band played. In these areas, people came to of their houses to watch, as evening became night, and people walked alongside the troupe, sometimes within the troupe, as there were no barriers, unlike the 2<sup>nd</sup> new year road march. The only thing that defined the troupe as separate was the uniforms. The part of

Delft we visited had mixed 'African' and 'coloured' residents who joined in the procession, possibly indicating the future involvement of a wider 'cultural' spectrum of participants in the future<sup>9</sup>.

There are some areas the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites avoid in road marches. Hanover Park is, for example, too dangerous they say, due to local gang violence. The vast difference in the level of 'street protection' in the city centre is obvious – and the lack of adequate 'disaster management' in other areas, as one executive of the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites declared, is potentially problematic in areas such as Lentegeur where the troupes now parade after competitions and which consequently becomes 'very crowded', and offers a direct contrast to the carefully policed city Bowl, indicating the seeming irrelevance of the 'suburbs' of Cape Town in comparison to the centre of Cape Town.

Permits are also required to 'march' in the city bowl, which need to be applied for months in advance, as opposed to the Cape Flats, where one only needs to inform the local police station in case of any eventual problems. This restriction also applies to the Bo Kaap, where troupes traditionally march after each stadium competition.

Since 2012, a 'cut off' time of 2am was introduced in the Bo Kaap, and the requirement of a permit from Carnival Boards, with only 6 troupes being allowed to parade on competition days, apart from after the finals, when all troupes could go. This requirement, claimed an executive, was the result of people in the Bo Kaap, which had remained a 'Malay area' during apartheid, 'selling up' to businesses and people of a 'different culture' who 'did not understand Carnival' and 'wanted to stop it'. New ratepayers in the area had, according to the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites, 'got together' to create a petition limiting the number and time that the bands could pass through the Bo Kaap.

The impact of these changes was felt by the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites who 'won' their section of the Carnival, and set off at the end of the prize giving, which ended at around 1am, to parade their trophies on the traditional victory march through the Bo Kaap.

The Bo Kaap streets were empty, only one Muslim family coming out to greet the troupe as it passed through two streets, and what appeared to be an enthusiastic tourist, appearing at another door. The band struck up and the troupe began to march. Within about ten minutes, the police arrived and told the troupe to leave the area, as their permit did not cover after 2am.

After this, the troupe decided to take their bus to parade in Lentegeur on the outskirts of Cape Town instead, which had been growing in popularity as an alternative parading venue to the Bo Kaap, due

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<sup>9</sup> Black African participants are common in bands, and sometimes sing in choirs. There are also small numbers joining the troupes of Carnival although still very much in the minority.

to the lack of City restrictions and permits. On arrival they found the place deserted of other troupes – and a man lying stabbed in the street while a small group of people waited for an ambulance. This lack of police presence was a direct contrast to the Bo Kaap and coincided with the Minstrel's concern there was a lack of 'disaster management' in the area. From the overly protected and enclosed area of the Bo Kaap to the vulnerable, violence-tainted event of Lentegour, the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites troupe, worried about exposing their members, including children, in the bus to the scene of the injured man, decided to go home, and their victory march for winning the Carnival never happened.

### ***Stadium Competitions and the Choreographed Body***

I now move to examples of the choreographies in the Stadium competitions from New Year's Day, selecting from a variety of competitions as examples. Although many of the competitions are singing competitions, others focus on presentation and aspects of body movement within competitions that emphasise group 'spectacle', whereas others incorporate specific choreographies, or 'special' dancers, and it is these components I will focus on. These 'choreographies' of space both link and identify troupe members with each other, while allowing for in many cases individual expressions of movement, or a host of varied modes of expression and performance that members can engage with.

One competition is the 'Grand March Past' competition, where a minimum of 60 members must march around the stadium with perfect timing and synchronicity in their movements. For this competition, the uniformity and 'smartness' of dress is crucial, along with an absolute adherence to the synchronicity and timing of their marching, for which a marching coach is usually hired in advance to choreograph their movements. This coach often has a military background, or specializes in coaching marching, a common practice, a Minstrels captain told me, in school marching competitions also. The marching is taken very seriously. It presents a unified and orderly team, rather than notions of the 'disordered' Carnival. Theoreticians such as Bruinders argue, her study of Christmas Bands (2011) that band marching and the association with militarism is a deeply symbolic act suggesting, through uniform, deportment, and parades, a notion of respectability and discipline in society that 'dynamically' preserves their cultural practice, essentially providing dignity and respect, as a form of cultural 'truth making' that in part derives from the notion that coloured are a people 'without a culture' in South Africa<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Chapter 2, p 9 of PhD thesis.

Another competition on New Year's Day was the 'Klopse Jol'<sup>11</sup>, a direct contrast to the 'Grand March Past'. The aim of the Klopse Jol, which includes the band, is to emphasise a vitality, liveliness and festivity, creating a sense of 'joy', while maintaining overall order within the group, which stays in its constituent sections as it parades around the stadium, led by the Senior and Junior<sup>12</sup> 'Drum Majors' who are also judged during this competition.

The role of the Drum Majors is to 'draw attention' to the troupe, and they are judged specifically for their dancing, which incorporates jerky choreographed movements, and at times appears comic, while being comprised of, as Martin describes it, 'the most intricate steps' (1999: 16). They stand out in wearing specific uniforms 'evocative of a fancy military uniform of the 19<sup>th</sup> century' with a high hat with ostrich plumes plus a baton (Martin 1999:16). They are marked for coordination, cleverness of execution, originality and improvisation of dance moves, synchrony with the music, and synchrony with each other. According to executive of the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites their new Drum Major copied the moves of their very successful previous dancer before him and added his own improvised 'moves' and thus won. The two drum majors also need to coordinate and be in synchrony with the music at times.

Although choirs compete for singing, the choirs also include choreography. A choreographer came to the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites rehearsal Klopskamer space to show the choir how to move before they competed, emphasising hand and body movements and dance to emphasise the songs- to ensure they are not static – their synchrony with the singing also emphasising the music.. They dress to emphasize hands and bodies, with shiny costumes in the troupe colours and painted faces, using gloves and hats to accentuate body movements. The impact of choreography was clearly apparent, for example, in the 'comic' song which particularly emphasised movement and liveliness, as well as incorporating a male lead singer dressed as a woman to add to the comic effect.

Other 'characters' that form part of the stadium carnival events include 'Atjar' troupes and 'Moffies'. The Atjars or 'Wild Indians'<sup>13</sup> are a small number of troupes based on 'Devil' and 'Indian' masquerades, who now also take part in singing and marching competitions in the stadiums. 'Moffies' (see Swarr 2004; Martin 1999) are homosexuals or transsexuals who dress extravagantly in men's clothing. He claims the 'Moffie' brings popular support to the troupe, linked to a respect which homosexuals are not granted in ordinary society, and because she symbolises autonomy and the freedom to choose her own costume and appearance, as well as a form of defiance (1999:16).

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<sup>11</sup> Judged along with the 'best dress' competition.

<sup>12</sup> Under 15 years old.

<sup>13</sup> Thought to be derived from West Indian traditions brought to Cape Town via the US (Martin 1999; Crowley 1956)

Certainly, when accompanying various songs and competition events, their movements are highly dramatic and draw attention, again, to the performances. Although not competing, if there is a spare trophy, a 'best Moffie' trophy is awarded.

The 'Exhibition' competition, in which I took part with a team of artists, making costumes out of mostly recycled cardboard and left over material from uniforms, is a spectacle based on a theme, akin to an Olympic opening produced within the stadium by the whole team, and incorporates the 'best band' competition at the same time. The participants are required to keep moving at all times, and the entire space of the stadium should be utilised with the team synchronising with the music as much as possible. The troupes often divide themselves into different 'sections' which illustrate the overall theme.

Some troupes, such as the 'Orientals' (sponsored by a famous rugby player) who compete in the Athlone stadium, are highly professional, apparently being asked to take part regularly in festivals in the Far East, every movement being choreographed across the field to create an extravagant spectacle. To 'stand out' is one of the main criteria in what is a highly visual display, and hence the requirement for 'Special' costumes and props, which extend to maypoles, the erection of giant mobile structures, flowing clothes, team acrobatics, flag waving and group choreography while the band plays. For this display, they often involve, through hiring or persuasion, professional or semi-professional dancers. In 2011 and 2012 for example, 'African' dancers from Gugulethu performed with the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites exhibition and in 2013 they hired a groups of belly dancers to also take part. It is not unusual to see ballroom dancers, fancy dress costumes, or modern dance or 'hip hop' and break dance teams amongst the overall displays.

### ***Freedom and the Minstrels Carnival***

What, then, is the 'Freedom' of Carnival? I return to the 'Mine!' performance of the iKapa Dance theatre at 'Infecting the City' as a comparison. Both performances are in the open air, moving through spaces, and although one is small-scale and involves only three people, and is performed within what might be termed an 'elite' or 'serious' arts festival in which the Minstrels Carnival is not participant, there are semblances of similarities. Is the carnival a huge artwork in itself?

Pile (2005) has written of the city as a 'phantasmagoric' space, one of dreams, hauntings, fantasies and desires, rather than merely material objects and presence, lying beyond the visible and tangible. He claims that 'what is real about cities is the sheer expressiveness and passion of its life' (1-2). These aspects which people live within constitute, he claims, the 'sense' of a city. What he describes

as intangible qualities relate well to the ephemerality of carnival, its means of reconnecting across city areas and yet remaining only, after the carnival, in memory.

Within the walking and parading, is reconstituted history, stories of slavery and creativity, the coming of the minstrels to Cape Town and a black diaspora, the forcibly removed persons of the city and their fragmentation and reassemblage as a 'community' through the parading, music and dancing that reconstitutes their world, and hopefully has the potential to cross other barriers of segregation also. Yet there are also blockages, spaces of not-travelling in the city, which form restrictions and limitations for the Carnival. The Minstrels Carnival is organised and structured and is arguably a self-sustained community creative arts enterprise lasting over 100 years, but also, some say 'big money' for the organisers, whereas others claim organisers only just 'break even'. The moving self of Carnival encounters and embodies different histories, transcends, negotiates and moves between different contexts of engagement over time and space in the city. The Carnival also provides a space of belonging and connection, but also, as participants claim, provides a form of 'stress release' from the difficulties of their lives – both a distancing of oneself, and a return to the self – as remembered, communal, expressive and 'seen', arguably a mode of healing for self and community.

At the end of the 'Mine!' iKapa Dance Theatre performance, the cube was dismantled. Whether this symbolised the end of divides is uncertain, but, for the Minstrels, the divides in Cape Town are still there; where people live, the economic and class divides that define persons, the dispossession of people and the re-possession of themselves, through multiple forms of self-expression, as well as the dispossession of their performance through its spatial and legal restrictions and limitations within a city that still struggles to acknowledge its relevance.

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# **POSTMODERN SPIRITUALITY IN DANCE AND SOMATIC RESEARCH: A NARRATIVE<sup>i</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

*Some dance scholars in the west view their work through a postmodern lens. This approach problematizes ideas such as essentialism, absolutism, universality, and even the idea of experience itself. Yet many dancers work through the body in an experientially sensorial way. Thus a question arises for those dance scholars who are drawn to postmodernism and post positivist research. Can there be a postmodern spirituality? This paper, based on a chapter I wrote about postmodern spirituality in dance and somatics, addresses the tensions between my personal spiritual life and my scholarly role as a researcher. Although, I moved towards a postmodern sensibility and have questioned theoretical "truths," I still find myself slipping into a strong experiential relationship with the world. I have wrestled with the issues related to this mode of communicating, and the realization that my knowledge and experience are constructed and based on a socio-cultural context. Yet, while postmodern theory questions relational aspects of research, I find a particular experiential connection to the world through what one might characterize as a spiritual process. Through this presentation, I negotiate the route that my personal and scholarly affinities take me and ask if there can be such a thing as a postmodern spirituality. Through this auto-narrative process I acknowledge difference, fragmentation, and partial narratives while maintaining an appreciation for somatic experience. Thus, the intention of the paper is to explore my personal narrative as a way to theoretically wrestle with tensions between a postmodern worldview, post positivist methodology, and the power of a somatic spirituality.*

## **Introduction**

When I was asked to write a chapter of a book about dance, spirituality, and somatics, I felt a sense of anxiety deep in my gut. I have been immersed in post positivist research and thinking for over twenty-five years, yet I have struggled to reconcile my affinities for postmodernism, and spirituality in dance. I published many articles and chapters about a postmodern and critical theory approach to somatics and dance (Green 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002-03, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2008) while my scholarly interests shifted and changed. I moved to a more postmodern view that was reflected in my research methodology and belief that experience is socially, culturally, and politically constructed.

However, the area of spirituality has been one that I have avoided, not because I do not feel spiritual, but rather that there were so many tensions between spiritual and postmodern ontologies and epistemologies.

I found that, however unsettling this may be, this venture was an opportunity to struggle with the issues, delve into research in the area, and investigate the connections between dance, somatics, spirituality, and postmodernism.

The key research methodology of this project was a development of theory through a personal narrative or auto ethnography. Narrative and auto ethnography are key methodological tools used in post positivist research. Although I did not use this self-reflexive tool to study myself in the research field, through this approach, I attempted to understand how my own narrative may explore questions about the social construction of knowledge. Thus, I was my own subject/participant in an investigation into the construction of beliefs about spirituality, somatics, dance, and life.

### ***The Struggle: A Personal Narrative***<sup>1</sup>

When I was a little girl, I distinctly remember a number of times when I felt a deep connection to the world as I experienced a sense of heightened existence. I cannot easily articulate this experience because it filled my soma in a way that cannot be reproduced with words. It was a Zen-like sense of oneness and attunement. I found this same kind of experience when I began dancing and found a love of the art form. Dancing for me was always about a sense of engagement and connection to something that seemed real and alive.

Interestingly, my father was agnostic and my mother gave up her religious identity when she married my father. I did not know where this feeling came from. I was brought up in a secular Jewish environment.

When I was in my twenties, and I was married to my ex-husband (his parents were Unitarian) we decided to try to search for our Jewish roots and attempted to find a synagogue that would meet our needs. When I was introduced to religion, I had an immediate resistance to the

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this paper will be published in a forthcoming chapter, Green, J. (in press). Postmodern spirituality?: A personal narrative. In Williamson, A. (ed.), *Dance, Somatics and Spiritualities: Contemporary Sacred Narrative. Leading Edge Voices in the field*. Coventry, UK: Intellect.

religious texts because, as I read them, they required that women give up their lives to their husbands and because they seemed to instill a sense of fear in God that did not make sense to me. I had a difficult time understanding the stories as “real” and found myself disconnected from all organized religion. I saw it as a patriarchal institution with the intent to keep its citizens in line and subservient to the particular religious system.

During the ensuing years, after an injury, while at New York University when I was doing my Master’s degree, I began to find somatics when I studied with Elaine Summers in Kinetic Awareness®. Once again, I felt a deep sense of joy and connection doing the work.

I entered the doctoral program at Ohio State University with the intention to study somatics as a humanistic and self-affirming area of study. I felt that somatics could offer students a sense of wholeness and harmony, as I felt while working with dance and Kinetic Awareness®.

However, I found my sense of the world shaken and the rug (everything I thought I knew) taken out under me when I began to study with Patti Lather, a postmodern educational theorist, and find out about another world of thought, postmodernism. I say the rug was taken out under me because I began to question what I knew and how I knew it. Postmodernism questions foundationalism, individualism, essence, experience, truth, and even the idea of holism; It points to a plurality of truths and acknowledges difference and fragmentation. It investigates partial truths and reveals “grand narratives,” written by a dominant political authority.

In other words, I began to understand that my knowledge and experience are socially, culturally, and politically constructed. I found that I valued a necessary change in thinking in such a multidimensional and growing diverse milieu. I came to believe that we cannot assume everyone experiences the world in the same way. In addition I found postmodernism to be a creative venture, in that there was not always a black and white answer to the world, or of presenting or performing ideas. I was attuned to a world of complexity and juxtapositions of viewpoints and epistemologies.

When I was hired to teach in the Department of Dance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, I taught dance education and somatics. From the start of my career after my doctoral work, I used a post positivist lens to see the world.

Yet, while adhering to this approach, at the same time I found this sense of connection once again, when I found myself in North Carolina, remarried, and living on a fifteen- acre plot of land in the country. As a New York City native, I never quite experienced the trees, flora, and fauna in such a connected and deeply felt way. I believed in a postmodern viewpoint but felt connected to the earth and life in a profound way.

This postmodern turn left me in a difficult position. I was moved by postmodern thought and felt it was a way to celebrate difference and acknowledge those who may be disfranchised. Yet I did not want to give up on the idea of experience because it served me well in life and connected me to the world. It is the experiential and relational aspects of life that I did not seem willing to diminish. In addition, my work in somatics kept me grounded in this experiential aspect of being and I began to reframe somatics and see it through a post positivist lens; cognizant of postmodern issues yet open to experience (see Green 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1999, 2000, 2002-03, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2008).

Within this world of conflicting positionalities, I asked, “How could I negotiate the value of a somatic epistemology based in the world of experience and holism when I was recognizing the fragmentation of knowledge and the ways ideas of “truth” bumped up against each other”? I began doing this by questioning assumptions that tend to guide the field of somatics such as “universal experience, “holism,” and the necessary goodness of somatic practice.

So it is from this position that I delved into research in the area of spirituality, somatics, and postmodernism, hoping to find ways that make sense of these assumed opposite viewpoints and find places where these views may overlap.

### **SO WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?**

According to the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, spiritual is defined in the following ways,

1. Of, pertaining to, or affecting the spirit or soul, esp. from a religious aspect...
2. Of, pertaining to, or concerned with sacred or religious things, holy, divine, prayerful; of or pertaining to the church or the clergy, ecclesiastical...
3. Pertaining to or have consisting of spirit, immaterial....



4. Of or pertaining to the intellect; intellectual.... (Brown, 1972: 2990)

These definitions do not connect to somatics, particularly numbers 3 and 4 because of the dualistic aspect of the term. In addition, the religious or fundamentalist aspect of numbers 1 and 2 do not adhere to postmodern thought. Moreover, none of these definitions describe my past experiences. Does this mean that what I experienced was not spiritual? Amanda Williamson suggests that the definition may be more complicated:

Spirituality is a scholarly subject that causes lively debate and sometimes a lot of aggravation. For some people, spirituality is profoundly meaningful – for others, it is deeply ambiguous and of far less interest. It is a highly contentious and controversial subject, open to criticism if pursued in public sector education. (2010:36)

Williamson addresses Ursula King's diverse scholarly sense of spirituality that is "invoked with great praise, even a sense of longing, so that it appears as a highly desirable ideal and on other occasions its very mention can meet with criticism, resistance, even rejection" (King, 2009 cited in Williamson, 2010, p. 36). King also suggests that the word is spoken of in so many different aspects of life that it may seem ambivalent. Yet, Williamson suggests,

For other people, the word has potency, substance, depth, and vitality. Such a range of feeling reflects an era marked by choice, freedom and plurality. Steven Wright reminds us that in relation to this subject, '[t]here is a wide continuum of views, from those whose source is strictly God-centered to those for who[m] there is only this human reality and nothing else; from those who experience, know or believe in something ineffable, numinous and 'supernatural' to those who find consideration of anything other than the rational, biophysical experience abhorrent or irrelevant' (Wright, 2005 cited in Williamson, 2010:36-37)

Other writers have addressed the open quality of the term as well. Sutherland, Poloma, and Pendelton (2003) suggest that spirituality means different things to people from different generations. While the parents of baby boomers in the west tend to conceptualize spirituality in a more religious context (religiosity), baby boomers (of which I am one) tend to relate spirituality to positive health perceptions. The authors site psychological, medical, and sociological literatures that point to a sense of personal awareness, and include meanings such as "transcendence," "unity and meaning," "wholeness," and take people beyond self-interested concerns into the social world. And they point to a move away from religiosity to one of life satisfaction and purpose as well as improved health (2003:317). In addition, they claim that this move leads to a more non-objectified viewpoint. Further, since many baby boomers became known as countercultural figures, there was a move to challenge modern institutions and bring

their ideas into an ideal that included political, social, and spiritual synthesis. In this sense, there was a move to a more “experiential spirituality” (2003:325).

Many of these ideas are grounded in the writing of Wade Clark Roof. Roof (1993) used the change in the baby boomer generation to reframe spirituality. His ideal is to move into a more culturally sensitive place with the idea of pluralism as its base. As he says,

The term I use—“reconstruction”—suggests that I prefer to move beyond the customary arguments on the decline of religion among sociologists, in favor of what I take to be a more insightful, more nuanced interpretation of religion in America. My approach is in keeping with a newer sociology-of-religion paradigm gradually emerging that is more historically informed and that privileges themes of voluntarism and innovation, the continuing vitality of American religious culture, and simple-side, rather than exclusively demand-side explanations of change. It presupposes the viability of religion as an energizing force despite changing forms rather than secular assumptions of shrinking plausibility’s. Hence...I look for embryonic and holistic forms of religion, often unstable and sporadic but that appear to be filling in spaces opened up by broad-scaled changes in what is increasingly called a postmodern world. (Roof, 1993:157)

Some feminists have also brought the idea of the spiritual together with cultural/social/political agendas. For example, Eugenie Gatens-Robinson (1994) takes the idea of spiritual to mean a connection to the earth through the growing idea of an ecofeminism. According to Gatens-Robinson,

From an ecofeminism perspective, the idea that we solve environmental problems without first profoundly changing our experiential relationship to nature is incoherent. Those who think seriously about these issues have come to realize that simply doing the things that environmental scientists tell us are necessary, even if that action is taken to serve out enlightened species’ interest, is not a powerful enough response. The problem is not at base one of mismanagement, but a problem of impoverished experience. (Gatens-Robinson, 1984:208-09)

Gatens-Robinson cites Susan Griffin:

If religion told us that the earth was a corrupt place, that our true home was heaven, that sensual feeling was not to be trusted and could lead us to hell and damnation, science did not in essence contradict that doctrine. For science told us too not to trust our senses, that matter is deceptive and that we are alien to our surroundings.... In both systems, not only are we alienated from the world that is described as deceiving us; we are also alienated from our own capacity to see and hear and taste and touch, to know and describe our own experience (Griffin, 1989, cited in Gatens-Robinson, 1994:208)

This movement toward a somatic/experience position opens the definition of spiritual to include a relationship to the earth, and additionally moves the intention to a socio-political focus.

So here there is a move to a less dualistic, less authoritarian vision of spirituality based on connection and experience. This idea has connections to my prior experience and affinities. However, some of these authors represent views that are not yet postmodern because they may embrace individualism, foundationalism, and experience and may do so in a relational way. Yet this more fluid set of descriptions may move this thinking toward a more postmodern conceptualization of the term.

### ***Postmodernism: Social, Cultural, And Political Conceptualizations***

How does one imagine the idea of a changed sense of spirituality within a postmodern world steeped in diversity and difference? A number of scholars have approached this query.

Some writers attempt to open the idea culturally. For example Kelly Besecke sees spirituality as a cultural language that “incorporates simultaneous commitments to modern rationality and to the value of transcendent meaning. As such reflective spirituality is thus a cultural resource that modern Americans are using to create guiding transcendent meanings for a rationalized society” (Besecke, 2001:356). Besecke sees Wade Clark Roof’s idea of a reflexive spirituality as “a way individuals relate to religious symbols and practices in their efforts to gain personal meaning from religion” (Roof 1998, 1999 in Besecke, 2001:366). She further takes the idea toward spirituality as a cultural resource, shared in groups for people to talk with each other about meaning (336). She emphasizes “spirituality’s public, interactional, cultural dimension (367), and sees it as a method of social critique. In this way, the definition of spirituality moves from individualism to the group and community, and attempts to look at the plurality of the idea.

Alexander Tristan Riley suggests that modernism was an era where religion was dismissed and that postmodernism can bring back spirituality through the renovation of the sacred (Riley, 2002:243). Through a discussion about Durkheim and Bergson, he argues that postmodern theory can actually create a turn to the sacred. He does this by tracing two realms of scholarly thought. For example, he suggests that although Durkheim (a sociologist) and Bergson, (a philosopher), have views that have been seen as opposing, that they both contributed to postmodern thinking. For example, he asserts,

The gist of both Durkheimian and Bergsonian thought is a profound criticism of the various kind of materialism that were the ascendant in French intellectual culture in the Third Republic, at least partially as a direct result of the very constitution of the Republic, in the concept of a deep anxiety that the existing, traditional forms of the

sacred could and would not sufficiently answer the dilemmas of the modern world, if indeed they even survived intact. The materialisms opposed by both Durkheimianism and Bergoniansism included Marxism in some early forms but were more typically derived from other social sources indigenous to France. The ultimate thrust of both positions is toward recognition of the gravity of the secularization crisis and the need for an effort to reconfigure, rather than simply eliminate, the sacred. (Riley, 2002:248)

Thus, Riley believes that there was a rejection of spirituality in modern times and those precursors of postmodernism sought a reconstruction of the sacred as a way to bring spirituality back to the world through postmodern thought. He did this by suggesting that a social analysis of spirituality reveals a socio-political aspect of sacredness and by opening the definition of the term sacred. He includes postmodernist thinkers such as Deleuze and Guattari in a definition that expands the sacred to mean a kind of intensity of experience,

Not in isolation but socially and they emerge in situations in which the individual disappears complete into the social form Deleuze and Guattari named the “body without organs”: Where psychoanalysis says “Stop, find yourself again,” we should say instead, “Let’s go further still, we haven’t found our BwO [body without organs] yet, we haven’t sufficiently dismantled our self.” More, the body without organs and the process of “becoming-intense” that it involves are tied in the molar, repressive social and moral order of capitalist relations to experiences that are the precise sort of transgress, extreme experiences we find in the impure sacred, especially in the work of Georges Baraille, who...is a key node of intellectual influence uniting the Durkheimians and the postmodernists. (Riley, 2002:253)

Thus, Riley is making the argument that there is a direct connection between postmodernism and the sacred. In this sense, he rejects the materialistic side of somatic experience, or holistic experience. His work is postmodern in that it recognizes the body as an energy field in a fluid form rather than as a material object.

Arnold Vento (2000) also makes direct reference to postmodernism through a discussion of the sacred, and speaks of a more non-linear definition. Vento seeks,

a redefinition of the sacred beyond the institutional and secularization of the metaphysical and transcendental idea of Divinity. The latter cannot assume the current structure of society worldwide; it must be seen within an evolutionary path that anticipates a cyclical end and beginning. If there is one area that all philosophers and scientists have agreed on, it is that everything changes, nothing remains the same. The age of linear thinking and materialistic progress is coming to an end. Many great thinkers, from Alfred North Whitehead to Octavio Paz have dealt with this idea. (Vento, 2000:184)

Vento points out a number of other postmodern ideas. He says, "'Sacred,' in a functional definition, refers to consecrated or holy, usually for the worship of the divine. What is sacred in one culture or religion may be different for another" (193). He says there are alternative ways of knowing and suggests new directions for a revised sense of spirituality:

The leading figures in movements such as feminism, cultural studies, critical theory, discourse analysis, and deconstruction have begun to reopen negotiations with the religious. Currently, it represents not going back to traditional faith systems, but rather to work out some kind of synthesis between the secular and sacred ways of seeing. Some theorists have begun to look at religion as "the other," while others seek to take account of "the extraordinary cultural and ideological vitality which religion has given to certain popular social movements (Edward Said, 1983 in Vento, 2000:194).

Thus Vento seeks a more postmodern definition in that it is nonlinear and reaches to community and connection, while acknowledging the significance of a focus on difference and who is disenfranchised via spiritual practice.

These postmodern writers present a pluralistic spirituality that connects to community, allows for divergent experiences and meaning and bases the spiritual on a constructed self and reality.

### ***So Where Am I?***

Thinking back to my experiences and viewpoints about spirituality in relationship to somatics and postmodernism, I find some crossover areas. These definitions of spirituality including somatic, eastern-oriented and postmodern ideas tend to move away from an authoritative sense and move towards a more pluralistic definition. As Williamson suggests, "personal spiritual truths and faiths are instrumentally shaped by the wider socio-cultural landscape" and move away from religion as an institution. (Williamson, 2010:40). Thus, definitions of spirituality can be malleable. As somatics tends to embrace a more personal and subjective relationship to the world, postmodernism also recognizes that the world is not objective.

However, there still exists a tension between somatic/experiential definitions, and postmodern conceptualizations in these bodies of literature. While somatic and experiential descriptions tend to provide a relational experience to the world and value essence, truth, and holism, it cannot be denied that postmodernism questions individualism, and materialism, while acknowledging fragmentation, difference, and partial truths.

But my larger question is, "Is there is a way to be able to negotiate these differences and still embrace parts of opposing worldviews?" Perhaps we can if we are aware of these tensions and differences; and if we do not avoid the divergent epistemologies from which they arise.

Postmodernism, not only provides another way of viewing spirituality, but also addresses the state of the world. For example, in a world of difference, one that is getting smaller and cultures constantly moving, postmodernism acknowledges a certain juxtaposition of voices and viewpoints. Perhaps, to see a postmodern world is to see that different and opposing worldviews can exist together. In this sense, one may be able to value aspects of one position while finding an affinity with an opposing worldview. In this spirit of postmodernism, I may be able to acknowledge the plurality of postmodernism and the acknowledgement of partial truths while holding on to a connection to experience. However, I believe that I must acknowledge that, for instance, somatics may not bring all the answers and, like everything, is value driven, that there is no knowledge that is value-neutral (see Johnson, 1992). As suggested in former articles (Green 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002-03, 2004a, 2004b) somatics, and now for that matter spirituality, should not be romanticized or seen as a panacea for all the world's ills but as a tool that may help us connect to the world and make visible key problems and issues. Without questioning our motives through a self-reflexive process, we may be repeating the grand narratives and partial truths we attempt to challenge.

In other words, from a postmodern perspective, I see that experience is constructed. I can value experience but realize that my experiences contain partial truths, assumptions, and biases that may not apply to disenfranchised groups or to others.

I may find that my experiences are spiritual in the sense that they connect me to the world, but within a construction of that spirituality that is partial and not the same for everyone. Others may have other constructions of spirituality.

Thus for me, a postmodern spirituality is one that deconstructs reality, truth and knowledge, yet allows me to embrace experience and connection. In this postmodern sense I can acknowledge different epistemologies yet I can be aware that there are tensions between these schools of thought. This may seem to be an easy and useful conclusion to this discussion but the concept is one I can employ to speak honestly about how views often bump up against each other.

I will end this discussion with another story about a question and answer. A couple of years ago, I was moderating a panel during a scholarly dance conference. One panel member presented a paper about ecosomatics and addressed the experiential and relational aspect of her work, without acknowledging culture or difference.

When she finished her paper, one audience member asked a question. He said that her work is not valid because relational scholarship has been debunked. He asked her how she can respond to this fact. The poor woman hemmed and hawed and was totally stunned by the critique of her work.

After the session, I thought about how I would have answered the question. I believe that I would have answered by saying yes, culture is important, and partial truths, can be damaging. But I am not willing to give up experience and reconnection to the world even while questioning that relationship.

For me this may be applied to spirituality as well. I embrace postmodern thought yet believe we construct knowledge through experience as well as culture and history. In this same sense, a postmodern spirituality may exist to some extent but I may be unwilling to dismiss the idea and feeling of connection. I can see myself with one foot in somatics and another in postmodernism, living with a spirituality that embraces experience but also acknowledges its limitations.

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## **TEACHING THE SPIRIT TO DANCE: EXPLORING DUENDE IN FLAMENCO**

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*Can we teach the spirit to dance? Should we teach the spirit to dance? Much discussion continues in education regarding the boundaries between traditional spiritual belief systems and education theory. In the classroom these boundaries have become contentious issues where many dance educators find themselves in the very front lines of the battle field. As a dance educator I have come to realise that to teach dance in a manner where one ignores the inner spirituality; the very core of the individual, results in dancers with knowledge of the physical mechanics of dance while the spiritual is seen as something separate and consequently left unexamined. If Socrates regarded the unexamined life as 'not worth living' then one could perhaps argue that teaching dance in education in ways that do not enhance the individuals examination of their spiritual life should be dispensed with. If spirituality is the 'eternal human yearning' to be connected with 'something larger than our own egos' (Palmer, 1998) perhaps in dance, it is also the yearning to be connected with something more than the body, where the dance becomes the expression of the whole self. In this paper I examine dance in education and the challenges facing teachers with a diversity of learners from multiple spiritual belief systems. I explore the concept of 'duende' in flamenco and the possibility of teaching dance in education holistically, where the boundaries between the spiritual and the educational are not separated and clearly defined but regarded as fluid and porous.*

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Can we teach the spirit to dance? Should we teach the spirit to dance? These two questions continue to inform my reflections on what really matters in education, and more specifically in dance education. After a lifetime of teaching and dancing, I have become fascinated with the relationship between dance and spirituality. As a teacher I continue to ask myself: "Who am I teaching? How do I teach the spirit to dance?" Reflecting on this enigma whilst using flamenco as my lens, I have gained deeper insights into dance and its potential to connect inner and outer reality. I have come to understand this connection as spiritual and I continue to explore ways to perform and teach dance which enable the spirit to dance.

For some time now I have researched dance education in South Africa's multicultural classrooms. We are indeed fortunate that our current school curriculum has embraced dance in such a comprehensive way; however, dance in the multicultural classroom does not come without its challenges. In South Africa we too have had our fair share of cruelty which has left a legacy of social division. Current government policy continues to seek solutions to heal these divisions which serve as reminders of the dangers of simplistic racial categorisation.

During apartheid, South African political policy successfully categorised racial groups into generic boxes, where racial 'difference' was used to justify a system of societal segregation and division. When we try to teach individuals to dance who are simplistically categorised according to race or ethnicity we are really only looking at the tip of the iceberg. Moving deeper, below the surface of physiology and race to include the spirit of the individual we often encounter even greater diversity and complexity. The importance of understanding this diversity has been marginalised in the current search for social connection. Dancers, choreographers and teachers continue to be encouraged by government policy to 'nation build' and to find 'oneness.' According to dance scholar Sharon Friedman:

The idea of *simunye* is largely one that has been imposed to create the idea of unity. But we are not one, in fact we are one of the most heterogeneous societies in the world and what does matter is *all* of our stories. We are all trying to make sense of our journeys in and on the way to this 'new' South Africa. My own story as a white, middle-class Jewish woman whose family were immigrants from Europe is completely different from that of a young black dancer whose family were not immigrants and who is trying to tell the story of the journey to full citizenship in her own country. And if choreography is the writing of stories on the body, then all our stories deserve to be told (Friedman, 2012:102).

Apartheid endeavoured to divide our society by placing people in convenient racial 'boxes'. Is the new political agenda of 'oneness' equally ludicrous? Friedman asserts that each of us has a unique story to tell which is intrinsically connected to the plurality of identity and experience. It is true that any one South African citizen may be of French origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a man, a painter, a feminist, and bisexual, a soccer fan, a violinist, and an environmentalist. These affiliations may not all have equal priority for the individual, and in fact may change in order of priority in different circumstances. What is certain is that all have a role to play when the spirit dances. How then do we embrace the plurality of individuals in dance education while simultaneously searching for oneness?

The human tendency towards simplistic categorisation is not unique to South Africa. Social theorist Amartya Sen.(Sen, 2007) warns against presuming that people can be uniquely categorized based on culture or religion, as this helps to sustain many conflicts in the world. He warns against the idea that we are "all much the same" when we are in fact "diversely different"(Sen, 2007:xiv). Sen. approaches multiculturalism by asking whether human beings

Should be categorised in terms of inherited traditions, particularly the inherited religion of the community in which they happen to be born, taking that un-chosen identity to have automatic priority over the affiliations involving politics profession, class, gender, language, literature, social involvements and many other connections? Or should they be understood as a person with many affiliations and associations the priorities over which they must themselves choose[...] (ibid).

In South Africa, education and curriculum continue to have a volatile relationship and the Department of Education continues to seek solutions to improve education for all, through major changes to its curriculum. But, do the answers lie within the parameters of curriculum? Perhaps not! Perhaps responsibility also lies with individual teachers and their ability to creatively interpret the curriculum. How do we, as teachers of dance, encourage individuals to dance together when individual identity is so complex? How do we use the myriad of emotions arising within the individual to encourage their spirit to dance? When a national curriculum attempts to embrace the diversity and complexities of a multicultural society, I believe challenges are unavoidable and generic solutions often illusive. UCT Professor Crain Soudien suggests that those who endeavour to reform the educational curriculum, and those who seek to implement its ideals are often misaligned, “where the school is being held to standards that the system is not *geared* to achieving” (Soudien, 2007, :16).

He further suggests that ‘solutions’ to “declining educational performance, at both the systemic level and that of learner performance, [where] schools are not functioning, children are not performing adequately and teachers appear to be failing may lie beyond the parameters of curriculum” (ibid:7). Perhaps obsession with race and ethnicity (the tip of the iceberg) leads to superficial views of the individual with spiritual reality remaining unrecognised and dormant below the surface. Political legislation and continued systemic overhauls to the curriculum merely divert public attention away from the individual and the social issues which have enormous influence in the classroom. They become political attempts to ‘window-dress’ in search of a ‘one size fits all’ solution to achieve ‘oneness’. Unity and diversity are complementary, not opposing energies and the curriculum only becomes relevant if it accommodates and embraces individual creativity, interpretation and expression.

In my research in dance education in KwaZulu-Natal (Fernandez, 2010), I discovered that while dance has been given a substantial piece of the educational pie, many of the schools

that I visited are still not including it in their formal classes. I discovered numerous reasons; inadequate teacher training, legacies of cultural prejudice, and general misunderstanding of the educational value of dance. Notwithstanding all the challenges, I believe dance can play a very pivotal role in addressing many of the social issues in the multicultural classroom, especially when teachers use dance to discover individual and communal spiritual connection. By spiritual connection I am not referring to spirituality as taught by traditional religions but am referring to a broader, non-cultural understanding of Spirit.

I became curious about diversity within the individual and I adapted flamenco for the multicultural classroom in search of embracing this diversity. In my experience, flamenco has allowed me to approximate Spirit in a way which transcends the boundaries of mind body and spirit. To those who dance flamenco, it becomes an outlet for personal emotions. These emotions influence physiology and lie in the cells of the body. In its essence, flamenco is cathartic and can provide opportunity for emotional release and spiritual connection. This in turn helps the reestablishment of homeostasis, balance and wholeness.

In a similar way, the Chinese speak of yin/yang which is not about oppositional energies but rather the balance of complementary energies. These energies are dynamic and inclusive. Many indigenous ways of knowing describe and seek this state of balance. Indigenous ways of knowing often approach reality from the 'both-and' perspective where what appears to need integration was never seen as separated in the first place. The search for social 'oneness' through dance must begin with the individual and requires a 'both-and' perspective with mind body and spirit in communication with something larger than self or ego.

This brings me to the question: Why flamenco? Why indeed! One could argue that flamenco in its traditional 'cultural packaging' does not provide any more than any other dance form. However, I have seen how flamenco as a cathartic phenomenon provides a lot more. Flamenco as a cathartic phenomenon can have educational relevance and it can assist the individual spirit to dance alone or with others. (Fernandez, 2010)

The root meaning of the word 'educate' is 'educare'- meaning to 'lead out' .While many teachers do endeavour to 'lead out' what is unique and special in their students, some tend to regard themselves as experts teaching the curriculum as if it were the Holy Grail. They

endeavour to 'fill' their students with all they believe they need to know, leaving little room for individual interpretation or creativity. I believe flamenco as cathartic experience subscribes to the former 'leading out' approach with profound educational relevance. Here the inner reality of the dancer is encouraged to find connection with outer reality. This 'connection' flamenco calls duende. Before we can approximate an understanding of duende, I must begin by clarifying what flamenco as a cathartic phenomenon is.

Flamenco scholars and aficionados often define flamenco differently. Flamenco aficionado James Woodall describes flamenco as:

[...]a dramatic statement about the passion that goes into living. It is a hard statement, uncompromising, combative, sensual, but isolated, free in gesture but proud and dignified in intent." He sees flamenco "an expression of effulgent physicality and bodily confidence... a danced confirmation of individuality, of identity..." where dancers "speak through the bodies" and where individuals "are being in a demanding art, naturally themselves" (Woodall, 1992:326-327.)

Robin Totton describes flamenco dance as "[...] forceful, downward, introvert, abstract, ecstatic,"(Totton, 2003:54). In flamenco, instinct and emotion rule. Its main purpose is the cathartic release of these emotions and looking or sounding pretty become irrelevant.

I understand flamenco as a cathartic phenomenon to be the composite, rhythmic expression of the individual's internal dialogue with self; it is a delicate balance of body, mind and spirit. On the other hand, duende is more complex. I understand duende to be the composite expression of the individual in spiritual communion with a consciousness larger than self namely, Spirit. Duende is powerful and often beyond verbal description; it is 'felt' rather than 'seen'.

A brief background on the origins of flamenco will provide further insights into duende. Many scholars and flamenco aficionados regard flamenco as a cross-cultural fertilization of numerous civilizations and cultures over an extensive period of time in Southern Spain which ultimately gave voice to many oppressed individuals in their cry for freedom. (Edwards, 2000; Fernandez, 2010; Leblon, 1995; Mitchell, 1994; Pohren, 1980; Schreiner, 1996; Thiel-Cramer, 1990; Webster, 2003) While to the ill informed, the gypsy is regarded as the originator and custodian of flamenco, research has shown that flamenco is the expression of a gradual cultural exchange and fusion which took place over many centuries in Spain. A

veritable rainbow of cultures and ethnic groups have conquered and ruled Spain, including Byzantine, Greek, Visigoth, Roman, Oriental, Jewish, Arab, Indian and North African. Rather than being a peculiar folk dance from a small region of Spain, flamenco is a blend of various ethnic songs and dances which magically fused in the melting pot of Andalusia.

Flamenco scholar Timothy Mitchell suggests that theories attributing the origins of flamenco to one specific group are simplistic, and that the “gitanos helped to stylize a sub-cultural otherness with roots in several ethnic or quasi-ethnic groups. Examined responsibly flamenco cannot be traced to one source only” (Mitchell, 1994:96). Even if they were the magic catalyst for flamenco, the Andalusian Gypsies as we know them today are undeniably descendants of an ethnic blend with many having clearly, Indian, Jewish, Moorish and even Negroid appearance.

The physiological complexity of the human race is fundamental to our understanding of the pitfalls of racial categorisation. Mitchell points out that:

Racial purity is mainly a social construct, one that almost any ethnic or quasi-ethnic group can lay claim to if they feel so compelled.” He refers to the “ethnic chaos” of the world and suggests that racial purity may not exist and that those who identify with a community may not be biologically identical (Mitchell, 1994:96).

Perhaps the ethnic chaos found in the history of flamenco, once again, highlights the dangers of simplistic racial categorisation which only serves political agendas of divide and rule. As racial and cultural boundaries become increasingly porous the world over, the notion of racial purity is becoming increasingly contentious. This ‘ethnic chaos,’ can only hint at the spiritual and emotional diversity which resides within individual human beings. As educators we should look beyond the physiology of race to explore connections between emotions, physiology and spirituality.

Flamenco is grounded in universal emotional themes which provide the magic ingredients for individual and communal connection. Aficionado Gwynne Edwards talks about the “universality of flamenco,” that flamenco has become sought after throughout the world due to its “timeless values” and that it touches chords within us that point to “shared emotions and passions...common feelings.” (Edwards, 2000:171) Mitchell contends that no one group has the monopoly on the emotions of “love, jealousy, poverty, sickness, death, loneliness, and pain,” all themes found in flamenco, (Mitchell, 1994: 96) while cantaor, Don

Antonio Chacon, cited in Mitchell asks “do you think that each race has the heart in a different place?”(ibid:159).

Flamenco is essentially about the individual and while it began as the expression of pain and suffering, Mitchell suggests that flamenco “ is not only about trauma, but about the quest to recover from trauma; it is about distress and discharge too; it is about taking pain, expressing it, playing with it, and possibly working through it” (ibid:227). Discharge of toxic emotions through movement is not peculiar to flamenco and increasingly research is providing evidence of the connection between emotional and physical wellbeing.(Pert, 1998) Mitchell connects emotions to mental health and sees flamenco, as peculiarly adept at facilitating emotional discharge: “learning how to modulate our moods is a sign of psychological resilience .... and flamenco can help us do it”(Mitchell, 1994: 227).

How does flamenco help us find connection and build psychological resilience? Is it the only dance form that does this? One could argue that many other dance forms do the same. For me, the difference lies in flamenco as a cathartic phenomenon which builds resilience through *individual authenticity*. It is not about the group or the community and it is certainly not about the choreography. It is the expression of the inner emotional reality of the *individual* and their struggles with the emotions that literally lie in the very cells of their body. Through intentional, powerful movements together with forceful stamping these emotions find release. Flamenco as catharsis is essentially about individual struggle and awareness of all that is ‘light’ and all that is ‘dark’ in human experience; it is less about grace and more about powerful release. Many believe that allowing the body to adopt movements of force and pain, facilitates the conjuring up of emotions and their consequent forceful release. This release is often described as duende.

Bernard Friederich Schultz, cited in Schreiner, has advanced a theory about duende as the “agreement between an inner hearing and external sound” and when what the performer “feels in his soul and has translated into song in his inner ear, is identical with what is actually sung, he is overwhelmed with a feeling of achievement akin to a state of ecstasy[...] (Schreiner, 1996: 26).

The term duende is often misunderstood and consequently flippantly used in the descriptions of flamenco performance. In my experience duende in performance is rare; it is



not a given! Flamenco originated as a solo art form and a private expression of the individuals inner emotions. As this expression became less and less private and performers began to be paid to perform, couple work and group performance emerged. Company choreography was the result of a commercial drive to make spectacular productions which could be enjoyed by large audiences. While many of these performances are undoubtedly exciting, group work is not about the individual and they often lack the duende that is intrinsic to solo performance. The solo performance is essentially 'improvised' and is the expression of the individual spirit in the moment- never to be repeated. It is a mystery and a journey into the spiritual unknown where at any given moment one may become witness to the emotional expression of "human tenderness and human ferocity" of the individual soul with the "euphoric expression of happiness and despair" (Woodall, 1992:329)

Sport and performance psychologist Chantale Lussier-Ley reflects how in her attempt to 'fall back' into her body, in order to 're-member' herself 'whole', she took up the study of flamenco. She describes how flamenco allowed her to "finally be who I am, no more yet no less, within the dance"(Lussier-Ley, 2010:200). She describes her experience as clearing the "emotional rubbish" as "produced in the factories of the mind" consisting of "pain that has long past and is no longer useful"(ibid:201).

I believe this clearing of 'emotional rubbish' was fundamental to flamenco in its origins where it was seen as having cathartic healing properties. When one witnesses this emotional clearing as duende it becomes a spiritual experience. Mitchell compares flamenco to a "psychodrama" which allows distance from one or more of the four stressful emotions: grief, anger, fear, humiliation(Mitchell, 1994:70). He describes how one is simultaneously, participant and observer. Part of ones attention is in the past where one relives the distress which the present has stimulated, and part of ones attention is in the present where there is no real threat.

For Marion Papenbrok, cited in Schreiner when "the intensity of expression goes beyond the limits of time and the personal experience of the artist, then one hears the word 'duende' used with great reverence and awe. It is said to be an irresistible power which posses an artist only at very special moments and which leads the participants in such a 'reunion' to such a state of ecstasy" which leads to aggressive uncontrolled behaviour in the audience(Schreiner, 1996:54).

Papenbrok then makes the connection between what she understands duende to be and universal consciousness or 'historic consciousness':

Conflict and suffering, as dealt with in flamenco must be sublimated and overcome" And while flamenco "grows out of the historic consciousness" of its people "it also deals with common human experiences and sentiments not linked to any specific culture. How else can we otherwise explain the enormous emotional impact and fascination flamenco exerts upon those who have never before seen a performance and know nothing about it (ibid:55).

Understanding the human condition and our spiritual connection to a universal power is fundamental to virtually all spiritual belief systems. Flamenco merely conducts that search through the combined artistic focus of mind body and soul. Because this search is essentially individual and often private, it "arises not out of an effort to create an aesthetic image, but from an elemental need to understand and come to terms with life and to find ones place in the midst of chaos and cruelty"(ibid). When young performers are able to express inexplicable, high levels of understanding of pain and suffering, Marion Papenbrok, suggests that it is often attributed to them drawing on the "deep pool of collective experiences and memories" (ibid:54). This deep pool of collective memories is perhaps another way of describing universal consciousness or spirituality.

The release of inner emotions through noise and movement is man's primary form of expression. The universal language of humanity is not linguistic, it is corporeal. As children, our non verbal communication through vocalisation and body language evolves into noise and movement and song and dance long before our ability to express ourselves linguistically. Noise and movement is our primary impulse (Jousse, 2005). I do not believe that everyone who expresses themselves through vocalisations and movement experiences duende. Some scholars do however insist that flamenco performers must "have the ability to identify with the duende, which is life giving, and to impart this emotion or set of emotions to his public"(Pohren, 1980:43) Sadly duende is not always present in all flamenco performances.

When flamenco shows become commercial, cultural commodities, we often become witness to spectacular views of the tip of the iceberg which lack individual spiritual depth or authenticity. Dancers are often poorly paid and have unrealistic schedules resulting in what I call 'over-performance'. Instead of watching a dancer expressing their 'wholeness' we become witness to an empty, mechanical display of a dancer 'going through the motions,' or

worse still- a forced showcase of bravado. Unfortunately, many flamenco shows as cultural commodities are often consumer driven, resulting in performances which are superficial and pseudo-sensual reducing the possibility of witnessing duende.

In my experience duende is the muse of authenticity, not commercialism and it requires certain conditions for its appearance. When the gypsies say 'tengo duende,' (I have duende) they are perhaps expressing a deep urge to allow what is within the individual to be shared with others. For the possibility of the appearance of duende, the process of sharing must take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and empathy. Duende requires vulnerability, receptivity, union. It is roused from the cells of the body and the depths of the soul, commanding respect and awe. When duende appears the performance space becomes sacred as the spirit of the individual communes with the Great Spirit.

At the age of ten I saw a performance of flamenco for the first time and I was inexplicably drawn to it as a means of self expression. As a native South African, my years of obsession with this art form is often perplexing; there is no rational explanation for my attraction to a form of dance which is so far removed from my own cultural inheritance. Even though I had been exposed to many other dance forms, none approximated flamenco. Through it, I sought and found freedom, empowerment, understanding and I gradually emerged into a heightened awareness of my spirituality. My understanding of duende was fundamental to this process. During my career as a flamenco dancer I have had many opportunities to express through my dance that which I felt in the moment, and which could not be expressed in words. On rare occasions, when the energies of the universe conspired, I felt what I believe to be duende: my spirit communing with the Great Spirit. I liken the experience to entering the eye of a hurricane where time, space and body submit to Spirit.

I do not believe duende can be taught. Duende only requires us to create a space where an 'ambiente' (ambience) of respect, humility, and anticipation is established. Flamenco as cathartic experience is really about providing opportunity for the re-creating of emotions which one may not necessarily understand or even be aware of. When this release from inner tension through uninhibited expression, leads to an emotional and physical transformation of the individual, it can be powerful enough to also lead to a transformation of those who watch, as they may literally begin to vibrate and resonate at a cellular level. Any flamenco performer who has experienced duende will understand the importance of

close physical proximity to other participants or witnesses. Big commercial stages tend to disperse energy and reduce the possibility of 'feeling' the power of duende or spiritual connection at a cellular level.

Finally scientific research has proved the connection between emotions, physiology and spirituality. In her groundbreaking research Dr. Candice Pert, Professor of Physiology and Biophysics at Georgetown University Medical Centre in Washington D.C discovered that:

Mind doesn't dominate body, it *becomes* body- body and mind are one...we know that the immune system, like the central nervous system has memory and the capacity to learn. Thus it could be said intelligence is located not only in the brain but in cells that are distributed throughout the body, and the traditional separation of mental process, including emotions, from the body is no longer valid ( Pert, 1998:187).

Pert reminds us that Aristotle was among the first to suggest the connection between mood and health: "Soul and body I suggest, react sympathetically upon each other" and her research proves that:

Emotions exist in the body as informational chemicals, the neuropeptides and receptors, and they also exist in another realm, the one we experience as feeling, inspiration, love - beyond the physical. The emotions move back and forth, flowing freely between both places, and, in that sense, they connect the physical to the non physical... my work has taught me that there is a physical reality to the emotions (ibid 307)

Pert not only discovered the connection between emotions and the body but she also discovered that memory is not only stored in the brain but also in the "psychosomatic network" which is not only found throughout the entire body but is in fact measurable(ibid, 1997:143).

The implications of this research are extensive especially when teaching or performing dance. If we think with our whole body, not only our brains, then when we dance, our bodies are literally expressing our composite intelligence in every gesture. Acclaimed theorist Marcel Jousse insists that "One should conceive the whole human being, from the tips of his toes to the top of his head. Some sort of isolated 'well-thinking head' does not exist: there is a human composite which thinks with its entire body, from its feet to its head"(Jousse, Sienaert, Conolly, & University of Natal. Centre for Oral Studies, 1997:670-672).

Scientific research has finally proved that body, mind and spirit do not exist in isolation or occasionally randomly interact, in a random universe. “There’s a higher intelligence, one that comes to us via our very molecules and results from our participation in a system far greater than the small, circumscribed one we call “ego”, the one we receive from our five senses alone” ( Pert, 1998:315).

If we progress from an understanding of individual reality as divided into body/mind/spirit, separate from universal reality, to one which is grounded in the awareness of our connected universe, we may begin to teach dance more holistically. Teachers of dance in education should also move beyond simplistic cultural classification of dance and dancers to explore ways to teach which explore individual reality and ways of connecting to the universal. We need to acknowledge the spirituality of the dancer and establish a culture of mutual respect. Only then may we delve below superficial understandings of identity, ego and dance to discover the spirit that informs the dance. If we create opportunities for students to experience dance holistically where the boundaries between the physical, spiritual and educational are not clearly defined but regarded as fluid and porous, we can create sacred spaces which encourage duende and allow the spirit to dance us whole.

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# **THE SPIRIT OF JAH AND THE DANCE CLASSROOM WITH DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS OF AFRICAN ANCESTRY**

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## **Abstract**

*Dance as a means of spiritual expression, and the body as a vessel of spirituality has long been a part of the human experience in many societies. Yet in the dance classroom, spirituality and dance are often viewed by dance teachers through separate lens, or connected in a superficial or indirect manner on the periphery of dance teaching and learning. This paper will challenge this distant relationship between dance and spirituality in dance education by focusing on the spirituality of the Rastafari movement, its ideologies, symbols and outward expressions as a central pedagogical tool in the dance classroom for the potential development of disadvantaged learners within the African Diaspora. Of the available research on the Rastafarian movement, none actually focuses on the engagement of this increasingly popular Afrocentric spirituality in dance education. This article addresses this void by virtue of highlighting concrete ways in which dance teachers can engage Rastafari spirituality to facilitate learning in and through dance and the cognitive, psychomotor and affective development of Black disadvantaged learners in the dance classroom. Selah!*

*Keywords: Rastafari spirituality, dance education, Black disadvantaged learners*

“Exodus, movement of Jah people” are the lyrics of a well known song by prominent Rastafarian reggae artiste Bob Marley. As I travel the world, the prophetic nature of those words become highly noticeable as I witness the Rastafari faith which emerged in Jamaica in the 1940s from the zinc and board structures of tenement yards expanding its borders and moving across the globe. Individuals of African ancestry (the vast majority of followers), Maoris in New Zealand, Scandinavians, Asians, Europeans and other racial groups across the world are pledging allegiance to this locally grown faith. In the Caribbean and on the continent of Africa, for example in West Africa and South Africa, growing numbers of Rastafarian adherents and communities can be found particularly among young people. Savishinsky (1994: 19) points out that that Rastafari spirituality and its culture has a contemporary appeal to African youths and those of African descent because “it provides an alternative source of meaning and identity to a life frequently punctuated by hopelessness, alienation and despair in what is often perceived as a hostile, corrupt and hypocritical Eurocentric environment”. Rastafari spirituality is lived ideology that emphasises the dignity and power of the Black race (and oppressed people in general) through the veneration of Haile Selassie I, former Emperor of Ethiopia and the assertion of Africa, its heritage, values and culture as a dominant, rising, sovereign force in the world (Chevannes, 1998; Murrell, Spencer & McFarlane, 1998). As Nettleford (2003:16) points out, the Rastafari movement emerged from amongst the poor and oppressed in Jamaica as a counter cultural response to the social, cultural and economic deprivation brought about by colonialism and Western imperialism. It is no surprise therefore that Rastafari spirituality is attractive to marginalised and disenfranchised youths who embrace it as a means of socio-cultural

and spiritual empowerment. As a dance educator of young people within the African Diaspora<sup>1</sup>, Jamaica more specifically, I could no longer overlook the growing fascination among Black disadvantaged young people with Rastafarian spirituality and culture<sup>2</sup> (the dreadlocks, lingo, the ritualistic smoking of cannabis).

Prior to investigating this topic I was of the misconception that Rastafari spirituality, dance and education were at odds with each other for several reasons. First the ritual of ganja smoking which Rastas<sup>3</sup> consider necessary for religious meditation, the cleansing and healing of the body, mind and soul, and drawing closer to their god Jah<sup>4</sup> (Murrell, Spencer & McFarlane, 1998), is illegal in Jamaica and many other countries. Second, the daily practice of ganja smoking is viewed in mainstream education as substance abuse and a form of anti-social behaviour. Furthermore smoking in general is an unhealthy social practice that could not be promoted in education. Third, some Rastas, in particular those of the Bobo Ashanti order, wear long robes covering their bodies while dance by nature of using the body as its instrument of expression require that dancers expose their limbs. Fourth, the Rastafari movement has a significant and committed following among the uneducated masses in Jamaica and therefore from an elitist standpoint its spiritual journey seemed to be unattractive to, and a misfit for the educated mind. As I began to observe the faith from a place of curiosity rather than condemnation and elitism I began contemplating the following question: Could this Afro-centric spiritual movement be of any relevance in the teaching and learning of dance to disadvantaged learners of African descent?

For the purpose of this paper disadvantaged learners refer to learners whose social and economic realities place them at risk of not achieving their full academic potential or mastering the academic skills necessary to become successful adults. These learners often, though not always, exhibit low self esteem and do not engage in learning as successfully as their counterparts for various reasons such as education or learning not being valued in their homes or the fact that they lack sufficient foundational tools for successful education (Elias, 2009; Meiners & Garrett, 2012). In order to achieve academically they tend to require extra learning support and the kind of education that honours their personhood and interests and helps them to think deeply about questions that

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<sup>1</sup> African Diaspora refers to peoples of African origin or descent living outside the continent of Africa, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality. They tend to share similar historical experiences of slavery, colonialism and racism (Davies, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Rastas consider their spirituality to be a way of life rather than a religion or a traditional system of belief. Consequently their faith infiltrates many areas of their lives such as dress, diet, language, music.

<sup>3</sup> Followers of the Rastafarian way of life are known as Rastas.

<sup>4</sup> Rastafari are monotheists worshipping a singular deity whom they call Jah. Most Rastas view Haile Selassie I, late Emperor of Ethiopia (1930-1974) as *Jah* or *Jah Rastafari*. Jah is a Biblical name for God found in the King James Bible (Psalm 68:4) and is the shortened version of Jehovah. Similar to Christianity most Rastas believe Jah exists in the forms of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Rastas emphasize that the holy spirit of Jah dwells within each person and in time Rastafari will manifest (Mordecai & Mordecai, 2001; Chevannes, 1998).



matter. I concur with British educator, David Gribble (cited in Kohn, 2011) that this kind of education is appropriate for all learners but it is essential for disadvantaged learners. The paper begins with a brief outline of the history of Rastafarian spirituality and its main doctrine followed by the main discussion on the engagement of Rastafari spirituality in dance education with Black disadvantaged learners in the Diaspora. It concludes with a summary of the ideas generated throughout the paper and suggestions for future research.

### ***History of Rastafari***

St. Catherine, Jamaica, is regarded as the birthplace of the Rastafari movement. Scholars such as Nettleford (2003) and Chevannes (1994, 1998) suggest that the cultural, economic and political struggles of the Jamaican people, the majority being former slaves brought from Africa, in the post-colonial years after 1838 motivated the genesis of Rastafari faith. According to Murrell, Spencer and McFarlane (1998: 46) Leonard P. Howell is said to have established the first official Rasta community at a plantation estate known as Pinnacle Hill in Jamaica at about 1940 1930s upon returning to Jamaica after many years living abroad. Howell was appalled by the poor conditions of his fellow African brothers and sisters post-emancipation and was very outspoken against the oppressive regime of the governing White colonialists. The Rasta commune he established was self-reliant as its members planted their own fields and grew their own crops, offering a new way of life for a once enslaved and dependent people. He came to prominence when he formed the Ethiopian Salvation Society, and along with fellow Afrocentric leader Joseph Hibbert and Archibald Dunkley preached the divinity and kingship of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia as the Supreme Being and only ruler of Black people. Chevannes (1998:11) purports that these men were the main architects of the Rastafari movement for the first twenty years. Their message threatened the walls of colonial rule and Howell was frequently harassed and even imprisoned. The message of Rastafari with its spiritual awakening and reaffirmation of sovereign Africa and the African identity or consciousness in the displaced people of the diaspora, served as resistance to the prevailing colonial oppression and denigration of African cultural ways by Britain which left the freed slaves in Jamaica poor and desolate economically, socio-culturally and psychologically (Hutton & Murrell, 1998:36-37).

Rastafari spirituality was however influenced by Jewish and Christian beliefs, which Rastas say they have re-interpreted to reflect the true message of Jah<sup>5</sup>, and various forms of Africanist ideology which prevailed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Examples of these Africanist ideologies were

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<sup>5</sup> At the core of their belief is the re-interpretation of the Hebrew Bible with a focus on Blacks as God's chosen race, and the belief that the true Messiah comes to us as Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia. Rastas believe the Bible (King James Version) contains the word of God but its true message was distorted or corrupted by white theology. They are extremely knowledgeable in certain books of the Bible e.g. Psalms and Revelations. Rastas believe that the Bible is the history of the African race, taken by Europeans at the time of enslavement and deliberately mistranslated in an effort to deceive the slaves (Waters, 1985). They see themselves as the real Jews or Israelites which the Bible speaks about who have been exiled but who will be returned to the Promise land, also known as Zion, which for Rastas means Ethiopia (Mordecai & Mordecai, 2001).

Bedwardism and Garveyism. From the 1890s to the 1920s Alexander Bedward, a religious preacher and leader in the Revivalist African church who gathered large group of followers preached the Imminence of a Black Jesus (Mordecai & Mordecai, 2001:46). In the 1920s there was the “Back to Africa” ideology driven by Pan-Africanist leader Marcus Garvey<sup>6</sup> which called for the Black diaspora to repatriate to the motherland of Africa and underscored the need for Blacks to interpret their own history and control their destiny in Africa and its diaspora (Mordecai & Mordecai, 2001:22; Murrell, 1998: 42). Scholars (Campbell, 1987; Chevannes, 1994, 1998) suggest however that it was the crowning of Ras Tafari<sup>7</sup>, the great-grandson of King Sahela Selassie of Shoa and son of Ras Makonnen, as Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930 that catapulted the Rastafari movement. The crowning was seen as a fulfilment of an alleged “messianic” proclamation by Marcus Garvey who earlier preached “Look to Africa where a black king shall be crowned, he shall be your redeemer” (Chevannes 1998: 10). Haile Selassie I was the first Black king and leader to join and be recognised among the international community of monarchs. As a result of this significant milestone, Rastafari spirituality perceive Africa, in particular Ethiopia, as “the cradle of the Black race” (Hutton & Murrell, 1998:42) and refers to it as Zion, the Promised land, the heaven on earth to which all Blacks will someday repatriate. In Rastafari spirituality, therefore, redemption lay in withdrawal from society governed or dominated by Euro-western values and ultimately in repatriation to Africa.

Murrell (1998) has suggested that some of the traditional Rastafari doctrines which held strong from the 1930s- mid 1970s have since been modestly re-interpreted by the brethren. According to Murrell (1998), Leonard Howell preached that eventually ‘Babylon’, the overarching term Rastas use to refer to the corrupt, degenerate and oppressive world system of the White man and Western culture, will fall and the slavery-based societal hierarchy will be reversed. Ethiopia/Africa will then take her rightful place as the ruling world order. Many early Rastas he points out upheld a doctrine of Black supremacy, hatred for and revenge on the White race for past atrocities on Black people. Murrell (1998: 6) states that such ideas have become less prominent in modern Rastafari thought. Current manifestation of Rastafari embrace adherents from all ethnicities as the brethren have come to believe that the movement with its moral vision of resistance to domination, peace and love, human dignity, justice, self empowerment and freedom from oppression belong to all of humanity. Also, the concept of ‘Babylon’ has expanded beyond oppression by the White man to represent all oppressive organisations and world systems. Yet another example of re-interpretation can be seen in the doctrine of repatriation to Africa which was traditionally anticipated to be a divine action of

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<sup>6</sup> Marcus Mosiah Garvey (1887-1940) was a staunch Black nationalist and Pan-Africanist from Jamaica who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Garvey was unique in advancing a Pan-African philosophy to inspire a global mass movement and economic empowerment focusing on Africa known as Garveyism (Chang, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> The Rastafari movement bears the pre-regnal name of Haile Selassie I, *Ras Tafari*. Ras in Ethiopian Amharic means prince.

Jah. According to Murrell (1998: 6) in present day Rastafari, repatriation is interpreted in divergent ways: a divine action of Jah; voluntary relocation or migration to Africa; returning to Africa culturally and psychologically; or a rejection of Western values in favour of preserving African roots and Black pride.

The Rastafari movement is largely an acephalous group in the sense that it has no distinct leader, no traditional organisational hierarchy and there is no central command (Chevannes, 1998: 16; Price, Nonini & Fox Tree, 2008: 138). Its spirituality is also not homogenous or rigid as it is lived out differently by its various adherents. There are however three main sects, each with their own manifestation of Rastafari: *Nyahbinghi Order*, the *Bobo Ashanti* and the *Twelve Tribes of Israel*<sup>8</sup> (Chevannes, 1998: 16). Many Rastas do not strongly identify with a particular sect or denomination but rather encourage one another to find faith and inspiration within themselves. Although still a relatively marginal faith Mordecai and Mordecai (2001) argue that the influence of Rastafari spirituality as a worldview and a cultural movement is far reaching within its place of origin, Jamaica, the Caribbean and beyond. Particularly through the global influence of Reggae music emerging from Jamaica, of which Rastas are at the forefront, the movement has gained greater international awareness and a more cosmopolitan following in the past few decades. I therefore ask the question: Can this spirituality find its way into the dance classroom with Black disadvantaged learners and be of value?

### ***The spirit of Jah and the dance classroom***

I propose that some aspects of Rastafari spirituality, which from henceforth I will also refer to as the spirit of Jah, can be of value to the particular teaching context of dance with disadvantaged learners of African descent. This section of the paper will now discuss how the spirit of Jah can be drawn upon to facilitate the holistic goals in dance education of developing the dancer's mind, body, and soul and fostering learning *in* and *through*<sup>9</sup> dance within the specified dance teaching context.

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<sup>8</sup> The sects all agree on the Rastafari foundational principles of the divinity of Haile Selassie I and uplifting and establishing unity and self-reliance among Black people. There are differences however in some beliefs and the way the sects manifest their rasta spirituality. For example the Bobo Ashanti sect, also called bobo dreads, is distinguished by their worship of Prince Emmanuel (priest), in addition to Marcus Garvey (prophet) and Haile Selassie (King) as the triune parts of the Holy Trinity. The other sects see Haile Selassie I as the full manifestation of Father, son and holy spirit. Bobo dreads wear long robes and tightly wrapped turbans around their dreads and live in highly ritualized communities while in the other orders, Rastas are integrated into their communities and exist as individuals. The Twelve Tribes of Israel sect is the most liberal of the Rastafarian orders and members are free to worship in a church of their choosing. Each member of this sect belongs to one of the 12 Tribes (or Houses), which is determined by Gregorian birth month. They can be bald or short-haired as opposed to being dreadlocked or turbaned and members of this sect tend to hail from the middle-class. The Nyabinghi sect tends to be more militant and often express strong sentiments against those who have historically oppressed African people (Murrell, 1998: 356; Chevannes, 1998: 17). Further view Organizations of Rastafari at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQuUemptyj6l>.

<sup>9</sup> Kear and Callaway (1998:136-145) make a distinction between learning *in* and learning *through* dance. The latter is defined as the development of skills and attitude such as teamwork and self-confidence which are not intrinsic to the arts

## ***Rastafari and development of the dancer's mind***

Rastafari spirituality with its affirmation of the presence, power and pride of Africa within and without the individual may be a valuable tool for elevating the self-image, self-worth and self-confidence so crucial to self-actualization of disadvantaged Black learners in the dance classroom. Ancient wisdom suggests that as a man thinks so is he. Human psychology further tells us that there is a direct relationship between a person's action and their belief system. In other words people's behaviour tend to follow their belief and eventually individuals become the products of the mental images they entertain about themselves. Disadvantaged learners, though not always, often possess low self-esteem and self-efficacy resulting in low self-confidence and self expectations in the learning process. These states of mind can be attributed to factors such as lack of affirmation at home, seemingly impregnable social and economic obstacles disadvantaged learners encounter as they try to get ahead at school and in life, or as educators such as Dils (2007) and Shapiro (1998) opine, the disadvantaged learners' constant exposure to curricular experiences external to their socio-cultural realities, which ultimately alienates them in the learning process. I also want to suggest, however, that in the present wave of globalisation which has resulted in the spread and glorification of Western values and culture throughout the world, the low self-esteem and self-worth exhibited by some Black learners, disadvantaged or otherwise, can be partly attributed to the Western yardstick against which they and others measure themselves and which tends to devalue their Africanness. For example the bombardment of messages and images by western media that consider beauty to be men and women with silky, flowing hair, blue or green eyes, light skin colour and 'straight' noses, or establish the benchmark of verbal-linguistic intelligence as mastery of Standard English can create significant internal tension in many young people of African descent whose darker skin shades, broad noses, 'coarse' or stunted hair and indigenous tongues are a far approximation from the hegemonic ideal. Such tension then leads to a questioning of self which if left unchecked can result in high levels of personal dissatisfaction and a sense of deficiency which leads to low self confidence and self worth. Using Rastafari in the dance lesson with learners for whom this spirituality has a cultural appeal and relevance, can result in the dance class being a space where the Black disadvantaged learner feels a sense of belonging and having belonged is challenged to arrest negative thoughts and feelings they hold about their self-worth.

In the spirit of Jah dance teachers can plan dance lessons around themes and ideas that cause students to interrogate and examine their sense of self worth and identity in light of Rastafari spirituality which highly asserts and affirms the beauty, dignity, validity and resilience of African culture and its people. Rastafari spirituality is therefore being drawn upon to promote in the minds of Black disadvantaged learners' habits of thinking that can nurture self-confidence and self-efficacy

which are important to personal growth and self-actualization. Improvisations that use empowering lyrics from reggae music, Rastafari or Africanist texts as stimuli for movement, creative dance, choreography, dance projects, student journals with reflective questions are examples of ways teachers can thematically explore, through dance, the issue of the African cultural identity and its relationship to learners' self-image and self-esteem. Anecdotally, as a response to one of my teaching contexts in which I lamented my Black students' perception of themselves as second class citizens of the world, I choreographed a dance entitled Ancestral Whisperings. The choreography explores the theme of African diaspora identity, probing the 'I' in I-identity within the context of a young male struggling to liberate himself from the emasculating colonial labels passed down through many generations. Interwoven in this young man's soul-searching process of 'I'-reconstruction are poignant physical and oral dialogues with his ancestors. The oral dialogues featured empowering Africanist texts from the likes of African American singer/songwriter Nina Simone, Rastafarian musician Bob Marley and Pan African nationalist Marcus Garvey. The work was highly appreciated by the many young, Black youths in the audience at the 2012 Jomba Contemporary Fringe Festival, in Durban, South Africa. Set to the text below, the words and movement profoundly resonated with the many African youths in the audience as evidenced in their immediate emotional reaction to the work<sup>10</sup> and the numerous requests for the featured texts during post-performance conversations. The message of self-worth, value and pride in their Blackness was seemingly very pertinent.

*You are Africa*

*You are young, gifted and Black*

*A warrior from the seed of Akan*

*Cudjoe, Cuffy, Coromantin<sup>11</sup>*

*Strong, bold, dignified African fathers*

*You are young gifted and Black*

*A Nubian not a hooligan*

*The Black, brown, skin a badge of honour not a badge of shame*

*Stand on the backs of your forefathers and carve your own destiny*

The spirit of Jah can therefore be of value in the dance classroom with learners of the African diaspora by teachers engaging the Rastafari worldview as a guide towards liberating learners' minds from the self-limiting, self-denigrating thoughts and inferior complexes they carry about themselves,

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<sup>10</sup> There was a standing ovation from the young Black dancers at the end of the performance and a few seemingly at a loss for words at how they were moved by the piece simply said thank you with a hug and teary eyes. I myself as the choreographer and one of the dance performers was quite surprised by the intense emotional response but it clearly signified the poignancy of its Black conscious message to those African youths.

<sup>11</sup> Cudjoe, Cuffy Coromanti were African men from the Akan people in Ghana, West Africa, who were brought to the West Indies as slaves. They were warriors who led significant revolts against the ruling colonial power in the West Indies during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Tanna, 1987: 31).

in particularly those that are racially based and colonially induced. Some may argue that the dance class should be free from such interrogation and should remain focused on the development of the body and physical mastery of skills but should it? From a pragmatic standpoint, I concur with Risner and Stinson (2010) that the dance educator's role must inevitably extend beyond being a technician to embracing the daunting yet important roles of cultural worker and agent of social justice and change if dance learning is to occur. This is because students' personal, social and cultural issues can be obstacles to their participation in dance and therefore teachers will need to confront these issues in order to motivate learners to participate in dance and to succeed in the dance classroom. Furthermore as Risner and Stinson (2010) suggest such interrogation is necessary for simply demonstrating that teaching is caring. Including Rastafari spirituality in the classroom in this manner is about learning and development through dance. It is also about learners understanding dance as performer, creator or viewer in the context of their social, cultural and political place in the world (Shapiro, 1998: 83). This can only broaden, enliven and deepen the meaning and relevance of dance education to the learner, in this case the Black disadvantaged learner. Such inclusion also echoes a Freirian call for education to place students' social and cultural reality at the core of teaching. The spirit of Jah in the dance classroom would therefore demand an expanded, holistic approach to dance teaching and learning, a pedagogy that extends beyond a focus on the acquisition of technical skills in dance.

### ***Rastafari and development of the dancing body***

As mentioned earlier Rastas celebrate and honour Africa, its people, its culture, and by extension the Black body as beautiful, honourable and dignified. In Rastafari spirituality the body, be it endomorphic, ectomorphic or mesomorphic is honoured and respected as the temple of Jah. Another way Rastafari spirituality can therefore be applied in the dance classroom is through nurturing acceptance of the Black dancing body in its myriads of shapes and forms and fostering appreciation for African dance aesthetics and culture. With the copious insecurities that many Black disadvantaged learners take with them into the dance classroom affirmation of their Black dancing bodies is quite crucial to their participation and development in dance. It is also crucial to their self-esteem as women growing up in Western societies that are increasingly becoming obsessed with the fragile-slender physique or what Heiland, Murray and Edley (2008) describe as the cult of slenderness. Nurturing appreciation for and acceptance of the Black dancing body in its myriads of shapes and forms is of particular relevance to dance teaching contexts in which Western dance forms are the main staple and the "sleek, streamlined, long-muscled power" (Heiland, Murray & Edley, 2008: 257) physique is the expected and ideal packaging for female dancers. Depending on how dance is taught and which form of dance is taught in the dance classroom, dancers of African ancestry with the stereotypical features of steatopygia or protruding buttocks, and flat footedness (which makes it difficult to achieve the romanticized arch when the foot is plantar flexed) can be led

to feel like their bodies are aliens from another planet. A dance classroom environment and pedagogy that implicitly or explicitly drive the hegemonic images of the female pencil-like dancer with 'invisible' buttocks and overarched feet and the muscular, lean male as the ideal physique to be attained in dance stands to alienate many bodies from the dance experience, and in the case of disadvantaged learners further exacerbate their insecurities and low self-image. The spirit of Jah in the dance classroom is the acceptance of the diversity of African dancing bodies, and dancing bodies in general, from the linear to the curvy, the petite to the voluptuous, the muscular to the flabby, while still working for increased fitness for all. Focused management of the dancing body is clearly necessary for fitness and skills development in dance but a conditioned body should not be confused with looking skinny or attaining a Eurocentric waif-like appearance so that learners without this body type feel alienated or marginalised in the dance training experience. It is important for dance teachers of Black learners, and even more so of disadvantaged learners who have limited support mechanisms, to encourage and guide them to love, celebrate and appreciate their Black dancing bodies so that they may be liberated to train in dance and explore their bodies in ways that are personally rewarding, empowering and satisfying. Without physical access to dance, dance cannot transform the lives of these young people. In addition, Rastafari spirituality is about challenging and resisting the oppressive establishment of 'Babylon' and therefore demands that dance teachers in exploring issues of self in the dance classroom with Black disadvantaged learners guide and direct them towards being critical of, and counteracting the ways in which dominant world systems negatively influence their view of self.

Following along the same line of thought, the spirit of Jah in the classroom also implies the intentional exploration of dance aesthetics and movement languages of Africa and the African diaspora (e.g. African traditional dances, reggae, dancehall, hip-hop, jazz) within the dance curriculum rather than an unwavering dedication to the hegemonic Western paradigm of ballet, modern and contemporary dance. Such cultural content by being more relevant to the learners' life world might be of greater interest and meaning to them than other dance forms. Furthermore African and African diasporic dance with their inherent value of community and social engagement often make them more easily accessible to dance learners. In the spirit of Rastafari dance teachers exploring African dance aesthetics with their Black learners does not mean token acknowledgement of learners' African cultural identity. It means authentic engagement with the dances, that which is underpinned by deeper understanding of their historical and socio-cultural contexts and the African values and ideals inherent in them. This type of learning is more likely to help Black learners of the diaspora distanced from their African roots sincerely discover the beauty and freedom of moving their bodies within their cultural heritage. It is also more likely to nurture the type of appreciation that will liberate them, and the dance classroom, from the colonial hierarchies of culture and corporeality that traditionally pervade the world of professional dance and dance education in the diaspora. Adopting the spirit of Jah in the classroom in this manner would therefore require teachers

themselves to expand their vision and perspectives of the dancing body beyond the exclusive and narrow traditional Western ideals. It would also require them to have authentic knowledge and understanding of African dance aesthetics, values and culture along with teaching methodologies and strategies for working with different body types.

Good physical health and nutrition are aspects of importance to all dance students as dance uses the body as its medium of expression. As with any musical instrument, the more tuned the body, meaning the more healthy and fit it is, the greater its capacity to perform and function expressively. One of the outcomes of many dance education curricula is for young people to develop positive attitudes and habits towards a healthy lifestyle which hopefully they will carry through to their adult lives. Rastafari spirituality offers one pathway to such health conscious living, an option dance learners can be taught to consider in their dance and health education. In Rastafari spirituality as mentioned earlier the body is regarded as the temple of Jah and as such it should be protected from contamination. Rastas believe food to have a key influence on the well-being of the body and soul and consequently what one eats either increases or reduces the life energy or *livity*<sup>12</sup> within. Resultantly they are very strict and disciplined in matters related to food. Rastas practice an *ital* diet which in principle generally means a diet of natural food: food from the earth (such as fruits, vegetables, produce, legumes, nuts, seed rich in natural nutrients); food without salt, preservatives, artificial flavourings, hormones or any other additives known to cause chronic diseases; and food not considered scavengers such as pork, predatory fish and some types of crustaceans which are high in toxins. The *ital* diet closely resembles the vegetarian diet but some Rastas further adopt the vegan lifestyle. For many Rastas, an *ital* diet also means no use of hard drugs or alcohol consumption<sup>13</sup> generally deemed unhealthy to the Rastafari way of life. This is a commendable stance as one just needs to look around at the homeless on the streets and read the news headlines to see the negative effects of alcohol abuse on families, young people and society on a whole. The Rastas' strict and disciplined approach towards *livity* that promotes physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being is worth emulating. Many young people abuse hard drugs, alcohol and engage in self-destructive habits such as heavy smoking and unhealthy dieting. For the Black disadvantaged learner whose lived experiences reflect instability, unhealthy role models and *laissez-faire* attitudes towards the body, health and nutrition, Rastafari spirituality can be utilized as a reference point for teaching about dancer's health and nutrition and may be beneficial to dance education in the following ways.

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<sup>12</sup> *Livity* is the Rastafarian coined word for living. More on rasta talk or lingo called dread talk or I-ance (Homiak 1998: 127) will be discussed later in the paper.

<sup>13</sup> Rastafari view alcohol and also salt (Murrell & Hutton, 1998: 46) as a tool of Babylon to confuse and destroy people's minds. Another explanation offered for the non-use of alcohol is that placing something that is pickled and fermented within one self is felt to be much like turning the body (the Temple) into a "cemetery". Some Rastas, particular those of the more liberal Twelve Tribes of Israel sect, do consume alcohol at social events.



First the cultural relevance of Rastafari could stimulate interest in the topic, making it more appealing to the learners. Second, the fact that such health consciousness is situated among grassroots individuals may resonate more with disadvantaged learners who often consider themselves to be on the periphery of education rather than in the mainstream. Third, the Rastafarian nutritional lifestyle being visibly manifested in society by Rastas provides learners with first-hand experience of the achievability of this healthy and disciplined way of life. This visible success may inspire learners to model the same.

Yet seemingly contradictory to Rastas healthy living is the sacramental smoking of cannabis<sup>14</sup>, also known as ganja, herb and marijuana. Much controversy surrounds this practice as for one the smoking of ganja is illegal in many countries, including Jamaica. Second, some medical research suggests that that persistent use of cannabis (marijuana) can negatively affect health, brain function and memory even though some studies suggest otherwise (Richards, 2013). Rastas refute that marijuana is perilous and view such claims along with the illegality of smoking cannabis as another attempt by Babylon to enslave their minds and keep them from the truth. Medical research does acknowledge however that smoking marijuana is less harmful to the body than other recreational drugs and alcohol abuse. These controversial and contrasting viewpoints can be a springboard for useful debate in the dance theory lesson with learners on smoking which is prevalent among young people, including dancers. Critical discussion that offers multiple perspectives and draws out students' experiences with the use of cannabis is an opportunity for teacher and students to "reason" <sup>15</sup> together. To add this frictional sacrament of ganja smoking to the discussion on taking care of the body is not to promote acceptance of this practice among young people but rather to stimulate their minds and guide them towards understanding how worldviews, personal and otherwise, influence human attitudes, action and behaviour and therefore the importance of critically examining them in order to take conscious control of their lives. It is to engage learners in the kinds of dialogue that gets them thinking critically and more meaningfully about their life choices and activities. Exploring such matters in the dance classroom narrows the gap between school and students' life experiences. Such discussions which I describe as oral movements about life are a necessary ingredient for teaching dance to disadvantaged learners. For these learners it is far more important that their lives and personhood matter more to the dance teacher than the dance itself. Anecdotally it is the security of that knowledge of care which creates the trust necessary to open their bodies to the power of dance. Therefore while this may not be dance teaching in the literal sense of bodies moving in space, the dance class must also become about minds and hearts, dance

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<sup>14</sup> Cannabis is also known as herbs, marijuana, ganja, sinse and dagga. Cannabis is the scientific name for the plant that is smoked and scholars believe this practice of smoking ganja was brought to the Caribbean in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the indentured labourers from India (Chevannes, 1998: 85)

<sup>15</sup> A "reasoning" is a simple event where the Rastas gather to reflect on and discuss their faith, or on any current or historic event that impinges on their lives (Edmonds, 1998: 355).

and culture, moving within a space to serve other needs of the disadvantaged learner and meet the holistic demands of dance education.

### ***Rastafari and Development of the dancer's creative soul***

Rastafari spirituality can yet be applied in the dance classroom in other ways. Rastafari by nature of its anti-establishment ethos and tendency to break free from the status quo breeds a creative consciousness that can bear fruits in the dance classroom. The spirit of Jah in the dance classroom is to nurture the dancer's creative soul. Creative behaviour can be simply described as outside the box independent thinking or the challenging of conventional responses and assumptions that results in an original product that is of value (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999: 29). Rastas' ideology of confronting "Babylon" has led to a rejection of what they consider to be imperialistic, Western status quo trappings and the creation of substitutes or novel products that reflect the new order of rasta identity. A prime example of this is the Rastas' rejection of Standard English as their official language. Rastas asserting that they were stripped of their original African languages during the European mid-Atlantic slave trade view Standard English as an imposed colonial language. According to Nettleford (2003: 12) as part of their "politics of protest" Rastas have made conscious change of vocabulary and syntax to the English language resulting in the creation of a new and distinct communication. This new communication is known as Dread talk, Rasta talk or I-ance (Homiak, 1998: 128; Edmonds, 1998: 32). For example in Dread talk one of the most distinctive modifications to the English language is the substitution of the personal pronoun "I" or "I-an-I" for the pronouns "me", "mine", "us" and "we". "I" also transforms other words such as "Iternal" (eternal), "Ireator" (creator) and "Isembly" (assembly). The Rastas have also made many other colourful transformations which express their views of society. For example "oppression" becomes "downpression" to signify the direction of the struggle and an individual "overstands" instead of "understands" since they gain knowledge. While these substitutions can confuse the outsider and seem illogical Homiak (1998: 167) and Edmonds (1998: 33) offer an explanation. They purport that Rastas belief that Jah is "I" and since each person is a part of God then each person is another "I", hence the use of "I" for me. Since everyone is an "I" then "I-an- I" acts as substitute for "we" as well as "us" and an expression of the oneness between two or more persons. Edmonds (1998: 33) further suggest that Rastas use "I-an- I" as a symbol of rejection from Babylonian culture and an affirmation of self as an active agent in the creation of one's own reality and identity. Although purist and gatekeepers of the English language may vehemently disagree, I consider Dread talk to be creativity in motion, a novel play with words and language of particular significance to a group of Africans in "exile". Other examples of rasta creativity is reggae music, which has become a global phenomenon and a medium for spreading Rastafarian consciousness and moral vision of human upliftment, the nyabinghi folk music which consists of drumming, chanting and dancing, Rastafari symbolic

movement gestures and spiritual songs, chants and poetry that arise from the re-interpretation of Western Christian hymns, songs and poems to reflect Rastafari 'truth'.

This creative spirit of Jah can be used in the dance classroom to develop student's creative soul in several concrete ways. First it serves as an example of anti-authority attitudes and sentiments, which many disadvantaged learners can exhibit, being channelled in a positive and meaningful way. Teachers can parallel Rastafarian creativity and encourage disadvantaged learners to think about, reflect on and express their anti-authority sentiments and attitudes in creative ways that are of value to them and the wider community. Channelling these attitudes and sentiments through a creative process with a teacher experienced in the art of learning through dance may help learners make better sense of their feelings as they interact with them from the standpoint of them being an asset rather than a liability. Employing these attitudes and sentiments as stimuli for creative work can cause learners to deal positively with their pent-up emotions and anti-establishment sentiments rather than express them in undesirable ways. In my experience with applying this aspect of Rastafari spirituality in the dance lesson with Black disadvantaged learners, students have used interdisciplinary modalities for example movement and poetry, movement and rap/deejaying, movement and design and technology, to imaginatively process and express their deep feelings of resentment and rebellion. While such processes, which Meiners and Garrett (2012) describe as a positive re-narration of disenfranchised students' experiences, do not always effect substantial change in learners' attitudes towards the object of their resistance, they can empower learners to take conscious charge of their emotions and feelings, and to purposively direct them in a manner that facilitates greater emotional well-being. They also encourage learners to draw on their socio-cultural knowledge fund to take physical and emotional risks in their engagement with the art form and to think outside the box in their expression of dance. Second, Rastafari creative artefacts such as reggae music, drumming and chanting and movement gestures can serve as inspiration or stimuli for students' choreography, movement exploration or skills training in dance. In African cultures song, music, dance and storytelling are dominant features of cultural expressions and as such utilizing these elements as a whole or in part in the dance classroom may resonate with Black learners resulting in increased engagement and motivation to dance. Third, the creative spirit of Jah in the dance classroom means dance teachers not always being occupied with "imposing" movement on the learner as is traditionally done in the teaching of dance techniques, but creating many opportunities for movement to be generated from the learners, thereby giving them a sense of ownership in the dance teaching and learning process. It may also mean in the spirit of Rastafari reasoning giving students the opportunity to discuss and critically evaluate their artistic choices. As mentioned elsewhere creativity is both generative and evaluative. Finally, in the spirit of Rastafari creativity dance teachers can help dancers to identify their established way of moving and over time challenge them, through new movement opportunities, to break away from any fixed notion of moving in order to facilitate their creative growth in the art form. It must be noted however that

while these examples have highlighted ways in which Rastafari creativity can be applied in the dance classroom with disadvantaged learners of African descent, it is the added variables of skilful teaching, a supportive learning environment, sufficient curriculum time, and learners' commitment to the creative dance process that will ultimately 'fire' the creative soul of the learner in dance.

### ***Conclusion***

Rastafarian spirituality can find application in the dance classroom with Black disadvantaged learners of the African Diaspora. The movement's afro-centric consciousness, creative spirit, and association with the poor, marginalized and disadvantaged within society lay at the heart of its relevance to this particular learning context. It has been posited that aspects of Rastafari spirituality can be utilised in the dance classroom as a tool for the development of learner's mind, body, and creative soul. In reference to the mind, it has been proposed that Rastafari spirituality with its affirmative ideology of Black sovereignty, empowerment, pride and dignity may be a valuable tool for elevating the self-image, self-worth and self-confidence of Black learners in the dance classroom. In reference to the body, it has been suggested that Rastafari spirituality can serve as a springboard for teaching about dancer's health and nutrition and for awakening the African heritage in Black learners of the diaspora, meaning an acceptance of their Black dancing bodies and an appreciation for African dance aesthetics and culture. In reference to the creative soul, it has been argued that the spirit of Jah in the dance classroom is to create opportunities for dance learners to take risks physically and emotionally and to generate movement ideas from their own cultural capital.

Through the lens of Rastafari spirituality it has been shown that dance education and spirituality can be closely integrated in the dance classroom. It has been suggested that the spirit of Jah in the dance classroom with Black disadvantaged learners can influence all three domains of their learning and development, the cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The limitations of the ideas raised throughout the paper must be acknowledged however given that Black disadvantaged learners are not a homogenous group and as such not all that has been proposed may be of relevance to all such learners. Incorporating the spirit of Jah in the dance classroom nevertheless is about learning in and through dance, perhaps more the latter than the former. This therefore requires dance teachers to shift from a pedagogy of dance for dance's sake, meaning a teaching approach highly focused on dance technique, towards one of dance for life's sake, a more humanistic pedagogical approach focused on nurturing life skills and social transformation through dance. Further discussion and research on effective teaching methods and strategies for infusing the spirit of Jah in the dance classroom, the outcomes of such teaching and the variables that may influence the outcomes are definitely warranted. This is because while aspects of Rastafarian spirituality can be used as a pedagogical tool for the development of disadvantaged learners of the African diaspora within the dance classroom, it is critical pedagogy, special teacher attributes, knowledge and understanding, curriculum space and time and perhaps other variables that must synergize to invite, inspire and

liberate these learners to unapologetically dance, and find meaning and purpose in moving body, mind and soul!

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## **BODY-SPIRIT ON STAGE: POETICS OF CHILDHOOD**

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### **Abstract**

*How may we use the body to bring the power of childhood onto the stage? Where in us does the child remain alive? Perhaps such space and power in my childhood "body-in-life" is the place of poetry? Can the potential of the cosmic childhood which lives in us, not only be utilised by the field of poets but also by artists? For Bachelard(1990)), the child is a cosmic existence that has no limits. Fixed, it is the beginning and the end. It has always existed and will continue to exist. So this cosmic quality of the child stays with us forever. The production; *The tree of all stories* that accesses the cosmic child actress on stage, illustrates the integration of body and mind in relation to other children. My paper will make use of Creation myths, songs and dances of indigenous Brazilians, to establish the relationship between Heaven and Earth, between the body-mind on the stage. It tries to create an argument for an individual aesthetic and poetic power of the spectacle. I propose, in this paper, a dismantling of *The Tree of all the stories*: a scenic spectacle involving storytelling, theatricality, musicality and dance in relation to children. Deconstruction is an artistic-pedagogic process in which the artist reveal and unveils questions about the creation of his work. This is a procedure that has been gaining strength among Latin American artists and has been investigated mainly by Ileana Dieguez, a researcher at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM - Cuajimalta), Mexico. This procedure narrows the interfaces between creation and pedagogy in the contemporary scene. The dismantling is usually done scenically, in the presence of the artist, his work and the public. I seek to bring disassembly as a means of a textual exercise. Unveiling autobiographical issues, concerns and encounters in the journey of *The Tree of all stories* I search my own cosmic child in relation to the world's children.*

### **Why Theater and Childhood?**

*In a world as close as distant, lived a little girl. Hair sun rays. Rosy cheeks, ashamed. Her eyes were more than eyes: two seeds, blue-green, popped in the face, ready to germinate. Everything that her eyes touched, turned up. Now growing, shrinking, changing color, turned what could never have been to other looks.<sup>1</sup>*

The girl of blue-green eyes" is a tale which chronicles the journey of my cosmic child in this existence. Inventing languages, letters, textures, movements, songs one (re)creates worlds. The learning in school can utilize solitary experiences populated by invented characters, creating other possibilities for interaction and apprehension of the world of magic, fantasy and amazement of being and perceiving the world. Such experiences lived over time could be, from poetry to reason, from sensibility to the intellect, from eyes popped to the eyes formatted.

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<sup>1</sup> I italicize the text to highlight the moments that bring poetic references to the text.

Snapping the eyes in the world is to open the windows of the soul to poetic perception, creating a live aesthetic. When the time runs rushed, and childhood stays behind, step by step inventing worlds do theater, seeking to stay popping the eyes in life.

### ***Terrors of children!***

"Ah ... *play is to get something fun and create and invent with it*" (Maria, age 6, 2009). Maria, with a doll in her hands, disturbs my "normal sense of ideas."<sup>2</sup> "*I love this song*. She invents with *ideas*" (Leticia 5 years, 2012). Leticia, listening to music in silence disturbs my "normal sense of ideas." Attempting to look at the children, I realize that I could promote an inventive mess by changing things around (how well children do that all the time?). And what if I switched the verb "play" from Mary to "teatre": living, cooking, dating, reading, writing..? And would the perception of the world be as much fun, creative and inventive as observant Maria and Leticia?

It enchants me to observe childhood. To notice the childhood present in infants, children, youth, adults, elders, dogs, birds, ants, even snails. The childhood I seek is timeless, symbolic and poetic. I seek to understand the relationships of inventive children in the world, beyond any stigmas, but of self to self, self with others, of the self in the world. I seek to grasp symptoms of childhood, to refine the reverie of the perception of the artist who strictly observes daily lives and with them, creates, and invents worlds and shares them.

Why deal with poetics of childhood? Maybe because we came along the same journey of humanity, moving away from cosmic childhood and experience of the reverie, of the germs of poetry? As Gaston Bachelard (1990) states, "When you dream in your loneliness, the child knows an existence that has no limits. Your reverie was not just a fantasy of escape. It was a daydream of flight." (Bachelard, 1990 p.46) According to Bachelard, we find the nucleus of childhood in the memories of the cosmic loneliness. It is there that imagination and memory are more closely intertwined. People go, but the cosmos remains. This cosmic quality of the child always remains with us. She reappears in the solitude of our daydreams. Our cosmic child is the beginning and the end. It has always existed and will continue to exist. For Bachelard (1990), our daydreams lead us to a pre-conditional Being.

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<sup>2</sup> Image-feeling inspired by the poetry of, Brazilian poet, Manoel de Barros.



This cosmic loneliness of the child allows an interweaving of imagination and memory capable of generating poetry. Childhood remains a potential state within us. Would it not be the possible to retain a field of daydreams inhabited by poets and artists? If artists can create, access the cosmic loneliness of reverie, would this not be an invitation to another possible perception and relationship with the world? In the effort to meet Bachelard's cosmic child, I make the decision to be on the scene in the production *The Tree of all the stories*, seeking to become the child actress on stage, in my body-spirit.

In 2005, in Florianopolis, an island in southern Brazil, I was playing, dancing, singing and making up stories with children in schools and cultural venues. A professor of theater and dance I explore the possibilities of being with the little ones in the world in a poetic form. As a child I had the habit of changing things, popping eyes at all times and creating an inventive mess wherever I went. Like Mary, Leticia and all children to be sure. At that very moment, I was seeking stories to create a show for children. Those whom we call Indians, ancestors of Brazil - the land I inhabit. These called me with their stories and myths about creation. After many readings, drawings, jokes and coffees, Julio Rafael Cogo<sup>3</sup> and I, created *The Tree of all the stories*, a fantastic journey that intertwines Sky, Land, Sea and all beings involved in these systems: elements of Nature: earth, water, fire and air; Kingdoms - Animal; Vegetable and Mineral. We played with the eternal search for harmony – to find a balance between tensions, the complementary forces that govern the cosmos - Sun and Moon, Day and Night, Male and Female, Sound and Silence, Presence and Absence and Comings and Goings. Our search for the knowledge and sensitivity in the wisdom of our ancestors connected to the elements of Nature.

Shamelessly, moved by the impulse of the soul in the act of creation, we were "taking something fun and creating and inventing with it." Like Mary, we blended elements of indigenous culture, like the fishing tradition and Brazilian popular music in our composition of the dramaturgy of the spectacle.

To the Indian, every word has spirit. A name is a soul provided with an accent, it is said in the language ayvu. It is a life sung in a form. Life is the moving spirit. Spirit, for the Indian, is both silence and sound. The silent-sound has a rhythm, a tone, whose body is the color. When spirit is chanted, it is, becomes, that is, has a tone. Before there was the word "Indian" to refer to all indigenous peoples, already existed the spirit *Indians* scattered in hundreds of shades (JECUPÉ, 1998:13).

Be aware then, that each word embodies the spirit and when the spirit is sung, it has a tone.

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<sup>3</sup> Julio Rafeal Cogo is an artist, philosopher and educator in Brazil.

Ask yourself what is the tone, what the spirit of the show? If each element, sound-silence, spirit that has a body, that is a color, then choosing the constituent elements of a show is to establish the body-spirit relationship on the stage. What spirit, or what tone do we want to tap into in a scenic spectacle for children?

The concept, "Life is moving spirit," generated by this question, leads me to the meeting, in my body-in-life<sup>4</sup>, my own cosmic child, as suggested by Bachelard. Therefore, the spirit of the production is the spirit of the cosmic child. Beginning and end - Earth and Cosmos. For this to occur while I am an actress on the stage, I need to connect myself with my cosmic child in relation to other children and the world around us. How do I connect to the cosmic child? By tapping into the harmony between the instruments of the body (color) and spirit (sound-silence). This is a daily quest and a constant. It is what happens in each performance that is repeated in its uniqueness. But for this tune, the cosmic child needs to be accessed on the scene, it takes discipline and persistence at every moment of life. Movement is recalled to re-establish the connection that may have been forgotten. Clicking on the blue-green eyes of the girl with hair like rays of sun, this is a search for re-connection made in relation to those existing in the world in an infinite movement from inside to outside, from outside to inside. The search for the "living memory of the time when being walked with the forest, the river, the stars and the mountains in the heart and the flow exerted of self" (JECUPÉ, 1998:19) is continued. The Brazilian indigenous tradition reminds us that we are in the world, with the things of the world, with the elements of nature, which are also our bodies. "Earth is my body. Water my blood. Air my breath. Fire my spirit "(Canto of indigenous shaman).

I establish a relationship between the indigenous wisdom which perceives the human being dissociated from the world, and phenomenology, especially as in Merleau-Ponty. Marilena Chauí<sup>5</sup> (2009), in her article *Merleau-Ponty: the work fruitful*, poses the following question: "What a unique fabric bow tie experience, creation, origin and Being?" And in the sequel, she says, "That one that holds the Wild Spirit and the Raw being." This Wild Spirit is the spirit of praxis, one that can actively want something. One realizes what one wants and can, achieve by acting, by performing an experiment and that becomes the experience itself. Marilena Chauí says that what makes possible the creative experience is that there is a gap to be filled. In this experience, intention and action are inseparable. If the painter reveals the

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<sup>4</sup> "Body-in-life" is a term used by Eugenio Barba, a contemporary playwright. This is more than a body that lives, it dilates the presence of the actor and the viewer's perception.

<sup>5</sup> Marilena de Souza Chauí is a Brazilian philosopher. She has been teaching political and modern philosophy in the Department of Philosophy of the University of São Paulo since 1967, when she presented her dissertation on Merleau-Ponty.

invisible, the writer breaks the silence, the unthought thinker asks, what then does the actor do? Does s/he give life to the invisible Being? What invisibilities do I as an actress choose in order to reveal the scene using children.

Being 'gross' is to be from indivision, which is not subjected to separation (metaphysical and scientific) between subject and object, mind and body, consciousness and world perception and thought. Being of indivision is what continues to differentiate self, duplicating all beings, causing them to have an outside and an inside, reversible, and relative. The Spirit Being Wild and Gross are intertwined and are, according to Merleau-Ponty, the pulp of the carnal world. Flesh of our body and our mind. If we communicate with things in the world, it is because we participate in the same flesh. Marilena Chauí explains the Meat World is the intersection of the visible and the invisible, the sayable and the unsayable, the thinkable and unthinkable, whose differentiation, communication and reversibility are made by themselves as padding in the world.

Perceived as being of indivision, interwoven into the world and being aware of how it manifests in the world. I do not seek to talk about it with the children, but, being undivided, intertwined and conscious of my manifestation in the world and arrive on the scene. This is how to bring these principles to the scene with the children. I recall that before the stage scene, we created the story, in 2005, on the verge of Lagoa da Conceição, in an environment that connected us to the elements and nature kingdoms. By being and being connected to the world, its essential elements all these experiences manifest themselves in the story below.

*Mane John is a man of the sea. He falls in love with the Moon. A hint of Man's search for the magic that connects us to the cosmos. In an attempt to hook the moon for you, you suffer a spell and are lost in the universe, in the company of one of the stars of the constellation "The Three Marias". There begins a journey of adventure and discovery between constellations and celestial bodies. Creation myths of indigenous Brazilians are recounted: All beings that now inhabit the earth long ago inhabited the world of the ceiling above, the Heaven. Each star shining in the sky was the home of a being who could come to inhabit the Earth. Everything ran well until the damn armadillo decided to dig a bigger hole than usual, making a hole in the ceiling above the World of Heaven. Everyone was curious and went to spy. What they saw was a huge blue ball floating in the universe. They were even more curious. They joined all their necklaces and built a rope launched from the hole made by the*

*armadillo. They climbed down: men, women, boys, girls, dogs, horses, ants, fish, whales, worms, thrushes, platypus ... and lived all over the Earth. The movement was great, until one boy decided to cut the rope. Whoever was descending plunged. And who had not yet fallen, got stuck in the ceiling above the World of Heaven (Indigenous Brazilian Creation Myth)*

*On the journey through the cosmos, they discovered that only the sun can undo the spell of the moon. But how to find the star Sun, lost in the immensity of the universe? They would need to find the hole dug by the armadillo, coming from the ceiling above the World of Heaven. There, they found the constellation of the Pleiades. This is inhabited by an indigenous tribe that is celebrating through song and dance, around the fire. At the end of the ritual the old Shaman, the oldest and wisest man of that tribe comes to them. He calls the constellation of Pegasus, the winged horse, which will lead them to the sun. Before leaving, they receive a gift from the Shaman: a handful of seeds to be planted on the land, to be cultivated by John and protected by the constellation of the Three Marias. When they reach the sun, the spell breaks and the fisherman returns to Earth and the stars return to Heaven. John cultivates each seed and plants these on the five continents. When the first bud begins to rise, John is amazed. Never seen in the same bud, green leaves, yellow leaves, blue-, red-, violet- ... Leaves that are large, some small, full, rounded ... Leaves of all colors and shapes. When Spring arrives the first flowers appear. There were large flowers, yellow petalled. But also small, white flowers that seemed like feathers flying in the wind. Pink flowers, lilac, blue, in all shapes and flavors ... With Summer time comes fruits. New fruit small, smaller than a grain of grape. Fruits large, larger than a watermelon. Some were twisted fruit, which seemed turned upside down. Square fruit, fruit that was crisp ... Fruits that John had never seen. It was very curious. He decided to taste the first fruit. The moment that he took the first bite, a story began.. Another bite, another piece of history. History, bite, bite, history ... At the end of the first fruit, he had a whole story to tell. More fruit, another story. Another story for another fruit. That was the tree of all stories. Its fruits brought stories of all peoples, all cultures around the Universe ... On nights of the Full Moon, the Three Marias descend to Earth in the form of butterflies and spread the fruits of these trees at fairs and supermarkets. It may happen that someday we may eat a fruit of the tree and all the stories and history will mysteriously arise in our hearts.*

These are excerpts from the story that carries the power of the relationship of life and death, heaven and earth, spirit-body, man and nature so interwoven of our existence. The

elements are treated as fantastical, magical and ritualistic. The story itself, while taking the word spirit, as taught by Kaka Werá Jecupé, brings the tone (spirit) and color (body) we wish to create. From the story created, we began investigating ways to tell it to the children. We arrived at the Cultural Center of the Earth Sol, where we worked as artist-educators in 2005/2006. Children brought us fruit to eat and we encountered new stories. We then began to joke with them, eating fruits stuffed with new felt / perceived / fabricated stories.

However, observing the different paths traveled by "Tree" since 2005, I note that the story is not the only element that establishes the atmosphere of re-connecting with yourself and the elements of nature we seek. The music, the instruments chosen, the colors, the textures and the play that occurs between narrators, characters and actors, make up the scene, the body-mind relationship. All elements chosen seek this relationship body (color) - Spirit (sound). But mostly, this relationship occurs in the body of the actors in the scene, in relation to children.

In 2012, I recall "The Tree of all stories". I am no longer living on the southern coast of Brazil, but in Minas Gerais, surrounded by lots of land in the center of the country. I begin to realize the contrasts of geography, climatology manifesting in my body. In the savannah, trees grow deep roots, they feed themselves on water from the depths of the earth. I discovered this new land fruit flavors that I had never tasted and the strangeness is slowly becoming an enchantment of life, moving a spirit of transformation. The excitement in my body and the desire to be closer again as children, brings "The Tree of all stories" with its new clothes into the new company. Maria Claudia is the actor who shares the scene. Her musical sensibility brings new ideas of sound to the show.

In the process of creation we played a lot in the backyard of my house, under a big hose, which profoundly affects the choices of scene elements. Once again more tone / spirit in the scene: the spirit of the yard. The backyard with grass , growing ants on trails, fruit on foot, free birds singing, running dog, child playing. Leticia, my 4 year old daughter, present at many rehearsals will affect our relationship with history, time, and the game. Then comes the new spirit of "Tree" in the presence of Leticia in our creation. We have even more fun. The child changes things around, is astonished at the bird that sings, the ant carrying a leaf passing by her ten times.. The child in this state is affected by everything that happens. I am

reminded "We took a fun thing and create and invent with it", to paraphrase Mary, all the time.

In this play, as an actress, narrator and character, I realize even more the way in which a child perceives the world. At this point I begin to find specifically in my "body-in-life", my cosmic child spoken of by Bachelard. I understand the structure of the narrative which comes out of the image and the spirit of the tree. A history with roots, trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruit . Sometimes some branches need to be pruned, because everything has its own time to happen. So, the new drama of the scene begins to emerge. This time even more sensitively, because as an actress I have put myself in a more sensitive, open, and affected position. "Girl of blue-green eyes popped" is present in the actress on stage, in relation to other children and the world. The show becomes more porous, more open to risk. Who showed us this path were the children themselves with whom we spent time in the backyard, courtyard, the library, and the classroom of public schools. Our tests needed to happen in the presence of children, as they affect our own children and point to cosmic paths. This is what we wanted: to connect for our children and the children of the world.

I cannot say that this new version of "The Tree of all stories" has been performed. Because the work was emerging in relation to children, and every child who meets us affects the work, because it affects our mind, always. Thus, it has been built in the possibility of being presented anywhere where a group of children can sit in a circle and "be with" us for at least 40 minutes.

Being in school affects relationships, and the time and space of these places is something that challenges me. It also pleases me. As a college professor, my chances of interaction directly with the children at school are limited. However, as an actress, a poetic space opens for me to establish relationships with other children at school, with less interference from teachers, coordinators, principals, and curriculum. However, to establish the alternate state of mind that we desire in school spaces is not easy and neither is it easy to adapt elements and movements to the scenic space that welcomes us. We grew taller in the courtyard, shrank in the library, and responded to the announcements in the school. The colors-sounds-silences (body-spirit) immediately affect children in the space and these, in turn, affect us. With every presentation, every encounter with new children, my cosmic child strengthens and introduces new nuances.

In the poetic encounter with our own children and the children of the world, body and spirit are intertwined. "The Tree of all stories" leads us to establish roots in the earth extending to the canopy to Heaven, nourishing the earth and the cosmos, fruitful colors, sounds and flavors in the world. Children affect me and my perceptions. With them I intend to live the unthinkable, the unpredictable. Time and space expand. Body (color) and spirit (sound) intertwine. According Kaka Werá Jecupé, just as the Indians do in their rituals, the more the individual is individualized, internally it is recognized as part of a larger group. For me, being body and spirit on stage, is in relation to children and the world, in all our relations.

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# **BEYOND THE “MUSEUM” APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF AFRICAN DANCE**

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## **Abstract**

*When considering the notion of teaching “African” dance we must firstly ask, “what is African dance” and “what does it express culturally and socially?” Within the African dance community there is still on-going debate around the question of whether or not “African Dance” should be allowed to be taught outside of the areas of origin of the dances and whether these may be codified. Some believe, that teaching African dance beyond the borders of the African continent and in formalised settings, places this unique cultural expression at risk of globalisation. This may result in the tainting of the distinctive dance forms as they converge with western dance styles. This argument endorses a standpoint that seeks to separate an African cultural identity as opposed to one that allows for a universal type of dance meant to be learned and studied by the global community. We have seen that ballet, hip-hop, jazz, and tap dances, which all have unique cultural roots, have been disseminated internationally. This helps to support the argument that African dance can be taught, expressed, studied and internationally recognised as a performing art in the global dance world.*

*Discourses surrounding African dance teaching provide an effective channel in which culture is taught and individual and collective identities can be formed, which poses an influential unifying and political tool. This paper will focus on the African dance teaching within urbanised locations but acknowledging the rural areas regarding history. The purpose of this paper is to show that African dance teaching is not stagnant. It is possible for it to evolve with time without losing its essence. It is not meant to be caged in a museum.*

**Keywords: African Dance Teaching, Culture, Identity and Spirituality**

## **Background**

African dance originated within traditional African societies as both ritual and an artistic expression of culture (Fryer, 1998:1-3). Different areas and cultures had different dances and styles; however, as a whole, dances originating from African communities are categorised broadly as “African Dance” (Fryer, 1998:1). From the era of the slave trade, African dance spread among the Western and Central American cultures. Fryer states that “some slaves were forced to dance for their masters as a form of entertainment, while others were banned from dancing” (Fryer, 1998:1-3). Within Africa, “dance was threatened and restricted by colonial rulers due to hip gyrations, which were seen as hedonistic” (Hanna, 1973:166). Friedman comments that in South Africa, “both the colonial and

apartheid<sup>1</sup> regimes devalued indigenous African culture and reduced it to ethnic curiosity” (Friedman, 2010: 1). Other early performances of African dance took place in circus like settings, displaying the dances and dancers as foreign, exotic subjects (Lindfors, 1999:viii).

### ***Teaching African dance: Challenges***

Today, African dance in most parts of Africa is taught in formal institutions including universities, studios and dance schools, as well as in the villages, towns and cities where the dances originated. As African dances spread, some have become increasingly Westernised in style amidst the global nature of today’s society. Jay Pather<sup>2</sup> suggests that this may be classified as “contemporary African dance” (Pather, 2006:13). While some early African dance performances portrayed Africans as “animalistic”, the modern context provides a forum for exchange that bridges racial gaps (Lindfors, 1999:vii). As discussed in *Africans on Stage* (1999), Lindfors expands his explanation by saying that “the presentation of Africans to the greater global community in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries promoted and perpetuated racism” (ibid:x). This practice reinforced the dynamics of the unequal relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, i.e. master and slave. In this sense, African dance served as a tool to exoticise and distance “black” Africans from the “white” population. “This created a system which enabled the subordination of non-white racial groups through the dehumanising perspectives spread to greater audiences in the zoo-like exhibits of African culture” (ibid:xii).

However, bringing African dance into South African class rooms, provides a means of challenging these racial barriers and eliminating the distance created during the two centuries. When African dance is taught to South Africans in urban<sup>3</sup> cities, multi-cultural race commonalities surface more easily because most racial groups are interacting on the same level. In other words, the racially associated division, that of spectator versus performer hierarchy is eliminated, and “Africans” are free to share their arts on their own terms. In most cases, the teaching of African dance in South Africa enables a constructive student / teacher dynamic to surface and racial differences to reduce

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<sup>1</sup> Apartheid was a social and political policy of racial segregation and discrimination enforced by a white minority government in South Africa from 1948 until 1994. The term derives from the Afrikaans word denoting ‘apartness’. Bear in mind that not all white South Africans supported the apartheid government (Rani, 2011: 48).

<sup>2</sup> Obtained Honours degrees in Literature and Drama from the University of Durban-Westville, a Performance Diploma from Trinity College, London, and an MA from New York University where he was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to research Dance Theatre.

<sup>3</sup> Urbanisation in a South African context is seen as the movement of people from rural to so-called “developed” cities. The rapid expansion of this process in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was due to the development of the mining industry, railways and national economy (Rani, 2011:48).

within the context of cultural exchange. The wide spread teaching of African dance unleashes the potential of dance as a unique and dynamic cultural education device. Within South African schools and formal settings, the use of African dance as a cultural entity has been found to be important because it provides an authentic representation of specific African cultures involved in the various areas.

Admittedly other elements come with the teaching of African dance i.e. individual interpretation and the retention of the spiritual ethos of the movement. Arguably, such elements can be fostered at the end of the learning experience, when a learner is able to physically execute African dance. An explanation and enhancement of the spiritual essence integral to African dance will need monitoring because emotions will surface. This spirituality is the embodied experience in class or when dancing in a supernatural transcendental sense. This does not necessarily dovetail with all interpretations of the “sacred”. In my experience of teaching students from diverse backgrounds including the Vadhini Indian classical Dance School, International exchange students from the Americas, Jamaica and the University of Cape Town School of Dance with its multi-racial students, I am fascinated by the differing understanding of the concept. Not only do they have a varied understanding of what constitutes spirituality, many have no idea at all that African dance has a “spiritual” aspect at all. They just want to dance. They come from Rock n Roll, Funk, Raggae, Kwaito and Drums background. So if one has to talk about spirituality in class, whose spirituality are you referring to and serving? This is a complex matter because the students have different religious background as well. Teaching African dance enables the students to find commonalities amongst themselves and feed each other’s energy and create a harmonious sphere in class. Energies in class manifest themselves into spirituality that is transcendental because the movements in African dance, if taught correctly, should reach into your soul. It is important to monitor the class as the journey to embodying this aspect can be fraught. It is essential to acknowledge that in African dance class you do not encourage African religious practices as a means of African religious worship. Rather, “[...] it is a vital means of communication with the sacred, it is expressive fully integrated within the worship system” (Ajayi, 1996:184). That is why I do not suggest the religious version in class because it may open up areas not appropriate to the dance class. Rather the focus should be on the nature of the dance.

Ajayi explains that

[...]the nature of dance is both a sign and a vehicle of communication. It is able to express an action, an idea and it is at the same time the action and the idea it expresses. For example, a person dancing can be a sign of happiness, at the same time this sign is a vehicle to communicate and express a state of mind.

### ***Moving away from African dance for tourist audiences.***

“Among global audiences, performances advertised as ‘African dance’ are being modified and catered to fit what the crowd is looking to see, which may or may not depict reality” (Pather, 2006: 12). One might ask, what is reality in terms of African dance in an urban setting? If you are looking for the “Zoo-like”, tourist gaze, spectacle and African contemporary, yes you will get it in South African urban locations. There is no single style that encapsulates South African dance because we are a multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-faceted society. Friedman<sup>4</sup> explains that the fusion of dance styles is nothing new and often occurs unconsciously and in the 1980s in particular, there was much debate around the South African dance scene needing a ‘melting pot’ approach (Friedman, 2010: 1). Glasser, a South African scholar, choreographer and founder of Moving into Dance Mophatong, goes deeper, in clarifying fusion as “the synthesis or integration or combination of two or more cultural forms of expression, which have their roots or sources in different traditions or different countries” (Glasser, 1993:81). In my view, this means that in allowing African dance to be taught in South Africa as a subject or a course, intercultural discourse needs to be addressed. An Afrocentric perspective needs implementation so that it can challenge matters of representation and contribute to an optimistic presentation of Africa dance, culture, history and spirituality. The Afrocentric approach and understanding is explained by Asante as:

[...] a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person. ... It centers on placing people of African origin in control of their lives and attitudes about the world. This means that we examine every aspect of the dislocation of African people; culture, economics, psychology, health and religion. ... As an intellectual theory, Afrocentricity is the study of the ideas and events from the standpoint of Africans as the key players rather than victims. This theory becomes, by virtue of an authentic relationship to the centrality of our own reality, a fundamentally empirical project ... it is Africa asserting itself intellectually and psychologically, breaking the bonds of Western domination in the mind as an analogue for breaking those bonds in every other field (1988:172).

An Afrocentric approach “places African ideals at the centre of any analysis that involves culture and behaviour” (Kerr-Berry, 1994: 26). The lack of a common Afrocentric perspective can be traced back to the colonial era, during which colonising nations controlled the image of African societies projected to external countries. By expressing dance as a widespread discourse, the opportunity is provided to explore a physical-cultural connection. In an article arguing for the formalised teaching of African dance in schools, Ward notes that “this is not only an opportunity to learn, but also to feel

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<sup>4</sup> Sharon Friedman is a dance scholar and an editor; she is one of the influential dance scholars in South Africa. She is the founder of the contemporary dance course at the University of Cape Town where she taught till retirement.

the history of culture of a people” (Ward, 2007:47). The hands-on participation in African dance is highly effective as a form of teaching, because it has been determined “that young learners learn best through engagement and movement” (Lutz & Kuhlman, 2000:35). Within a South African dance curricular setting, the benefits of teaching African dance have been found to include spirituality, physical and cultural elements. As determined in one study, “body awareness and control, personal confidence and esteem, and cultural understanding and respect” (ibid). The link between African dance and culture<sup>5</sup> also surfaces on a non-physical level. The process of learning the dances and the influences of modernity<sup>6</sup> promotes discussions surrounding the cultural significance of the dance and the shifts based on today’s interpretation of African dance, therefore maintaining a connection between African society and diaspora.

### ***Moving beyond the Museum***

Since the introduction of African dance on a global scale, intercultural borrowing has never been a one-way process. Adinku states that “critics of the expansion of African dance are concerned about westernisation of the unique techniques employed through dances from African cultures” (Adinku, 2004:63). However, African mannerisms have transformed western dances as well. Specifically referring to eighteenth and nineteenth century dances, it has been noted that

[...] dances which, all over the western sphere, were ‘creolised’, that is to say, Africanised: the quadrille; waltz; mazurka; polka; country dance or contredanse (which in Cuba became first the contradanza habanera, then the danzon, and in Puerto Rico the danza); and schottische (a kind of slow polka which in Brazil became the *xotes*, also spelt *xotis* and *xote*). (Fryer, 1998:5).

In a modern context, hip hop is an example of the merging of African and Western dances (Macaulay, 2010:3). Contrary to those who believe this stylistic convergence dilutes cultural meaning, it is beneficial in promoting cultural understanding, because those who hope to learn, understand, critique or integrate a particular dance style must first understand the culture which shapes the dance in order to understand matters of appropriation and appreciation. African dance is a tradition historically resilient to change, but changes have occurred for all the above reasons, although, as Pather points out, “colonial and postcolonial conditions in Africa have disrupted

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<sup>5</sup> . “Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations and material objects acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving” (Hofstede, 1997: 23)

<sup>6</sup> . “Modernity refers to a certain period of western culture, artistic and sociological history. This period covers the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Modernity is a vague and general term that refers to a period of great change in the western world. This change refers mainly to an alteration in thinking and development of different views of reality” (Lee, 2006: 356).

cultures rich in the visual arts, religions, oral traditions and social political formations, this disruption has not been total” (2006:13). This suggests strengths in African dance techniques which will enable the maintenance of at least some individuality when introduced globally. Regardless of location around the globe, finding and expressing identity does not readily formulate into words. For some, the arts continue to provide a framework for sharing identity through performance. Dance offers an artistic expression of identity<sup>7</sup> or on another level; it creates a sense of place and belonging for those in the process of discovering who they are. In this sense dance reaches beyond “simple” entertainment and contributes to the formation of both individual and collective identities<sup>8</sup>.

In the specific context of African dance, the link between dance, identity and spirituality is arguably undeniable, both micro- and macrocosmically. The forces of colonialism, globalisation and migration have all created a culturally diverse landscape of Africa. Yet, dance provides a traditional centre within which a collective “African” identity<sup>9</sup> remains intact, and might prove a powerful tool in the creation of what it means to be “African” amidst political transition. The impact of African dance starts with an individual level of identity through performance, and then reaches towards a collective “African” identity through widespread performance and the teaching of African dance methods. The methods I refer to are the definition and history of African dance, costume, etiquette, articulation of dance movements, style and the importance of music.

On an individual level, most African dances embody different elements that contribute to the self-identification process. This is particularly apparent in the construction of racial identity for people across the globe, specifically African Americans and South Africans. In an experiment on assessing the effectiveness of dance as a cultural teacher for kindergarten learners in America, teachers confirmed that “just as the children learned about content on a deeper level, they also learn about themselves and others” (Lutz & Kuhlman, 2000:39). Even at the age of five years old, some learners were able to identify with certain aspects of their study on African dance, including race, class and rural versus urban lifestyle (ibid:37). Another identity which can be interpreted through dance is the exploration of gender. As with many dance techniques, African dance can embody masculine and feminine forms. The expression of gender can be particularly apparent through different movements

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<sup>7</sup>. “Identity is an attitude and behaviours influence the ways in which individuals conduct their lives, interact with people from other groups, and view society as a whole ( Phinney, 1996: 145).

<sup>8</sup>. “Collective identity is the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interest, experiences and solidarity” (Rupp & Taylor 1999, 365).

<sup>9</sup>. “The primary function of defining African identity is first and foremost an exercise in political self-interest of African agency. The power definition must remain with the majority and today “African” is a term used to super-umbrella all the indigenous ethnicities of the African continent and their modern-day descendents in the Diaspora” (Shahadah, 2013: 2).

and roles within the performance (Macaulay, 2010:2). Collective and international “African” identity is also explored through African dance. Exploring this identity in this manner, participants have the agency to describe exactly what being “African” means in the expression of dance. Steve Biko describes the importance of self-constructs of identity in his argument for “Black Consciousness”. In a modern setting, identity construction through dance contributes to “Black Consciousness” amongst “black people”, by showing “black people the value of their own standards and outlook...not to be fooled by some white society who have white washed themselves and made white standards the yardstick by which even some black people judge each other” (Biko, 1978:33).

As discussed above, colonial and apartheid structures enforced negative images and connotations of what being African entailed in order to maintain a position of superiority (Fanon, 1963:32). In a non-racial context, African dance allows for identity to match whatever the participants create it to be, rather than being subjected to external standards of measurement. In a widespread use of African dance, many groups choose to express African identity through traditional forms. For example, a “Durban<sup>10</sup>-based intercultural group which focuses on Indian classical dance and Zulu dance uses traditional Zulu speaking, black African men to present Africanness” (Radhakrishnan, 2003:532). In doing this, a tradition of a collective African identity is maintained. Even for those not classified as “traditional Africans”, the associations of this dance can help them find overlap between their identity and that which traditional dance embodies.

At the same time, racial identity can pose a sort of limitation for non-black African dancers, which arguably should be deconstructed in the creation of a modern definition of “African”. African identity is growing to include people of all races, as colonisation and migration patterns have mixed the world’s population. This poses a strong argument for extending teaching African dance beyond a “village” setting, since being “African” now reaches beyond traditional roots. A “white” professional choreographer and dance scholar, Liane Loots, expresses her concern for the racial restrictions of African dance; she questions her ability to take on a traditional dance and make it her own seeing that she does not fit the traditional identity (Loots, 2006: 92-93). Beyond her internal struggles, Loots struggles to modify African identity in the perception of the wider public as she searches for funding for her dance company, as many people believe that a “real” South African company consist of all “black” members (ibid:91). Thus, social and political dangers surface. As Loots comments, “If

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<sup>10</sup>. Durban (Zulu, Thekwini, from Itheke meaning “bay/Lagoon”) is the largest city in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. It is also the third largest city in South Africa after Johannesburg and Cape Town. Durban is famous for being the busiest port in South Africa. It is also seen as one of the major centre of tourism because of the city’s warm subtropical climate and extensive beaches. ([www.durban.gov.za](http://www.durban.gov.za)).

European cultural exchange is so endlessly about “representational politics”, ... they are re-inventing the worst possible level of colonial patronage that does not allow the black African dancer to be anything but a poor recipient of aid” (ibid). By opening African dance to a variety of races and ethnicities, an independent African identity is allowed to flourish. Furthermore, a racial exclusive view of African dance does not allow reflection about what being African can entail in a modern setting. Clearly people who identify as “African” are scattered across the globe, and occupy various racial identities, and these people should be free through dance.

The “real” power of African dance comes in its ability to create collective identity which can hold political power. In several countries, African dance has been used as a tool for creating national unity during periods of political transition. One example of this is the foundation of the National Dance Company of Ghana. The Company was created to infuse African heritage into the system created through colonialism (Adinku, 2004:49-50). While deconstructing the “inferiority complex” created through colonial structures, the National Dance Company of Ghana served as “African Personality Consciousness” in sharing positive values of African society and understanding for African tradition (ibid). In the context of political transition in Ghana, the use of dance was particularly efficient, as it could

[...] portray various ideas and feelings of the indigenous peoples’ history, rituals, religions, moral codes, politics and social issues for easy assimilation by the masses. The majority of who could not read and write, but easily understand the messages portrayed in movement forms and dramatic expressions (ibid:52).

In the South African context, African dance is used to challenge deep rooted racial identities created through apartheid and to present the possibility for the reality of a “Rainbow Nation”<sup>11</sup>. One example of this is the Surialanga Dance Group, which fuses Indian and African dance techniques. The overarching effect of this combination of dances is a re-evaluation of the identities “laid down by apartheid state and its networks of (mainly) old patriarchs in the Indian community...the (choreographer) seemed to be encouraging cultural intercourse” (Radhakrishnan, 2003:530). Surialanga aims to create hope for the reality of a “Rainbow Nation” among the audience, and inspire them to continue to build a multiracial and cohesive South African identity (ibid:536).

Another positive political use of African dance in South Africa is its challenging of xenophobia through exchange and creation of collective identity. The concept of “makwerekwere”, a term used

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<sup>11</sup> A name coined by Bishop Desmond Tutu which means “a cultural diverse country, one nation made of many people. With 11 official languages, multiplicity of traditions and skin tones ranging from ebony to sunburnt pink” (www.southafrica.info).



to describe “native Africans” who have migrated to another African country, focuses on cultural and racial differences and promotes for prejudice and discrimination (Sichone, 2008:259). In sharing African dance among large populations, lines which separate identities under “makwerekwere” provide an arena for celebration and exchange. Through sharing and teaching dance, the “others” created through xenophobia become teachers and students. Separate identities based on claims to a nationality can be transformed into collective African identity subsuming the various dance techniques.

### ***Conclusion***

Today, African culture reaches far beyond the boundaries of the continent. It has been disseminated by a population that was dispersed around the globe. Amidst the scattered masses that foster an African identity, African dance allows multitudes of people to define and express their ties to Africa, while challenging previous constructions through self-definition. As cultures mix, African dance serves as a way that people can respect and understand what it means to hold individual and collective identities. Ultimately, spreading African dance through the world provides the opportunity to turn to tradition to discover and construct identity for changing times. The current generation has been categorised by a high level of globalisation, in a global “melting pot”. For some, this facet is alarming and destructive, as the borders between cultures narrow, and distinct cultural features become less pronounced. For African dance, this could mean the potential loss of traditional dance techniques, and the beginning of an African Contemporary style fusing traditional dance with western influences (Pather, 2006:14). However, if dance is a reflection of culture, the question arises whether isolating dance is an appropriate response; should dance not be “informed by a life lived within and of our communities at this time and in this place”? (ibid).

African dance extends beyond a “museum” approach because it is a teacher of culture, a tool for identity formation and a unifying factor. Beyond the political right of individuals to participate in this cultural expression, African dance provides a traditional centre from which cultures and identities can continue to develop and reshape while maintaining a connection to its roots and its vital spiritual essence. Most importantly, African dance extends beyond the stage and into political spheres and global communities, creating a stronger understanding of the self and others as it spreads.

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**THE FUTURE OF DANCE**  
**MERLE O'BRIEN**

**ABSTRACT**

*This paper is a transdisciplinary exploration of the future of dance in the global creative economy. It uses the future studies methodology of scenario planning to present four scenarios based a cursory examination of the sector's key driving forces and two unknown certainties - (1) whether we focus on somatic knowing through human movement or on the physical rigor of disciplining the body through dance; and (2) whether dance is influenced more by global or local (regional) cultural values. It also explores the underlying philosophies to dance in Cartesian and indigenous knowledge systems, focusing on Vedic, Ubuntu and Sino philosophy – the world's three dominant ancient cultures. Within the context of BRICS, the new economic power bloc created by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, the value of cultural dance forms may be unlocked. It presents similarities and differences in the way BRICS countries approach to the human body, aesthetics and spirituality at the root of their creativity, giving rise to different contexts for judging what is sacred, profane, beauty and art. As the fields of art and science move towards a common space in the global creative economy, paints a portrait of how how different dance forms may find or loose their foot in a new context and why the emerging future of dance may look remarkably similar to its most ancient past; as a spiritual science.*

**Introduction**

Dance is a way of moving the body rhythmically and repetitively to certain spatial patterns to express feelings, moods and values – in a unique language of aesthetic movement. All dance forms, whether Ballet, African, Indian or Hip-hop, are languages unique to the worldviews from which they emerge. When we judge a dance code, we judge it on the social conventions it reflects within a given context shaped by political ideology, economic value, social hegemony and spiritual beliefs.

As paradigms shift, we come to realize the extent to which the body may move differently in another space-time, seeking to work with or defy gravity; symbolically expressing the politics of freedom and space, the body's relationship to power (and divinity) and its ability to interpret and transform nature into art.

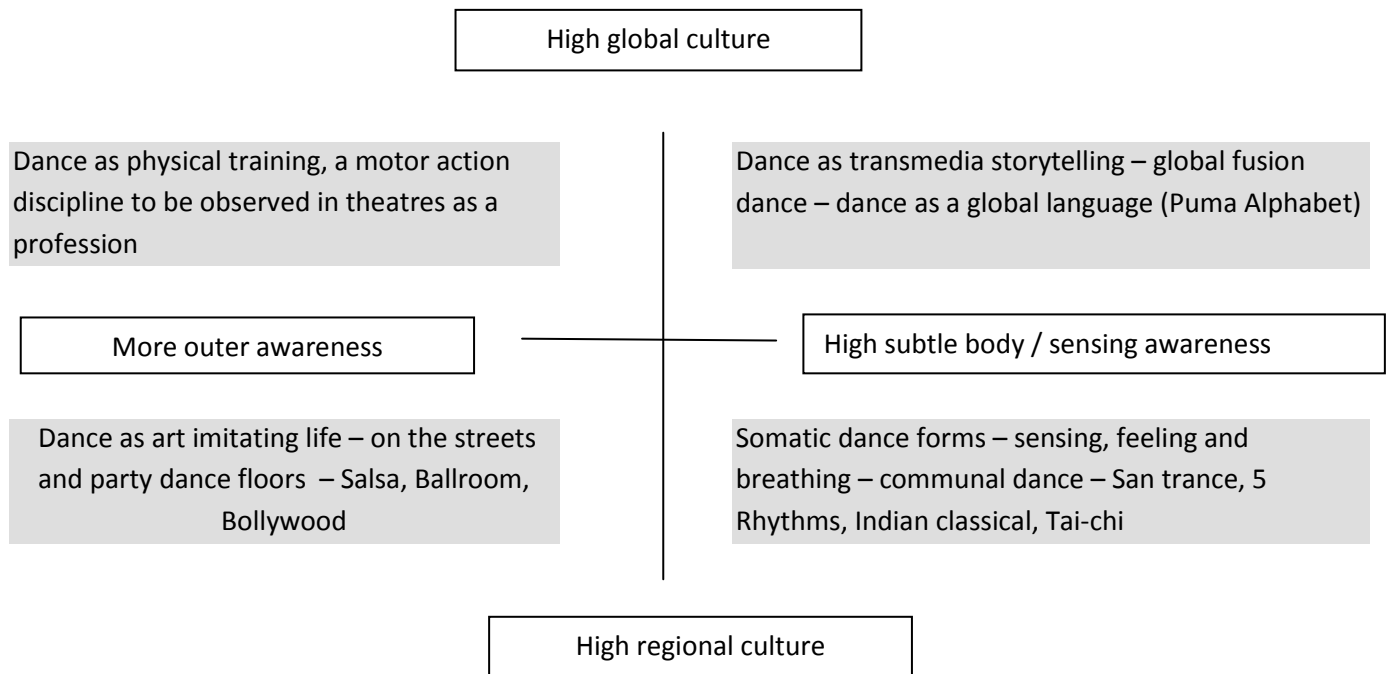
This paper presents a transdisciplinarity exploration of the future of dance using the future studies framework of scenario planning. It is structured in four sections. In the first section it introduces the scenario framework. In the second section it sets out key drivers shaping the growth of dance – the human need for self expression, scientific understanding of the body, environmental dynamics, cultural norms, social hegemony, evolving communication, technologies, political and economic models that might favour certain movement dynamics or give rise to new ones.

In the third section it explores each of the four scenarios in more detail and concludes in the fourth section with an overview of the similarities and differences in the BRICS dance forms. This provides the basis to understanding why and how it is plausible that dance will become more spiritual and more scientific in the future.

**A FRAMEWORK FOR DANCE SCENARIOS**

Scenario narratives are powerful metaphors through which to imagine the consequences of different choices and identify possible wildcards to inform strategy development. Four scenarios for dance using two unknown certainties for the future: (1) whether we focus on somatic knowing or on the physical rigor of disciplining the body through dance; and (2) whether dance is influenced more by global or local (regional) cultural values:

**Figure 1: Four scenarios for dance**

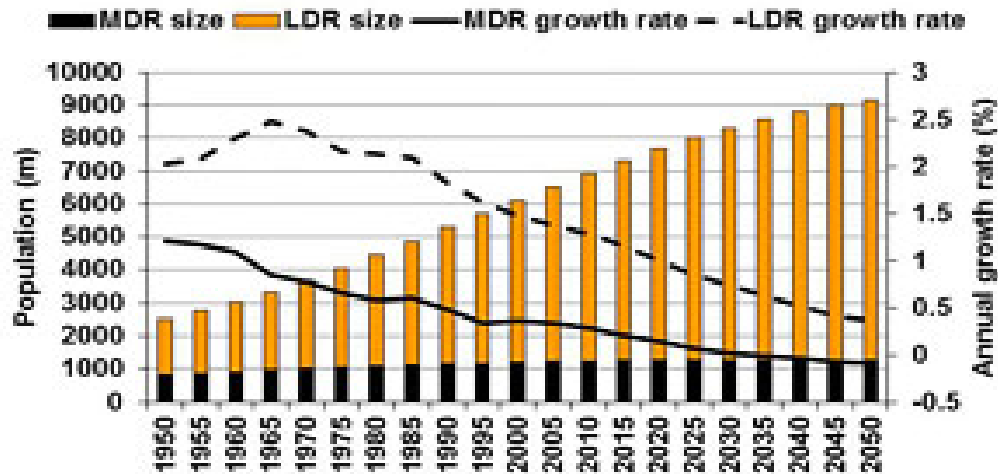


- Lower Right (LR) More sensing awareness / High regional culture e.g. San trance dance, Indian classical, Chinese Tai-chi rooted in spiritual philosophies – **Back to the Future scenario**
- Lower Left (LL) More outer awareness / high local culture e.g. Salsa, Ballroom, regional forms of party dance – **We all think we can dance scenario**
- Upper Left (UL) More outer awareness / high global culture e.g. Ballet, Contemporary, Hip Hop – **Dance as peak performance scenario**
- Upper Right (UR) High global culture / more sensing awareness e.g. Puma Alphabet – **I art, therefore I dance scenario**

KEY DRIVERS

**Demographics**

**Figure 2: UN Forecast population growth rate**



Source: United Nations, 2009.

By 2030 the world's population will have increased from 6-billion to just above 8-billion people; mainly due to growth in the developing world. As first world population growth rates decline, its older population is rapidly assuming a critical mass destined to burden state healthcare. By comparison, some 50 percent of Africa's population is under the age of 25, and 60 percent of South Africans are under the age of 40 (28-million).

According to the UK BUPA Report entitled 'Shall we dance: a review of the international evidence for the health benefits of dancing for older people' - by 2026 there will be over 10 million people aged 65 and over, in the UK alone. By contrast, Africa will have 600-million adults under the age of 40 with basic education, literacy and creative skills to offer the mainstream creative economy.

A landmark study reported in the New England Journal of Medicine adds to growing evidence that stimulating one's mind by dancing can ward off Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Much as physical exercise can keep the body fit, dancing also increases cognitive acuity at all ages. The 21-year study of senior citizens, 75 and older, was led by the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City and funded by the National Institute on Aging. Their method for objectively measuring mental acuity in aging was to monitor rates of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease. <sup>1</sup>

The study wanted to see if any physical activity (tennis or golf, swimming, bicycling, dancing, walking for exercise and doing housework) or cognitive recreational activity (reading books, writing for pleasure, doing crossword puzzles, playing cards and playing musical instruments) influenced mental acuity.

<sup>1</sup> <http://socialdance.stanford.edu/syllabi/smarter.htm> retrieved 23rd June 2013

They discovered that some activities had a significant beneficial effect. Other activities had none. The only physical activity to offer protection against dementia was frequent dancing - at **76%** the greatest risk reduction of any activity studied, cognitive or physical. while cognitive activity of reading proved a 35% reduced risk of dementia.

YOUTUBE LINKS: <HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=LACLBVMK1EU>

### ***Politics***

South Africa's dance policy falls within policies of arts and culture, education and the creative economy. The arts and culture white paper is under review for cultural enterprise development to appropriately meet the needs of artists and the market in an African context. Issues include creating a platform for artists, business acumen training, unionization, funding, academic development and the value chain. Dance education policy allocates 4 hours a week per term to dance students in grade 10 – 12. This adds up to 40 hours of dance a term; approximately 160 hours a year. The aim is to enable learners to pursue dancing and dance-related careers in the performing arts, entertainment, education, fitness and leisure industries. The curriculum policy makes no mention of dance research, human movement science or the linkages between dance and the creative arts, design thinking and sports science.

It must be noted that the creative sector was not scoped in South Africa's Vision 2030 Plan due to its relatively small size and existing contribution to GDP. If it had done so, the SA National Planning Commission may have recognized the creative economy as a key element of industrial policy and designed industrial development strategies to exploit the dynamism of the creative sector in generating growth in output, exports and employment – as recommended by the United Nations Creative Economy Report 2010.

20 Years after South Africa's democracy, cultural dance remains largely undervalued in the politics of art. India on the other hand, is a good example of a country that prioritized the reclamation and codification of its cultural dance forms post-independence and is reaping the benefits of that strategy today in the form of cultural tourism.

The British Government is an example of a developed country that is investing significantly into creativity education with a focus on human movement. Recognizing the economic value and social contribution of dance to holistic national wellness, it is promoting dance as a way of curbing the impact of its aging population on tax coffers and the national healthcare system.

The British Council is actively collaborating with African dancers, musicians, artists and playwrights to strengthen professional standards and cultural knowledge sharing. Foreign interest and funding into Africa's dance sector is growing.

Local productions such as 'Mix it Up' with Heal the Hood Hip Hop dancers collaborating with UK dance talent, provides evidence of ways in which a culture of global dance fusion is being promoted.

At the same time, regional dance forms are receiving more attention by local and provincial departments of arts and culture; for the value it contributes to regional cultural tourism and local entertainment. There is a rise in the appreciation for African, San, Indian and other cultural dance forms notably the Cape Minstrels, in local events such as the Cape Town Carnival as well as internationally. This is in line with the global experiential marketing phenomena that people are attaching more value to culturally rich, sensorial, immersive experiences that are connecting, meaningful and unique.

Global consumers have a growing appreciation for African cultural dance forms that are unique than local renditions of European dance forms. The principle applies for all forms of creative, performing and fine art as well as the field of architecture and design.

A good example of this is the World Design Capital Cape Town 2014 (WDC CT) initiative in which ICSID – the International Council of Society of Industrial Designers – hope to be inspired by the local cultural aesthetic and philosophical principles and notions of what makes good design in an African context than to see evidence that Africans have a global design aesthetic. I serve on the curatorial panel for WDC CT 2014 and recognize that design thinking in dance (i.e. choreography) has been overlooked and in the first round of project proposals, there was not one dance submission.

My own recent appointment as member of UNESCO CID, the highest dance policy making body in the world, is further evidence of the growing recognition and value of cultural dance forms in Africa, especially in the context of BRICS.

### ***Economics***

The UN Report notes that the world market for live performing arts generates an estimated \$40 billion in box office revenues. This excludes collateral promotional materials. In addition, dance contributes economic value via the growing number of dance schools providing professional training and classes for self development.

Dance also shares linkages in the value chain of cultural tourism, carnivals and festivals, the experiential marketing and PR events sector, television and viral advertising, music videos, activist flash mobs, fashion shows, the booming growth of television dance shows, dance films (notably Bollywood), industry dance competitions and tourism promotion activities.

While the UN report makes scant direct reference to dance, world exports of recorded music tripled from \$9.6 billion in 2002 to \$26 billion in 2008. This spectacular increase — 17.8 per cent average annual growth — represents the fastest acceleration among all creative industries exports. Despite a 12 percent global contraction of trade during the global financial crisis, world exports of creative goods and services continued to grow at 14% - reaching \$592 billion in 2008 — more than double their 2002 level — whereas the Green Economy is growing at around 3.5% a year.

Present debate on the economics of creativity is centered on whether the six fundamental principles of classical economic theory hold true in the field of creativity. According to leading transdisciplinarity



researchers of the creative and knowledge economies, including UCT GSB Dean Prof. Walter Baets, they do not; the law of diminishing returns inverts into the law of increasing returns when one deals with an intangible product such as creativity, knowledge and computer code.

The work of John Howkins on the emergence of a new global creative class and Prof. Paul Romers' groundbreaking work on New Growth Theory provides useful models by which to understand the potential for dance IP (intellectual property) to grow increasingly more valuable in the digital world of e-commerce.

According to Dr KK Mishra, Vice Chancellor of Sri Sri University and one of India's leading econophysicists, New Growth Theory (NGT) might also be understood through the scientific principles of thermodynamics; where heat (energy) moves from high to low pressure in the same way as creative capital.

If the economic principles to creativity are different to the industrial economy, the creative economy will also have a fundamentally different structure. Again, this appears to be the case.

The industrial economy comprises singular sources of origination fed into mass production and distributed in linear logistics patterns governed by time and motion to fulfill the demand of a mass of consumers.

The creative economy on the other hand comprises multiple sources of origination embedded in creative products, produced by a small number of professionals with access to multiples avenues for distribution via e-commerce to a global market of consumers.

### ***BRICS Political Economy***

According to Sir John Haggerty at the closing session of Design Indaba 2013 held in Cape Town in March 2013, there is no longer a developed world against which to speak of a developing world; but one world collapsing and another one rising.

The IMF forecasts growth in Europe and the US economies at less than 1.5 percent for the next ten years, with figures for Brazil, Russia and India closer to eight percent. China and India are set to become the first and third largest economies by 2050, with Brazil and Russia capturing the fifth and sixth spots, and South Africa at number 21.

China has overtaken the US as Africa's biggest investor. In 2011, China-Africa trade reached a high of more than \$160 billion in 2011, up 28 percent from 2010 - and the volume for 2012 is estimated to have surpassed \$200 billion.

At the end of 2011, China's direct investment in Africa reached almost \$15 billion, with more than 2,000 Chinese companies currently invested in Africa. How will the BRICS architecture of power change social hegemony as ideology in relation to dance?

As I write this, President Obama is en route to South Africa to meet with President Zuma to discuss the Agoa agreement (the African Growth and Opportunity Act). This US trade initiative will offer duty-free access to selected goods from 41 African countries. How might this redefine US relations with Africa and open new opportunities for creative collaborations in art and science?

### **Science**

The recent discovery of the Higgs Boson is especially relevant to dance and yet it has largely gone unnoticed and remains unspoken in academia. This discovery, of the last of the predicted particles within the standard model of particle physics, the Higgs - is the mechanism responsible for the mass of subatomic particles. What this changes is our understanding of the relationship between gravity, space and time. Science now knows how the material world is constructed into form as invisible data particles (dark matter) are transformed into matter, energy and information.

What it implies for dance is a shift in how we encounter and use space; a paradigm shift in the realization that there is something we are dancing with, as if sculpting space, transforming the information field as bodies of energy, sound and light moves through it. We realize that we are dancing, living and breathing in a rich field of information accessible at the most subtle realms – something the ancients understood and used dance as a way to access this field underlying the universe. As modern science unravels the mysteries of this field of consciousness, it is unlocking the door to the science of spirituality.

This scientific truth – of the existence of a perennial information field - is embodied in Indian mythology as Shiva - the full potential energy of the universe. The Goddess Shakti is a mythological interpretation of kinetic energy by which all ideas manifest into form. Shakti may be likened to 'the god particle', Nataraj as Shiva, is the lord of the dance - by whose rhythm the universe is kept in constant motion by the primordial sound of Om.

In a departure from normative thinking, in 2006 Yale University established a dance curriculum to enhance collaborations in the arts and science. A research project is underway between its departments of physics, dance and photography to discover the Higgs Boson as part of project Reintegrate. Recently Yale hosted an ideas festival of dance to explore the trope of discovery in science and art through the Higgs boson – hailing it as a major breakthrough that has rocked the field of particle physics and beyond. The session culminated in the creation of movement studies and photographs.

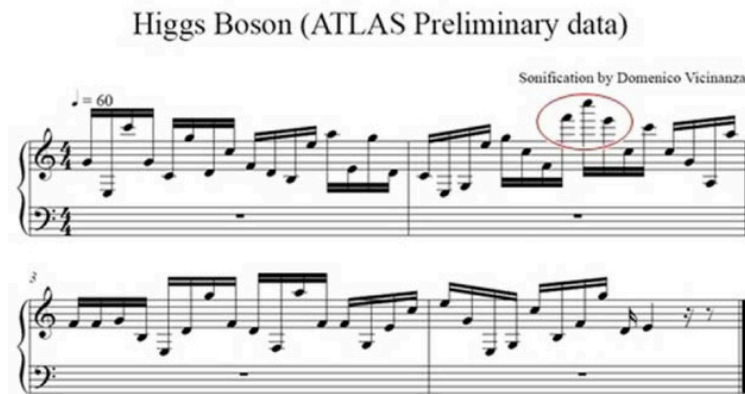
At the Higgs Boson Headquarters of CERN – the European Organization for Particle Physics – scientists recently put the God particle to music to explore movement in the space where time stands still.<sup>2</sup> (<http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/the-higgs-boson-interpreted-as-music>) CERN'S mission says that

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/17/cern-art-strangels-dancers\\_n\\_1679805.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/17/cern-art-strangels-dancers_n_1679805.html)

"Particle physics and the arts are inextricably linked. Both are ways to explore our existence – what it is to be human and our place in the universe."

**Figure 2: Music score to the Higgs Boson**



In South Africa, local dance research projects at this realm of high thinking are stunted at the ceiling of academia locked into the silos and rigid structures with a low tolerance for transdisciplinarity research. For this reason, many South African PhD scholars are forced to either dilute research projects to accommodate the existing paradigm or study abroad where our thinking holds its own among others ahead of the curve. Ultimately, it is a lose-lose situation for all - the scholar, university, NRF and country as a whole.

### **Technology**

According to Moore's Law, we will reach human-machine intelligence parity by 2029 and by 2045 reach the singularity; when human intelligence will subsume to machine. The creative destruction of the industrial age of oil and steel is consistent with Kondratieff wave theory pointing towards a world of unbridled creativity and future singularity on the exponential effect art, science, technology and economics converging in creativity.

We see the emergence of this trend in the rise of dance in viral and digital space, 3D dance, interactive apps for dance and the ability for an avatar to do in cyberspace what the body is unable to achieve in a space-time-gravity compact.

In the technological realm, Web 2.0 is shaping the future theatre for dance and expanding the power for every dancer to be a global brand. Dancers have never been so empowered to monetize her/ his talent as a Prosumer – a producer and consumer of creative capital. However, the dancer of the future needs to be as techno-savvy as she is agile to market through the channels and touchpoints available such as Youtube, Vimeo, Bloggs, Vloggs, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest etc. The world of the critic shaping dance gives way to the citizen journalist where the dancer has own media, mass media and earned media strategies.

Technology is both augmenting and in some cases replacing human capability – Wii, 3D apps, holographic technologies, I-Phone, I-Pads etc. Now anyone who has access to the internet can learn dance by Skype and Youtube. In India, I recently met an enterprising yoga teacher who offers tailor-made yoga classes online that operates on a programme that selects a set of postures based on a short upfront questionnaire. The real beauty is while she is honing her craft in India, she is earning dollars on her IP and travelling the world. The empowered dancers of the future will do the same.

### ***Intellectual Property***

In the legal sphere the issue is about ownership of intellectual property. In the creative economy, the value of dance is directly related to its potential to create intellectual property that is enhanced by a value chain and its distribution to impact the national economy in terms of employment and contribution to GDP.

At the recent Music Exchange conference in Cape Town, SAMRO acknowledged that the IP laws and royalty policies to support the creative sector are in disarray. According to the UN Creative Economy Report 2010, the WIPO secretariat has been developing a new methodology and data sets for measuring the impact of copyright- based creative industries. While dance choreography and music is protected under Creative Commons, the laws for embedded creative content are highly complex and require the specialized assistance of IP lawyers to assist dance creatives.

### ***Academia***

The number of South African PhD dance scholars leading innovation in the field of dance is also an indicator of the future and well as perpetuating the intellectual development of dancers. The historical pedagogical approach to dance in South Africa has largely focused on the physical body with little emphasis on the spiritual, emotional and inter-disciplinary intellectual development. It would appear that the best is extracted from dancer's body before he/she reaches 35; forcing the dancer to build a second career off stage.

The situation in India is vastly different where the dancer's emotional and spiritual quality enhances as she matures and the focus of beauty shifts from the physical form to the richness of life experience she embodies through her dance. India's dance pedagogy is the Guru Parampara Shishya tradition where the lineage of the dance guru is upheld. Today, leading Odissi dance maestro Dr Minothi Mishra continues to perform abhinaya at age 70 to standing ovations from theatre crowds.

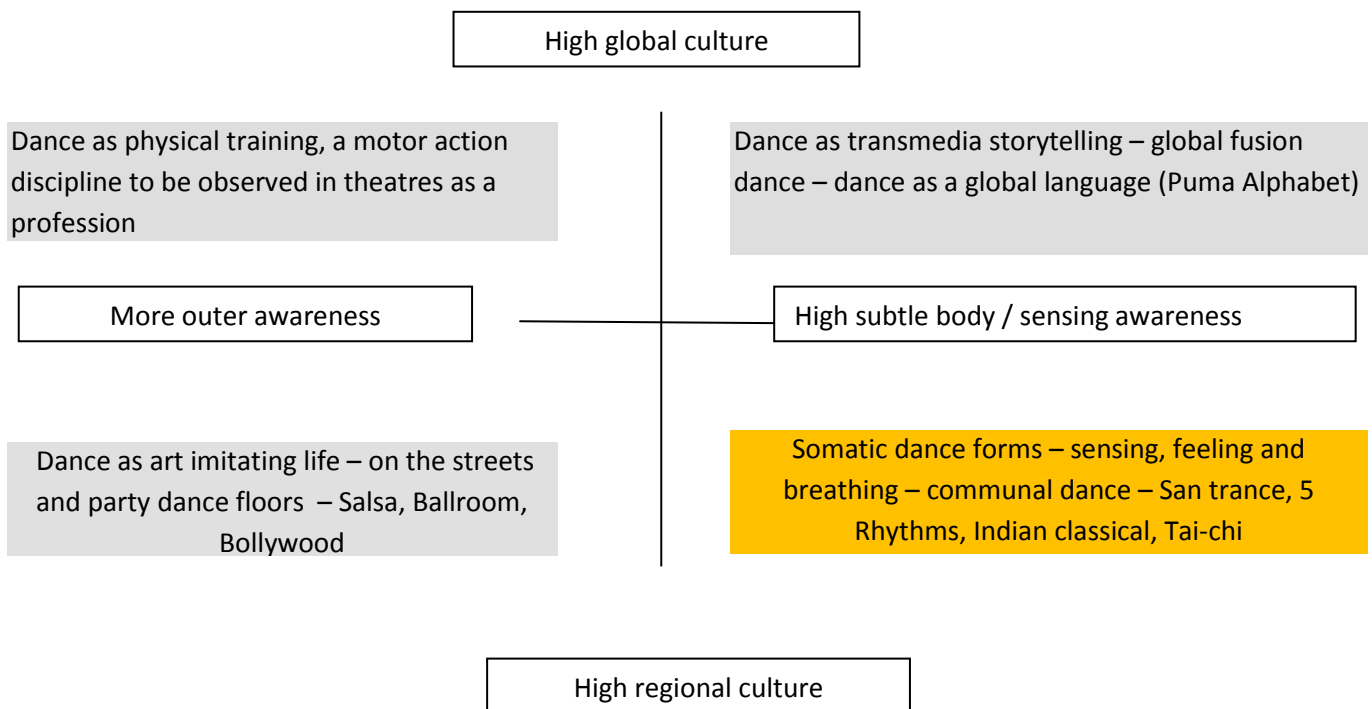
South Africa's National Research Foundation cannot appreciate the value that a dance PhD scholar brings, especially in the absence of an established research tradition and within the context of its research priorities in hard science. As a result, dance scholars whose work can stand on the global stage are unable to find local supervisors to guide them. In addition, the local university system is not set up to support transdisciplinarity research that explores new avenues for dance to outside of education, psychology, phenomenology and performance studies.

Therefore, dance research in South Africa struggles to make its way into the harder sciences to fill the knowledge gaps in sports and human movement science, ergonomics, spiritual leadership, organizational performance and movement dynamics, experiential marketing, cultural aesthetics, biokinetics and design thinking to name a few. As futurists at the Oxford Martin School of the Future debate the future of humanities, it is plausible to say that as creativity becomes more algorithmic in the fifth wave, creativity will become an interdisciplinary lifescience and dance will assume a heavier scientific weight of truth.

SCENARIOS

**SCENARIO 1 - LOWER RIGHT QUADRANT: BACK TO THE FUTURE**

**Figure 3: The Lower Right Quadrant**



Here, we see evidence of the shift toward holistic, consciousness living in the rise of the Green and Creative Economy. As people look for ways to live with more dynamic equilibrium, we are seeing the explosive growth of spirituality, wellness, conscious living and corporate wellness programmes to bring the body into greater balance. Somatic forms of movement thrives in appreciation of dance as a medium of self expression, to educate the emotions, unblock the imagination, enhance sensitivity, expand range of freedom and awareness of boundaries & choice. The ancient dances of the east are Spiritual in nature, codified on an axis of truth that human beings are made of a body, mind and spirit.

Drawing on this principle we may understand why and how in the context of BRICS the future of dance may look remarkably similar to our most ancient past when the art of dance was codified on the science of spirituality.

***Society in Dynamic equilibrium***

In the ever increasing pace of complexity and change, the value of dynamic equilibrium in creative and spiritual leadership cannot be underestimated. Through dance, we understand social life as movement. We live in a society of performance where its structural foundation is choreography – whether applied to the movement of people in a company, in a city, in dance. Turn down the volume and the language of expression of society is movement.

All creativity, whether visible or invisible, is motion. All structure is crystallized creativity. All motion involves processes of matter, energy and information that creates meaning in a given context. In this sense, we are all dancing to a greater or lesser extent in the choreography of society.

***Enabling freedom through Social Movement Policy***

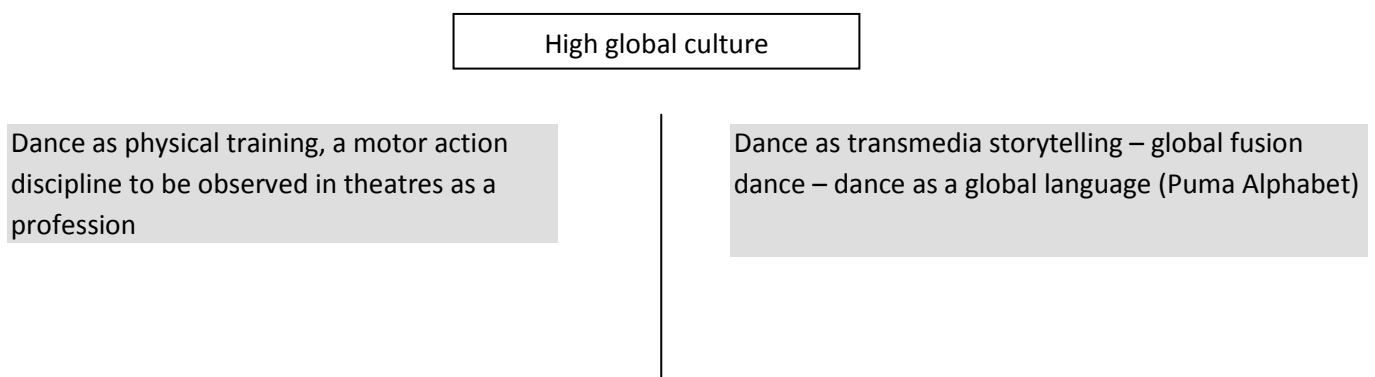
Political control and degrees of personal freedom rests on the organization of society in time and space, the movement of labour, physical products, access to resources and technologies and the circulation of ideas. Social movement policy is the aorta of social policies for democratic freedoms and should not be defined by those who understand the full range of human movement potential.

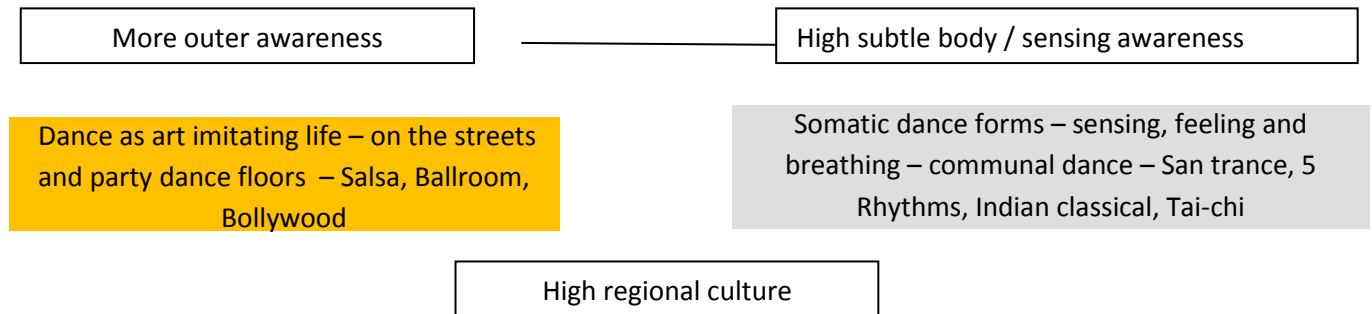
***A Dance pedagogy of the Oppressed***

For somatic dance forms to have a stronger future it would need to engage in a process of deskilling and reskilling dance educators locked in the paradigm of dance as civilization of the body – to help Cartesian thinkers recognize the value of culture as ‘a cultivation of mind, body spirit’ balance. In such a context, dance pedagogy shifts to find roots in the work of Paulo Frere’s pedagogy of the oppressed, Augusto Baol’s Theatre of the Oppressed and the 2000 year old Natyashastra, the Vedic treatise on the science of dance.

**SCENARIO 2: Lower Left Quadrant: WE ALL THINK WE CAN DANCE**

**Figure 4: The Lower Left Quadrant**





Strictly come dancing attracted 10-million viewers on BBC1 each week – and the explosive growth of dance TV is a telling phenomena – with shows such as Dance India Dance, So you think you can dance, Britain’s got talent, - all signs of the growing popular appeal of dance talent as an innate human ability.

### ***Social activism***

Social movements of change are increasing freedom, pluralism and democracy. In this context, dance is going mainstream - no longer confined to the stage or owned by small minority but appreciated on the streets, in dance halls and within communities - performed by everyday people. A good local example is the recent Artscape production – AWETHU – exposing regional cultural philosophy of Ubuntu in a communal performance incorporating Indian and African dance, Afrikaans opera singing, poetry and women well into their sixties.

### ***Cape dance culture***

At the recent Cape Town Arts and Craft Indaba, the dance sector was largely under-represented. It is evident years of funding focus on ‘civilized dance’ as Ballet under apartheid has left little room in the City for its cultural dance forms to take root and grow. And here I include the Cape Minstrels, San Bushmen dance, Indian and Hip Hop which has had to support itself from the days of break-dancing in Safmarine containers on the Cape Flats in the 1980’s.

### ***Religious traditions***

South Africa has a rich and diverse interfaith tradition among Christian, African, Islam, Hindu and Jewish communities. African dance is intrinsic to the spiritual belief systems of African philosophy as is Indian dance. I’ve partaken with Muslim women in circular dance at Thikkar prayer in a Mosque – and dancers in St Georges Cathedral are not an uncommon sight. In the City, spiritual dance forms as an act of worship is becoming accepted in churches - no longer as foreign and frowned upon. In fact, as an Indian classical dancer I have performed for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town on a number of occasions - performing an item to Odissi music first and then repeating it to English gospel to translate the meaning in a new context.

### ***Cape Town Festivals***

As the value of dance to cultural tourism is increasingly recognized, the number of cultural festivals in the City is growing – notably the Cape Town Carnival, the Holi Festival, North Sea Jazz Festival, Diwali celebrations and the new Festival of Lights – all ushering in a wave of appreciation for regional dance forms to be celebrated.

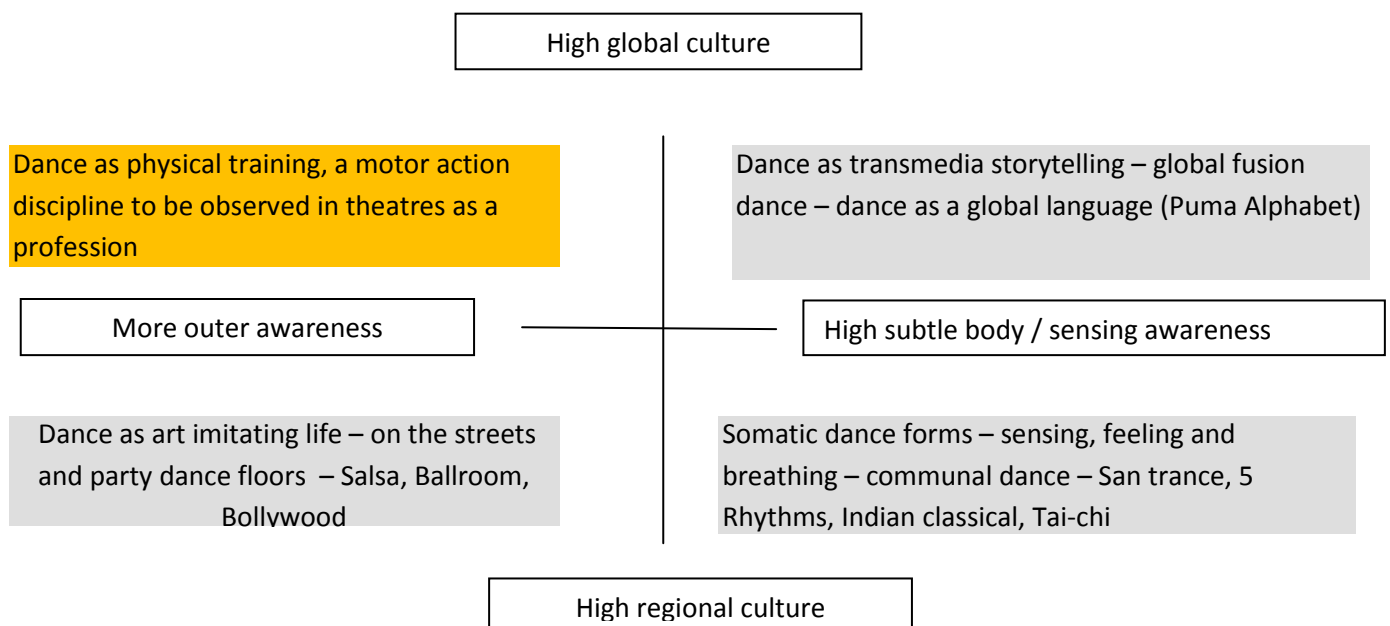
**SCENARIO 3 - UPPER LEFT QUADRANT: DANCE AS PEAK PERFORMANCE SCENARIO**

***Dance and sports science***

30 Years ago it would have taken some doing to convince a medical doctor that there is a science to sport. Prof. Tim Noakes, South Africa’s leading sports scientists and one of my PhD co-supervisors shares how in those early days his own professors laughed at the notion of sports science saying ‘sports is PT – physical training - there is no science in that Tim’, he recalls one professor saying.

Fast forward to 2010 and sports science is a multi-billion dollar industry with specialized sub-fields in sports psychology, biokinetics etc. and continued research funded by the healthcare sector driving its continued growth

**Figure 5: The Upper Left Quadrant**



As scientific studies prove the emotional, physical, medical and mental benefits of dance – such as its ability to reduce the chances of Alzheimer’s and as new techniques enable us to map the relationship between blood-sugar levels, neuro-muscular entrainment and creativity outputs, dance is entering the sphere of biokinetics and morphing the field of sports science into human movement science.

Another fascinating insight in this direction is contained in the book Power versus Force by Dr David Hawkins who explains his biokinetics research into calibrating the neuro-muscular response to 500

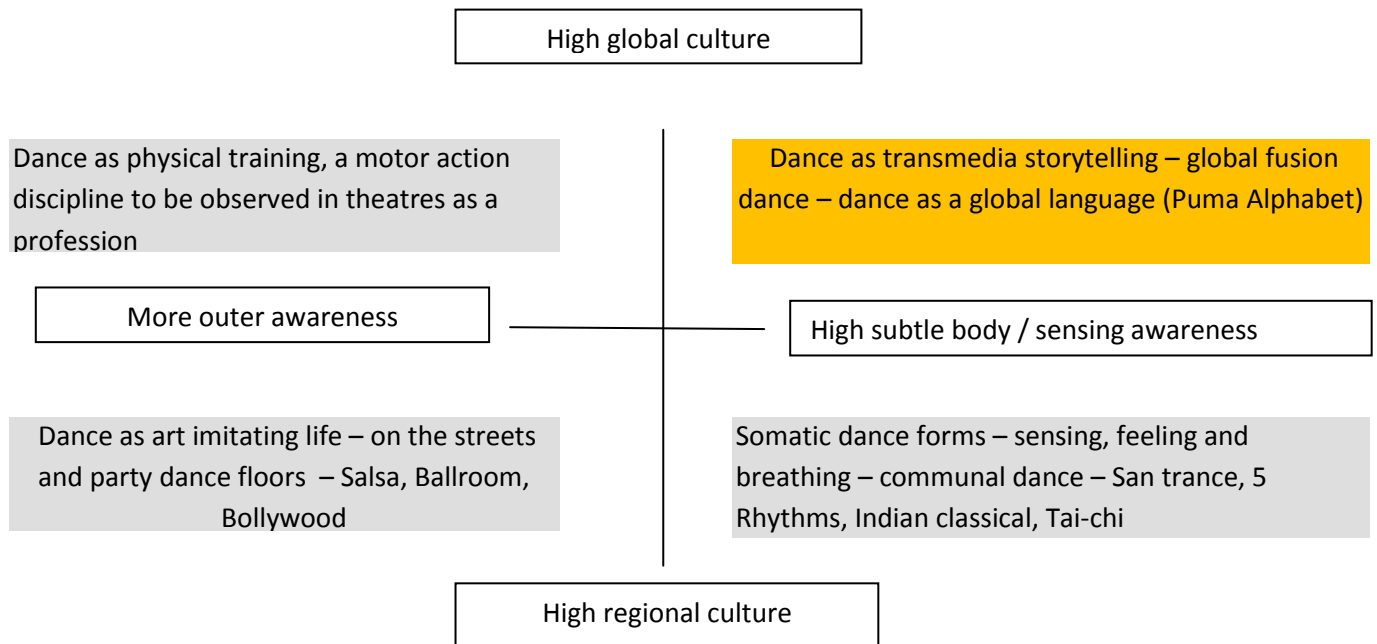


emotive states. The findings of this work calls into question the subjective nature of emotions and points towards an objective way of knowing the emotional value and content of art in the future. It is not unthinkable that barely 16 years from today when the creative economy becomes mainstream, that dance will become a multi-billion rand industry in which survival of the fittest will directly relate to peak creative performance.

In this context, the dancer's status in society will rise from the lowest to one of the highest, consumers will pay specialists to make them more creative – and audiences will pay to see the body in peak performance on stage.

**SCENARIO 4 - UPPER RIGHT QUADRANT: I ART, THEREFORE I AM SCENARIO**

**Figure 6: The Upper Right Quadrant**



**Global dance culture**

As people are living more mobile lives, so is business shifting from huge production plants in favor of mobile offices, mobile restaurants, mobile homes – the suitcase business is booming with mass migration across countries and continents. As a result, a hybrid cultures are cross-pollinating ideas and increasing the diversity of expression of the human gene pool. Global sports apparel companies recognize the power of dance to speak a common language to common lifetribe of consumers with a

similar value-set and dance is big business to them. Here, Puma is clearly ahead of the game – a good example is the Puma Alphabet of dance and the way Puma is using dance itself in transmedia storytelling to capture the evolving story of dance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***The Value of Dance Choreography***

As with all forms of intellectual property, conceptual thinking is where the real value is – the strength of the original idea and the scientific principles on which that is built. But to take that idea into production requires vast sums of money which is why choreography remains undervalued.

In scientific terms, choreography is the science of space, time and gravity – as an expanded capacity to know the information field we are dancing in. For this reason, Indian dance is based on design principles of Vaastu; not unlike directional energies used in San and African dance seeking to work closer to gravity. Choreography is not the art of making dances (a directional set of tools), it is a generic set of capacities to be applied to any kind of production, analysis or organization.<sup>3</sup> It's a complex means of approaching and knowing the world.

As we shift into the new creative economy in which economic value is based on the creation and circulation of abstract values, ideas, the symbolic instead of material goods, movement and interactions (relations and iterations) are king, not oil and steel. Choreographers who are scientists will map the future space in multidimensional ways.

### **3D Dance Interactive Systems**

Dance is increasingly being recognized for its ability to create new user experiences in cyberspace – for viral advertising, music videos and 3D digital media. At the forefront of global creativity research sector are projects in interactive systems, experience laboratories, digital projection techniques and transmedia storytelling. These are opening a whole new realm of value for dance to create highly valuable connections between brands and people in cyberspace. The danger in this is that over time, the extrapolation of this trend may directly lead to the singularity.

### **CONCLUSION**

I conclude with a brief exploration of the similarities and differences in the way BRICS countries approach the human body, aesthetics and spirituality by looking at the root of their philosophies toward creative art forms using multimedia presentation. In the attached powerpoint, I attempt to show how the new BRICS context might give rise to new notions for judging what is sacred, profane, beauty and art in global dance culture. (Powerpoint)

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<sup>3</sup> <http://spangbergianism.wordpress.com/2012/09/13/seventeen-points-for-the-future-of-dance/>

According to 20th century philosopher Thomas Kuhn, new paradigms emerge when new ideas, perhaps ones previously discarded are formed in a new context, and gains its own new followers - as an intellectual "battle" takes place between the followers of the new paradigm and hold-outs of the old. Real creativity research will by its very nature depart from the pedestrian path of knowledge and unlock new pathways of hope for a field. Due to time, resources and access constraints, only a relatively  **cursory** examination of the drivers of dance was possible. A proper study would cost tens of thousands of rands, a research team of futurists and qualified team of development economists to map. Hopefully, this paper is the first step in that direction. This scenarios mapping exercise attempts to show the sector's potential and how choices we make today will create the future of the next generation of dancers. It provides food for thought for all forms of dance within their unique socio-economic context in relation to the two identified unknown certainties. Some will inevitably thrive in the future by default and others will need to proactively take steps to redesign their future according to various policy contexts and stages of economic development. Ultimately, this paper puts the power of choice in the hands of the individual dancer; who has never been more empowered as a person brand in the creative economy against a bigger backdrop of the rising value of dance in human movement science.

They say that any idea, in science or art or dance, is not hard enough unless it scares you to death, yet propels you pursue in the search for truth. I conclude by saying that if it scares you to conceive a future in which there is a science to dance, this paper would have served well to plant that idea.

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# CHOREOGRAPHING THE PERFORMER-CREATOR: A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE PERFORMER IN A CREATIVE CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS

Nicola Elliott

This paper is an attempt to make sense of an experience that I have when creating choreography on and through the bodies of others. The most recent occurrence of this was during the process of creating *Run!*, a forty-five minute dance work, which I choreographed with four dancers and one pianist.<sup>1</sup> The experience that I am trying to make sense of is what I can now put into words as essentially my desire to craft performance, as opposed to “just steps”. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with all the dance and theatre innovations (particularly in the ‘post-choreographic’ field) that have come before us, this is not groundbreaking. The question is what process does one use to create a performance that uses the dance language in order to transcend that language? Or, how to find performance that goes beyond steps via a work that is completely made up of them?<sup>2</sup> The process I discuss explores the notion of the performer-creator, which in itself is interesting, but also epitomises the spirit of choreographic investigation (as opposed to execution) which is key to crafting presence.

As a subject within the research, I need to contextualise this with my own journey through dance. Growing up I had a love affair with movement, but it was very clearly something that I located in my own body. It was only when I came to university that my interest shifted from my own kinetic experience to having a creative movement experience through directing the bodies of other people. What became prevalent for me was the desire to choreograph not just their bodies, but their whole performance. My entry to Choreography was via a Drama Department (Rhodes Drama Department). I had every reason to pick directing over choreography. Yet, what most excited me artistically was seeing an interaction between the real performer in space and time, and the structuring language of movement.<sup>3</sup> This interplay between the real and the representational has the potential to create a sometimes subtle yet powerful exploration of presence. This is my first entry point into the conference theme. My choreographic desire to create, via performance, an awareness of the here-and-now so that we are not just audiences, we are witnesses to an experience that, no matter how many times the show runs or how tightly set the choreography is, cannot be reproduced exactly the same way, because that exact experience is subject to space and time. In other words, its ephemerality as an experience is heightened and celebrated.

My second entry point into the theme of Dance and Spirituality is in the process of creating work. I feel that if you want to create presence, you need to take the performer on a journey that activates their creative side. This process requires that the end product is not completely predetermined. I am not

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<sup>1</sup> *Run!* premiered at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in July (one week before presenting this paper). The performers: Adriana Jamisse, Thalia Laric, Joy Millar, Jori Snell and Mareli Stolp (pianist).

<sup>2</sup> In the case of *Run!*, this aspect is heightened through the frequent use of unison.

<sup>3</sup> I should also add that acclaimed choreographer Gary Gordon was at the time HOD of the department and his classes were alluring and inspiring.

talking about collaboration. Collaboration is when artists come together and together make the piece. This for me is not the case. I retain authorship over the work, but in the process I require the performers not simply to execute, but also to create. This is not only for the generation of ideas, but also in an attempt to locate and craft presence as the final performance product. In this paper, I discuss what that means using the concept of the performer-creator.

In choreographing the performer, not just the performer's body, there are various methods. For instance, the performer can be engaged in the work in a very content-based way, such as with DV8 Physical Theatre creations in which performers created material based on the content of their lives (for instance their sexual orientation) and this was explored thematically in the work. In one process, choreographer Lloyd Newson accounts that the group spent a week purely talking about how societal perceptions of sexual orientation affect their lives. The content of this talking strongly influenced the content of the work.

The performer can also be engaged in a subtler way and this is directly through their bodies. On a practical level, what I am talking about here is the choreographer coming to rehearsal with tasks as opposed to steps. These tasks can be structured improvisation or creative movement tasks, or as one performer (Laric) said once, "movement problem solving".<sup>4</sup> I approach this from a choreographic perspective that explores the perceived (and false) duality between so-called humanism (arguably where DV8 work abides) and formalism.

We tend to think of formalism as dance that separates itself from the outside world. The prevailing image is the Cunningham leotarded dancer whose physical capacities are so vast that the human pedestrian aspect (the part that perhaps recognisably reflects the audience member) is only the smallest element presented on stage. However, if we think about it more deeply, this is revealed as not the case at all. The relevant conceptualisation of formalism here is offered by Roger Copeland (1990) who argues that formalism allows the dancing body to be more itself than ever. He writes that in this understanding of formalism

"the meaning of the dance is concentrated on the sensuous surface of the dancer's body; the meaning is entirely *there*, which is to say, here and now, in this very space that we (as audience members) inhabit together. The dancers aren't representing another reality, whose essence lies elsewhere, beyond these particular bodies in some other place and time. [...] Formalism is an exercise in seeing what is *really there*, right in front of your eyes" (1990:38 emphasis in the original).

In this formalism, all that is presented is on the stage already. But that does not mean that formalism is a departure from politics or reality or the outside world. Rather, as Copeland argues, formalism is a tool to enable us in our individual capacity to relieve ourselves of applying the same meaning over and over to everything we see. He writes, "Formalism can help free us from the tyranny of ourselves" (ibid:39).

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<sup>4</sup> I am aware especially after the last few days (of the conference), that an area of research that would support and unpack this is somatic theory for tracking how the production of movement knowledge (ie choreography) journeys through the performer over the duration of the rehearsal period. This would be a valuable area to explore for future investigations into this field.

Formalism in dance can be a type of vulnerable honesty that we all share in whether we are performers, choreographers or audience members as it demands us to look at what is really there as opposed to its symbolic reference.

In attempting to cross the humanism-formalism divide, my interest is in placing the *individual* within a sort of formalism so that the audience is (hopefully) drawn in to the performer within the here-and-now. This entails using formalism to create recognisably human presence (as opposed to the Cunningham figures referred to above), and thus I stand on the shoulders of the likes of Belgian choreographer Ana Teresa De Keersmaeker, whose work is my consistent inspiration. Looking at her work, we see the perceived divide between formalism and humanism disappear or at least become problematized.

What process is best to achieve this and how does the performer behave?

I have experimented (not always strictly) with a process in which the performance is found in and through the body and whole being of the performer via the journey/process created by the choreographer. Theoretically, this performer is not interchangeable with another, without the reading of the performance being altered. Along with technique, this performer brings her 'whole' self to the rehearsal room, and is engaged by the choreographer not simple as a vessel for technique and design, but also as an agent and subject of personal, political, spiritual, physical and psychological aspects, to name only a few aspects of the 'whole' self. These elements are engaged not only through discussion and opinions, but more subtly, through creative movement problem solving. This role can be called the performer-creator.

Theatre practitioner and academic Rob Murray's MA thesis (2002) explores the notion of the performer-creator in the arena of mime-based contemporary performance. The key characteristics are

- This performer is highly trained, but is not bound by whatever technique she is trained in (2002:71)
- She is not (merely) a puppet for the concepts and visions of the director (ibid:74);
- As part of her process, she looks at herself and others in relation to the world (ibid:72 - 73).

I consider this in terms of dance.

The performer-creator is not bound by technique. In dance we have bodies which uphold tradition. Their focus is to embody accurately the designs, movements structures and philosophical principles of a certain tradition be it traditional western dance forms like ballet, traditional African or Asian dance forms, etc. The aim here is not innovation but the preservation of tradition and the individual body is disciplined into finding and nourishing that tradition within themselves. For the performer-creator, technique and tradition are only a set of tools which she can use (or not use) in her aim to discover new ideas. She may have accumulated several different sets of tools over her life time: she may be, for instance, a skilled contemporary dancer (one set of tools), but she may also have travelled to South America and learnt the tango (another tool). She may have learnt how to cook from her mother, or certain lullabies from her grandfather. She may be fluent in isiXhosa, English, and Italian (more tools).

This performer does not come into a creative process blinkered into thinking only certain creative ideas are relevant. She comes with a sense of play and open possibility – bringing with her, and making available to the process, all (or many) of the facets of herself. As our great South African performer-creator in theatre Andrew Buckland has often said about creating theatre, “If you want to come to the party, you have to bring your toys”.<sup>5</sup> Creating theatre (and dance) in this way requires a sense of play and a set of skills (toys) – and you cannot have one without the other.

The next point is that the performer is not (merely) a puppet in the hands of the choreographer or director. The performer-creator has input in the process which creates the final product. There are varying degrees about how much input one might have ranging from full collaboration to no collaboration, as previously discussed.

The final point from Murray’s working definition is that the performer-creator considers herself and others in relation to the world. She is a subject and an object in the process. Murray writes about this in terms of character portrayal, but it is just as relevant from a formalist (which, from the performer’s angle, is a somatic or kinetic) perspective. Just as the performer-creator does not blinker out any potentially exciting tools, so she also engages her whole being in the process of creating the work. She considers her body in relation to the elements of movement (time, space, and weight) and to politics, age, technique, environment, etc. Her whole experience (her ontological self, not just her body) becomes potentially relevant for the creation of the work. It is her job as performer to make these aspects available where possible. What is her whole experience made up of? There are all the things that make up a person (history, politics, personality, society, etc), but there are also the immediate sensory qualities: her experience of weight, touch, environment, focus, emotions, etc. All of this is potentially relevant in making a performance.

What becomes evident is that our performer-creator is a being who is deeply in touch with the here-and-now via a somatic, formalist experience. Yes, she is a product of history, a construct of society, her thoughts and ideas are only partly her own; but, only *she* knows what she feels when she runs into the space and feels the air brushing past her skin. Only *she* knows what she feels when she connects to another body. Only she can craft that journey. This somatic knowledge becomes as important as the so-called content knowledge in the performer-creator’s set of tools, especially in the process of dance (as opposed to theatre) creation. Thus, instead of interpreting a role, she is crafting a presence. Within or via the dancing body, which is so often reified, is a subject. Drawing that subject out into the realm of performance *is* the act of choreography; as opposed to only understanding choreography within the boundaries of a particular technique.

What I have described so far is a performer-centred, somatically-aware approach to choreographing, in which the whole being of the performer is potentially considered in the making of performance material. It might seem like an awful lot of navel gazing, in which everyone comes to rehearsal and explores their own presence in the space and environment. That might be true for a process, but it should not necessarily be desirable for the product.

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<sup>5</sup> This is a key concept in his teaching, which I experienced during my time as a student at Rhodes University.



Thus, the choreographer is faced with some problems: If one wants to engage the performer creatively so as to have access to their whole self and not just their body, so as to be able to engage with their creative faculties on both a deep and superficial level, where does one place down boundaries and where does one allow new territory to develop? Does one let go of one's own or original vision altogether and get carried along the surf of what that performer can do? How does one mediate one's ideas through this being who is subject to time, age, politics, personality, etc. In as much as the performer-creator opens up possibilities, she also threatens to throw one off course. This is where there is a very special conversation that is part intellectual, part aesthetic taste, part intuition is transmitted between non-dancing choreographer and performer.

Why non-dancing choreographer? If the performer-creator is responsible for making available her own experiential journey through and for the material of the work, then the choreographer-director is responsible for the journey of the audience. Dancer-choreographers often seem to assume that what they are feeling on the stage must surely be projected to the audience member. In my experience, this is often not the case and that more interesting, detailed journeys can be found if choreographers craft the journey from the audience's perspective. Choreographing out of one's own body paves the way for the audience's experience.

The choreographer-director generates material by engaging the creative side of her performers, who are active agents, within a set of creatively-inspiring boundaries, as discussed. She is not only looking with her eye but rather experiencing with her whole self, mediating between her original intentions or ideas for the work and what is developing in the rehearsal process. A crucial part of the process is editing. The choreographer-director needs carefully and ruthlessly to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Why would we want to work like this? Because in this way something can be discovered: we are not assembling a pre-created idea (like furniture that you assemble from a box) but discovering ideas that we may not have been aware of. Just as the task of the performer-creator is to consider their real experience in the here-and-now, so too for the choreographer-director it is important to open oneself to the experience of the process and allow that *experience* to generate material. The act of choreography *is* to guide a process through which a performance that is not simply physical can be *discovered*. Importantly, this is not a wishy-washy process in which anything goes. It is a creative process that is as designed as it is intuitive. The choreography is as much the designing of a process as it is the organisation of bodies in space and movements in sequence. Does this diminish the role of the choreographer? I do not think so. This is as much choreographic signature as it would be if you found every step in your own body before transposing it onto others.

This process was the base for the creation of the dance work *Run!* (and most of my other work). Many other choreographers, especially from the Rhodes lineage, use this process and it is in no way original. The purpose of this discussion is to unpack some of the ideas that have been unspoken or taken for granted in the studio, such as the use of formalist or kinetic tools in crafting presence. As with any creative technique or process, the tools influence the product, sometimes creating work with family resemblances to other work created in the same way. Thus, as with the performer-creator, it would be hypocritical to suggest that this is the best or the only way to make interesting work. It is, however, an

area of performance creation in which the skills needed by the performer are not always acknowledged or formalised. Performers trained in ballet and contemporary dance, for instance, may have tapped only very slightly into their creative potential. I hope that this discussion joins forces with the growing awareness of the need for performers whose technique includes the ability to transcend technique, and for choreographers whose ability includes the crafting of a creative journey.

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# **MOVING THROUGH LIMINAL AND LIMINOID SPACES: IDENTITY, THE BODY AND OTHER PERFORMANCE OBJECTS IN HYBRID AFRICAN PERFORMANCE**

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## **Abstract**

*Movement and dance are integral aspects of traditional performances in Africa. The body is not the only object that moves during a performance. Masks and puppets are used as performance tools and it is through the use of movement and dance that these objects, in conjunction with the body, embody spirits, gods, cultural heritage and even forms of protest. In contemporary African performances the audience is very often confronted with hybrid performances, where the boundaries between liminal (sacred) and liminoid (secular) spaces – to borrow the terms from Schechner and Turner – are growing increasingly faint. This paper investigates the moving body and other performance objects such as puppets and masks as ways to identify the various spaces of meaning where the components of traditional (often religious) performances are reframed in untraditional (secular) contexts. The interaction and tension between traditional belief structures, secular spaces, reframed performance forms and the objects which occupy those performances and spaces are also the means through which the spectator can question various sets of identities. These identities include national, personal, cultural, performative and even religious identities and contexts. What do hybrid performances tell us about ourselves, not only as performers but as spectators? And how does this influence the way we view the body and other performance objects in contemporary African performance forms?*

**KEY WORDS:** *Performance, liminality, liminoid performance, hybrid performance, African dance, puppetry and masquerades.*

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## **Introduction**

Space – how we occupy space, move in and through space – is an integral part of the study of the body in dance and performance in general. The physical space is not the only type of space that comes into play when we try and analyse performance as an aspect of human behaviour. The metaphorical space of performance can determine the function of the actions that are performed. The metaphorical spaces that I refer to are linked with the context of the performance. The interplay between context, space, action and, in the case of ritual, even effect serves to create body (or somatic) and cultural identities. Body identity is linked to the creation of an identity through the functioning and appearance of the body as well as the body as social construction which the individual subscribes to. This is where the mask and puppet come into play as objects in performance. These performance objects not only adorn the body in performance, they also extend, hide and even change the shape and function of the body in performance. The body very often only functions as a means of representation in a performative context. In liminal performances the body can act as a vehicle, a vessel where iconic forms of representation or, in the case of trance forms, manifestations can occur.

Before I continue, I want to comment on the title of the paper. The first part of the title raises several aspects of concern for the elucidation of the second part of the title. *Moving* indicates action. Movement is a basic element of dance, but in puppetry and in performances where masks are used, movement is the most important element in order to create an illusion of life in the object or body in the performance. The adjectives 'liminal' and 'liminoid' referring to the descriptions of space point to the context of the performance, indicating the function of the actions of performance. Hybridity as a description of performance here refers to the combination of both liminal and liminoid spaces, where the distinction isn't necessarily easily identifiable – but more on this later.

Identity is also a contested term. What is identity? How is it created in specific situations or contexts? What is the difference between individual identity and a communal identity? All these questions are part of the broad field of study, but in this paper I refer to both individual and cultural identity as created through the means of performance<sup>1</sup> and the way that dance echoes the daily life of Africans, as Dagan points out:

But accepting for the moment that there is such a subject that we can call dance in Africa, this may be related to other forms of movement in Africa, such as farm work, the pounding grain or yams, hunting movements or carrying head loads. (...) Ultimately we may be able to analyze out the basic body movement of a culture, those fundamental motion phonemes and morphemes which provide a culture with its unity, which, as with these linguistic elements, may be employed by persons without being aware of them. Dance then becomes a particular form of general movement which elaborates, decorates and extends a culture's basic movement forms (Dagan, 1997:11).

The everyday becomes symbolic and, because of their symbolic nature, the actions become something that stands outside of the everyday. It is impossible to discuss all these elements in the restricted space of a paper. My focus will be on how the liminal performances found in religious contexts (also associated with pre-colonial performance forms) can develop into liminoid performances which operate in secular contexts. In some cases the transition between liminal and liminoid forms is not complete and we are confronted with hybrid performances, embodying the non-religious and secular aspects, spaces and forms of representation.

### ***Liminal and liminoid forms***

The concept of liminality was discussed by Victor Turner (in 1969, 1974, 1982, 1984 and 1988) but it was derived from Arnold van Gennep's work (1960) on the rites of passage. According to Turner (1974:47), liminal actions (in the form of performances) take place on the periphery of society, outside the social structures of communities. Schechner (1988) embroiders on this and refers to them as actions that take place outside the everyday activities, rendering them non-productive

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<sup>1</sup>On the creation of culture, see Bhabha (1994).

activities. The limen is a threshold, a place of transition, and the concept is rich with associations in ritual, metaphor, play and belief-structures. Although the limen, or the situation of liminality, may refer to a lack of structure, the *actions* that are found in the state of liminality have structure. The structure found in the actions, the performances, emphasizes the formlessness of the performers themselves:

Liminal states dissolve all factual and commonsense systems into their components and “play” with them in ways never found in nature or in custom, at least at the level of direct perception (Beeman, 1999 – Online).

The performative forms that we find in Africa that can be classified as liminal performances very often use dance, masking and puppetry as forms of religious practice. In the extreme forms of liminal performances, the audience member is confronted with trance performances, in which the Western concept of representation is not present, but the performer stands “outside himself”<sup>2</sup> (Schechner, 1985) and the performer vanishes to become a vessel for spirit, godly or other supernatural manifestations. The structure of the performance can also be found in the artistic forms or tools that are used (such as dance, music and the use performance objects) and also the movement signs or codes that are used to communicate the particular messages of the performance. The performance objects that are found in the performance might even dictate the signs and choreographic elements of the dance, such as circular patterns in the performance space where the boundaries between audience and performer might be porous, as well as choreographic elements, which may be prescribed by the nature of the dance but also by the restrictions<sup>3</sup> caused by the performance objects or conventions that might feature in the performance. These external forms can help to create the identifiable components or styles of a particular culture, resulting in a cultural performance identity. Very often these cultural forms are used as a basis for the development of personal choreographic styles, and this is where the transition between liminal and liminoid performances is particularly evident.

The limen usually refers to a sacred time-space. During these time-space activities they might seem to be in conflict with the normal activities of a society. On the other hand, you can also find playful activities as in a carnival. Many such time-space activities are found in a culture and they use cultural symbols. These symbols can have various meanings because the representational forms that are found in liminal spaces are not always mimetic in nature, but are based on fantasy, myth and/or

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<sup>2</sup>This description comes from Schechner’s discussion on the concept of ‘restored behaviour’, which is an important quality of performance. The concept of restored behaviour also attempts to illustrate how performances can be generated. For an in-depth discussion, see Schechner (1985).

<sup>3</sup>For the possible restrictions and the uses of masks and puppets in Africa, I would refer the reader to the work of Dagan (1990 & 1997). The style of the mask and puppet can restrict the performer’s physicality and movement potential.

magic. The mixture between the known and the unknown can turn into grotesque forms (Turner, 1982:27). Jurkowski (2000:17) gives an example of a grotesque form where puppets and masks also feature:

Puppets in Africa very often participated in rituals of fecundity. Some of these were large and long ceremonies. Puppets Gelede from the tribe Yoruba took part in the ritual of fecundity worshipping the Sapata divinity, which took place in the period of the first sowing. The ceremony consisted of several dances during which the initiated could have sex and some young men even had sexual intercourse with the ground.

This might seem strange to us, but in the space of the ritual and the performance, they are appropriate. Through the combination of known and unknown worlds, innovative forms of expression can develop. Turner (1982:28) notes how Sutton-Smith explained that the innovative forms can develop because of contact with the anti-structure that is found in the performances that operate in the liminal time-space. The anti-structure refers to the deterioration of normative social structures of role allocation, statuses and responsibilities. For Sutton-Smith the anti-structure represents latent systems that can possibly act as alternatives to the already existing systems. From the anti-structural situation innovation in the performance and even the society can occur.

The anti-structure creates a situation of social escape, but it also indicates, through the means of performance, that social change must take place. The interplay between performance and social context can also have a profound impact on the performance itself. The social context can determine whether a performance is seen as liminal or liminoid. As a synopsis or definition of liminal forms, I would state that these are performance genres that indicate a transition or a non-specific between more socially sanctioned structures. The performance genres can include play, rituals and other metaphoric systems and they are restricted to pre-industrial communities. Aspects such as the abrogation of social identities are found in the forms with the aim to achieve *communitas*, a feeling of unity by creating forms of performance.

Liminoid forms are very similar to liminal forms. They also refer to a state of being “outside” which is very similar to a time of transition. Liminoid performances are found only in industrial communities where individual artisanship is more important than the communal experience of a ritual or other types of liminal performances. In Africa we find performances that originated as liminal performances, but as a result of the religious, social, economic and political developments in the community the original sources or reasons for the performance are no longer present, authoritative or adhered to. The “external form” of the performances remains, but the context has changed. The religious connotations or reasons for the performance of specific rituals might not be present any

longer, but the artistic form of expression (such as dance and music), the mediums (puppetry or masking) and the audiences for which it is performed still remain the same.

These performative forms act as cultural forms through which the audience and the performers embody their cultural and personal identities. Den Otter in Dagan (1997:143) elaborates on an example from Mali, where song, dance, masking and puppetry are used:

Through this type of total theatre the cultural identity of the Bamana and Bozo, as members of age groups and of a village, is reflected in the performing arts. The dances, songs, and drum rhythms are valued parts of their cultural heritage which is relived each year and adapted whenever the need arises. Puppets and masks may be seen as two sides of one coin: manipulated by man, they are located in the magic field between illusion and reality, connecting the invisible world of the supernatural and the visible world of the human.

There are numerous spaces that are in operation in the performance. The personal and the cultural spaces are evident, but so are both the religious and the secular spaces. The dividing line between liminal and liminoid forms is unclear. A combination of these two forms is present in such an in Bamana. This indicates a hybrid performance.

### ***Hybridity and culture***

In my previous explorations in puppetry, masking and dance in Africa (Du Preez, 2007 & 2011), hybridity was a major issue in an attempt to analyse contemporary approaches and forms of performance. The most important issue that comes into play time and time again, in conjunction with intercultural aspects, is the confusion that hybrid performances can cause between the theatre makers and the audience members. The porous borders between the liminal and the liminoid might confuse audiences. How should we react to the performance? How should we read the performance? Is it a ritual? Is it a performance which aims only to entertain? As an example I usually refer to the *Bin Sogo Bo* performances of Mali.

These performances are not purely ritual nor do they have religious outcomes or effects; but they are also not aimed at purely entertaining an audience. Mythical and religious characters can appear in the performance. Chi Wara is an example. This character comes from the time when the animals still had a connection with religious systems. Chi Wara was the first farmer on the earth and he taught the humans how to till the earth. The animal saw that the humans became lazy and that they wasted the food that was produced. The dance to summon this spirit is performed at the beginning of the rainy season after the ground was prepared and the seeds sown. The belief in this story and the performance of the dance (in which masks are an integral part) as a ritual are no longer present. The dance is not going to call the spirit from beneath the earth. The performance is now secularized,

although the link to the original religious system can still be traced. Other dances in the *Bin Sogo Bo* still retain their religious functions. Would this link with a religious system be “enough” to classify the *Bin Sogo Bo* and the *Chi Wara* dance as a form of hybrid performance? *Chi Wara* is an extreme example in the sense that it indicates the path of a religious performance to a secular performance.

Jurkowski (2000:22) sees hybrid performance systems as a developmental phase in the development from sacred rituals into secular forms of performance. He expands:

In spite of the continued presence of ritual puppets and their use in magic activities in Africa, the process of transmission from the primitive, sacred puppets to the theatrical puppets, which serve to entertain participants of the village holidays, came about. Entertaining productions did not immediately find the unified, fictional dramatic structure. They are compositions of many episodes, presenting topical scenes, animals, and also mythic figures such as UneMeven with caiman head, Fanro or the master of water, and the divinity Yankadi or double face and four breasts.

These examples come from Mali, Senegal and Benin. The movement from the religious to the secular spaces and contexts also indicates the possibility that the dances can be associated with other identities. Many of the liminal performances which are linked with religious rituals are performed by secret societies in which the members have to be initiated into the society. Some of these rituals are seen as so sacred that uninitiated members of the community would not even be allowed to see the masks or the performance. Participants and even audience members can be identified by the performance of the ritual and the act of performing the ritual might even assist in creating part of the individual’s identity.

When the performance loses its religious function and the ritual is no longer performed in order to achieve an effect, the identity-forming aspect of that performance is no longer functioning in the same way. If ritual or other liminal performances are there to achieve a result, liminoid performances are there to entertain. Schechner (1988:120) and Ashley and Holloman (1982:68) elaborate on the differences between liminal and liminoid performances. As points of illustration, these differences indicate. The hybrid performance would be a combination of these aspects and the changing of the context will indicate a shift on the continuum from effective ritual, on the one hand, to entertainment, on the other.

Efficacy	Entertainment
The ritual	The drama
Results	Fun
Link to the absent Other	Only for those present



Abolishes time, symbolic time	Emphasizes now
Brings Other here	Audience is the Other
Performer possessed, in trance	Performer knows what he's doing
Audience participates	Audience watches
Audience believes	Audience appreciates
Criticism is forbidden	Criticism is encouraged
Collective creativity	Individual creativity

Hybridity can also occur where the audience and the performers do not view the actions of the performance from the same perspective. A religious performance might not have any religious connotations for an audience. The performer will be performing with specific effects in mind; to the audience these effects are of no consequence. The reverse is also found where audiences might think they are watching a religious performance, but actually it is a performance aimed at a tourist audience. Once again the context of the performance can indicate identity, whether as a group or as an individual. The way the body functions in these different contexts of performance is also important. In liminal performance forms, such as dances where trance and spirit manifestations can occur, the body is not seen as a means of communicating an aesthetic messages as is the case in liminoid performances. The body, in trance dance, is an icon. It becomes something else and the performer is no longer present. The body stops being a performer's body. In secular performances the body remains a central component of the performance, whether it is hidden or changed by means of masks, puppets of other performance objects.

Brett Bailey's work can be seen as a South African example of hybrid performances where there is a mixture between the religious and secular contexts. The performers are often sangomas who perform rituals on stage. But the audiences viewing these performances in a Western style theatre for the purpose of entertainment attach no religious connotations or beliefs to those actions that we witness. This would be an example where we not only see drama and dance as movement, but we also see the shifts and movements of identity, contexts of performance as well as the aims of performance.

### **Conclusion**

In the ever-shifting continuum of performance between religious and secular forms, the body and other performing objects have to move to indicate life - even if the life that we see for the duration

of the performance is only an illusion. We buy into the performance and the double vision<sup>4</sup> of the spectators makes the audience co-creators of that life. Whether it is the bodies that dance, the masks and puppets that we recognize or our unique contexts as audience members or performers, the performance remains a way through which we can come to grips with who we are, show how we are and who we are becoming.

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<sup>4</sup>Double vision refers to the theory in puppetry which maintains that the audience is aware that the object which is used in the performance is not alive, but for the duration of the performance the object is imbued with life.

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# **FACILITATING IMPROVISATION: A PERFORMATIVE RESPONSE**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper is framed by my experience of facilitating a group of students from Rhodes University towards a spontaneous performance based on a somatic approach to improvisational dancing. This approach to movement is concerned with the subjective experience that individuals have of their own bodies by paying attention to felt sensation rather than imposed forms. In addition, the paper explores how a subjective approach to writing can further expand the purpose of the project. In this regard, the paper draws on performative writing and écriture féminine (feminine writing) which advocate subjective experience and a return to the body as a way of challenging conventional discourse. This echoes Julia Kristeva's warning that losing touch with semiotic energy can destroy psychic life and alienate us from our bodies. This project calls for a more personal approach to both dancing and writing, and gives voice to intuitive experiences that might otherwise not be considered. This paper is not simply a write-up of the project, but rather seeks to embody these practical concerns. This is consistent with Brad Haseman's proposal for "performative research" as a new methodological paradigm. Guided by research insights arrived at through practical investigation, this paper contributes to an emerging field of practice-led research in the performing arts.*

## **Introduction**

The use of improvisation in the devising of choreographic work is not an uncommon practice, but in most cases, the material generated from this way of working is shaped and crafted to serve a particular aesthetic or concept. When it comes to improvisation as performance however, the aim is somewhat different. In an improvisation performance, each performer is responsible for their actions as well as the development of the performance as a whole. This type of process asks performers to pay attention to what is happening around them and to respond in ways that best support what is beginning to develop. In this regard, each performer is responsible for spontaneously crafting the aesthetic and conceptual qualities of the performance as they take on the role of both player, and collaborative creator of the performance in process.

An improvisation performance is similar in this way to having a conversation; you don't know what the other people are going to say, but you do your best to listen, to offer what you can, and if the conversation is dull, find a way to change the subject. This is the starting point for improvisation performance; listening to others and responding to shift and change the encounter in interesting ways.

The artistry lies in the sensitivity and skill with which we begin to read these moments of exchange and notice their potential for development and play.

The aim of this paper is to articulate the various approaches that I found useful in facilitating a group of students towards an improvisation performance based on movement encounters. It outlines a process that has been informed by my own interaction with various improvisation teachers, whose different approaches I have combined, adapted and developed through my own facilitation process.

### **Writing a process**

The research that will be shared in this paper is drawn from practical experience as well as theoretical insight. This is consistent with feminist performance studies which argues for practice as a mode of academic enquiry, since theory and practice are not separate endeavors, but “connect up and complement each other” (Aston & Harris, 2008:7). This writing is an attempt to commit to paper the practical experience that has led me to develop my own theories about improvisation performance. It begins a discussion between my understanding of different improvisation processes with reflections on how my attempts to share what I have learned practically with a group, has begun to shape an emerging methodology.

For this project I worked with a group of 10 students from the Rhodes University Drama Department. The group worked together for 5 weeks, and presented 3 improvisation performances at the Drama department’s *Theatre in Motion* season (23-27 October 2012). The process by which I facilitated the group was particularly influenced by my encounters with improvisation teachers Tossie van Tonder, Katie Duck and Jess Curtis. I will discuss the teaching approaches that I adopted from each of them, as well as the performance strategies that have been integrated in this project.

Another objective of this paper is to explore how an improvisatory, approach to writing can be incorporated in the documenting of this project. In this regard, the paper draws on the practices of performative writing and *écriture féminine* (feminine writing).

The term *écriture féminine* was first used by contemporary French writer and theorist Hélène Cixous (1996:92), who notes that “defining a feminine practice of writing is impossible with an impossibility that will continue; for this practice will never be able to be theorised, enclosed or coded, which does not mean that it does not exist”. In this same way, theorizing about improvisation is equally problematic,

because like *écriture féminine*, it is rooted in practice. The goal is thus to “theorize” in a way that engages practice.

### **Feminine and performative - writing improvisation**

Improvisation performance can be thought of in terms of feminine writing with regards to the experimental approach it brings to creation. While often ambiguous through their close association to the unconscious, both feminine writing and improvisation performance share a common goal of challenging the dominant order of representation to approach a practice that is both complex and deceptively simple.

Peggy Phelan (1993:46) articulates a tension in attempting to document temporal events such as performance and experience, which become what they are only as they disappear through time. She (ibid:147) notes how a description cannot reproduce an event, but rather helps us to “restage and restate the effort to remember what is lost”. On another occasion, I might relate my experience of the improvisation group quite differently. I might call up memories today that yesterday seemed less significant, and in my ordering of the events that I choose to retell, I might begin to draw a very different picture. This attempt to re-enact through writing, events that have passed demonstrates the performative possibilities of writing and evokes the challenge, as Phelan (ibid:148) points out, that performance’s non-reproductive ontology brings to writing - to write towards disappearance as opposed to preservation. It is not that we should resist from writing about performance, but that we should do so acknowledging that the act of writing does not preserve the event, but rather re-enacts ideas and impressions that have been generated through the performance experience.

I acknowledge that the writing of this paper can never hope to preserve or document all aspects of the facilitation experience. Through acknowledging this, I allow my writing to enter the mode of the performative; beginning from the experience of what happened, but allowing it develop through the influences that come to me now as I structure into the fabric of this paper understandings that came before, during and after the events about which I am writing.

Ronald Pelias (2005: 418) describes an “enabling fiction” in performative writing that gives voice to human experience, and “tells a story that can be trusted”. With this enabling fiction in mind, I have chosen to relate what I have learned from this process by writing a series of personal letters. The letters

are addressed to my friend Nicola Visser. The reason that I have chosen to write to her particularly is because she has come into contact with the 3 teachers who have most influenced my approach, and in her position as an improvisation artist, academic, teacher and friend, she provides the “enabling fiction” through which I can more intimately articulate my own understandings of different improvisation processes.

By including letters in this academic paper, I hope to give a more personal account of my process. The letters also honour the way in which knowledge is arrived at in relation to others and passed on practically through sharing, discussing and doing. Through engaging with performative writing, these letters give voice to aspects of the process that might not otherwise be spoken about because they don’t fit neatly into the standard format of conventional academic writing, but rather find articulation through poetic expression, and the “enabling fiction” to which performative writing opens the doors. The reflections that are shared are thus highly subjective and particular, but this is not to say that they do not provide empirical insight on improvisation practice, how it relates to theory, and how this is explored further in a practical context.

### **Cixous, Kristeva, Phelan**

Cixous (1997:57) notes that the books she loves most are not masterful narratives but rather journals of experience and books that have “recorded, and indeed left intact, the emergence of an experience that has been located or noticed for the first time”. Through admitting vulnerability and uncertainty, the style of this paper is more closely aligned with the practice of improvisation performance. It reveals a more open and less definite attitude, surfacing ideas that are still in process and findings that are by no means absolute. This style of writing is influenced by Cixous’ (1996:93) concept of feminine writing, which allows for “questioning” and “uneasiness” and respects the possibility of “superabundance” and “waste”.

Cixous sees feminine writing as path to liberation within the theoretical and philosophical domain of patriarchal dominance, and she sees this liberation coming through a return to and rediscovery of the body (Blyth & Sellers, 2004:33). Her argument for this is that women have been distanced from and made to feel ashamed of their bodies. To counter this, Cixous (1996:93) contends that “Women must write her body”. What this means, is that “women must pay attention to all the non-verbal,

unconscious, instinctual drives and sensations of their bodies – they must accent language with the patterns, reverberations and echoes emerging from these states”(Blyth & Sellers, 2004:33).

This is consistent with Julia Kristeva’s concept revolt in poetic writing, where she calls for a rebirth of the pleasure principle in writing to counteract the way contemporary society threatens to alienate us from our bodies, and anesthetize semiotic energy (McAfee, 2004:106).

Kristeva’s theory of language considers how meaning is made through the denotative and affective aspects of literary texts. She differentiates two modes of signification: the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic encompasses the bodily energy, drives and emotions that could be seen to originate in the unconscious, while the symbolic is the conscious way a person tries to express clear and ordered meaning using a stable sign system(ibid:17). These two modes of signification are not separate, and are always both at work in the signification process. Purely semiotic communication would result in unintelligible babblings, whereas purely symbolic language would lack meaning and be equally incomprehensible (ibid:15).

Kristeva notes that today’s subjects are more at risk of losing touch with semiotic energy than the code of symbolic order. Drawing on the work of Guy Debord (1931-1994), she (ibid:108) argues how semiotic energy becomes anesthetised under the economic and productive order of capitalism. In a modern world run by productivity and consumerism, people become tools of the economy, wanting more than we need, with desires that become manufactured for us. In *Society of the Spectacle* (1983), Debord (Debord in McAfee, 2004:108) explains that “All of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation”. Kristeva observes the futility of seeking satisfaction through representations, noting how the society of the spectacle threatens to destroy psychic life and alienate us from our bodies (McAfee, 2004:110).

Cixous (Siach, 1991:70) warns of an illusion of intellectual control that threatens to erase and censor the historicizing body. Phelan (1997:52), drawing from psychoanalysis, supports this claim, when she argues that the body does not experience the world in the way that consciousness does and that psychic order is rehearsed onto the body through narrative imposition.

Where Cixous contends that woman must write her body to subvert patriarchal order, Kristeva (1974: 15) explains that normalized language is “just one of the ways of articulating the signifying process that



encompasses the body, the material referent and language itself. This relation between the body and language is at the heart of the writing project of Phelan, Kristeva and Cixous. Where Cixous calls for feminine approach, Kristeva for poetic language, and Phelan for a performative writing, all three advocate a return to the body, as a way to shatter conventional discourse, noting how this rupture in language can begin to remodel the dominant order of representation.

### **A letter...**

*Dear Nicky,*

*I feel a bit different as I get down to writing today, it could be the weather, or maybe this place of reflection, but more so, I think it's the way I've been thinking about writing. You said you've noticed a change. Previously I've been a bit uptight and linear – you know, agonising about what to say, planning it out in my head and then getting to the point as quickly as possible. It's almost as if I didn't trust the page to hold my figuring out. That's why I'm usually so brief, so good at editing. No one gets to see the goings on of my thoughts, the way things get worked out. I don't like to share that really, I prefer to reveal only the good stuff. But lately, I've given myself over to improvising, to practice putting my thoughts down just as they come, to release into the process and just see what comes up. It's taken me pretty long to get into this though, maybe because I lack endurance, or patience to follow through, but now that I've started I can feel a difference in the way I'm sharing things. I feel less self-conscious, and even about my own untidy handwriting. Tossie got me into this, she said it's really important to see your own handwriting, and to see your thoughts put down on the page. Writing was an important part of her process, and I'm beginning to adopt it too. It's a good way to integrate what you're learning, but also it starts to bring the body to the page. Especially when engaging in improvisation, which accesses creativity and the unconscious. I feel my writing gain momentum, it becomes charged with the energy of what I've just figured out - writing that flows directly from experience... and then goes off on a tangent... I'm not afraid of it.*

*Cixous (1991:39) talks about writing that wells up from the “throats of your unknown inhabitants”. I was thinking about those improvisation sessions we had in 2010. I remember feeling so young and unsure, and only comfortable if I found myself in a game with someone else, following them and responding to them. It's kind of like how I would write, always following a theory, and thinking too carefully about how to say something, not allowing anyone to see how I figured it out. I used to follow you often, maybe*

*because I found your “theory” accessible. I could translate quickly what I wanted to say because I understood the dialogue. But then on one of those days, I was suddenly left in a solo, no dialogue, no theory to respond to, nobody to hide behind. The group was watching me, and that gave me some courage. I felt unsure, not ready, but held by the eyes of the group, I knew I must find something... some “unknown inhabitants”. I might have been born in that moment, there in that open field of just me, with only my immediate experience to draw on. It was a kind of initiation, where the group said, “Go on let us see you write something”.*

### **Tossie van Tonder**

“In process” is the term that Tossie van Tonder uses to explain the state we engage in an improvisation performance. I attended a two week workshop that she gave at the Rhodes University Drama department in February 2012 where she guided a group of postgraduate students through a self-exploration process drawing from contact improvisation, action theatre, ritual and psychology. Themes include; self and other, one and many, leading and following, and crossing thresholds. Her process encouraged self-reflection through consistent time made for reflective writing. I drew on her teaching approach often in my own facilitation process where I aimed to develop a sense of group awareness through the idea of leading, following and listening to others.

*Remember that workshop with Tossie I told you about? Well, most of the time we didn’t know what the heck was going on... but we did get to know each other really well, and it was like an initiation of some kind, where it felt like I went through layers of myself.*

*I’ve never been engaged in such a long improvisation period before. We worked so closely that eventually we were performing ourselves together without performing really. We were in some kind of process where roles were assumed, archetypes even, and it was almost ritualistic sometimes, which was a bit strange. I remember feeling weird about it – because it wasn’t play anymore, but became real. It’s unnerving at first, but I think that once you’ve gone through that you almost hunger for it. Well I know I do. I want to feel that realness again, for someone to provoke me to a reaction that changes my perception of things. To press all my buttons and change my channels, to provoke me, and pull things*

*out. That's what excites me about improvisation performance, when we develop that skill to come into contact with each other, using performance as a mode to activate experience. It's like we become teachers for each other – going to the edge – crossing new thresholds.*

*I remember being “in process” once where I pushed someone to the edge, it seemed cruel almost, but for some reason I knew that it needed to happen, to reach a catharsis, it's necessary sometimes. I think we get afraid to provoke. We're too polite, too content to be comfortable. And maybe we don't trust that the other person will say no when it's enough.*

*I remember an exercise, where we were invited to try different things with a passive partner, and to push it further and further until they said, “no thanks, that's not what I need right now”. That was great, because on the one hand it encourages you to be confident to say “no” and then also it gives more space to try out things that you might not otherwise have the guts to do.*

### **Jess Curtis**

In August this year I attended a contact improvisation workshop with Jess Curtis at the International Contact Festival in Freiburg, Germany. The workshop was called *Exploring Synesthetic Connections: Dancing Between Senses*. In this workshop we explored how the senses inform our actions and movement choices. Through my interaction with Jess, I was encouraged to read James Gibson and Alva Noë to get a better understanding on the notion of sensation and perception, how they are constantly at work in everything that we do, and how they can give insight on improvisation process.

Improvisation, as a performance practice, is concerned with increasing our awareness of that which is happening within and around us. Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay (2004:ix) speak about “waking up to the sensing body” to widen the field in which we perceive and experience the world. This can be achieved through considering how we access this information. James Gibson explains that it is through our senses that we are able to access and perceive the world around us. He (1966:2) considers the senses as the “active seeking mechanisms” through which we secure information from our surroundings, noting that, even though we may not realise when our sense organs have been stimulated, our ability to perceive is reliant on our the capacity to perceive sense impressions. Alva Noë (2004:1) extends this further to account for how perception is only possible through physical interaction with that which is being perceived. He argues that perception is dependent on capacities for action,

because in order to perceive something, we have to be able to interact with it. It is worth quoting him at length:

Perception is not something that happens to us, or in us. It is something that we do. Think of a blind person tap-tapping his or her way around a cluttered space, perceiving that space by touch, not all at once, but through time, by skilful probing and movement. This is, or at least should be our paradigm of what perceiving is. The world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction. I argue that all perception is touch-like in this way: Perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of bodily skills. What we perceive is determined by what we do (or what we know how to do); it is determined by what we are ready to do. In ways I try to make precise, we enact our perceptual experience, we act it out.

It is through our senses, in active engagement with the environment that we can begin to access information about that which is happening now. This is particularly relevant to improvisation in which we make spontaneous decisions to develop actions based on how we have come to perceive them.

Bonnie Banbridge Cohen (1995:200) speaks about “pre-motor focusing” as a way to exercise intention in what we perceive of our environment. Since perception is a motor act, this means that how we chose to move is part of deciding what we will perceive. This motor component of perception offers the potential to actively choose which aspects of incoming stimuli we decide to focus on. This is useful to think of in relation to how we use our senses to navigate our way through an improvisation performance. Also, the more we become aware of our perceptual processes, the more possibilities we find for motivated movement opportunities.

This is similar to what we aim to achieve in physical theatre and postmodern dance, where performers are involved in task-based activities (of varying degrees of risk). The movement is responsive, and (generally) not embellished, but rather raw and un-crafted, emerging in reaction to the task. So in order for movement to be responsive and non-representational, do we always have to be involved in a task? What is the task in an improvisation performance? Is it to tune into the sensing I’m thinking about the potential for accessing movement that is functional and enjoyable, that comes before technique and socialization but that does not necessarily depend on task-based activity. Emlin Claid (2006:87) calls dancing that seeks to escape from the rules and prescriptions of codified technique *jouissance* dancing. For Claid, this movement that seeks to return to the “fluid, formless, multiple, semiotic drives internal to the body as sensation”.

I found Jess's process very useful for "un-training" representational dancing, and beginning to focus more on the sensing body. I would often repeat the following phrase that he used in his classes; "move towards the sensations you enjoy and away from the ones you don't". This was the focus of most of my work with the Rhodes group; somatics based work, and listening to the sensing body. I don't think it's possible to start before considering this.

### **Somatic focus**

I would often begin class with the idea of looking into the body, observing how it is today and noticing how it is different from any other day. I usually stress the importance of being able to listen to when the body says yes and when it says no, and to notice opportunities to move into options that are not learned or habitual, or attached to a particular technique.

This kind of body awareness is similar to feminine writing, in that it does not remain confined within a system, but ventures out and finds new territories to explore. This is the way we would start to find our personal movement vocabularies, through investigating ways of moving that are functional, efficient and enjoyable – ways of moving that we discovered ourselves. Of course there are basic concepts of release and contact improvisation that I would lead – moving to and from the floor, grounding, and connecting with another body; but the aim was always to encourage further investigation in these areas as opposed to learning a definitive form. Bellow is an example of a warm up that I would lead:

*Close your eyes and bring your attention into your body. How does it feel today? Allow yourself to arrive gently, scanning through, turning your eyes inside and looking into your body. How do your muscles, organs and bones appear in your mind's eye? Now, turning the ears inside, start to listen to the requests of the body. Are there places that are calling your attention? Accept invitations from the body to move into places that want to feel stretch, compression, weight, friction, inversion. Finding ways to get what you need, explore how different movement possibilities can begin to feed your body. Don't worry about what it looks like or means, focus*

*only on how it feels. Be honest with your listening, tuning in to the body and giving it what it needs. Move into sensations that you enjoy, using your movement as a way to discover these enjoyable sensations.*

### **Katie Duck**

When people do improvisation work, they often go internal, hardly using their eyes, and often just close them. Perhaps it's when focusing on imagery or felt sensations (and to not feel self-conscious of what others think or how it looks). Katie Duck however argues that we should rather think about training our eyes in improvisation work, because they are part of the body, and offer a way to give and receive information. Katie Duck holds an annual five-week improvisation summer course in Amsterdam with Alfredo Genovesi for dancers, performers and musicians. I attended one week of the course in August this year, which focused on how what we see and hear affects our creative choices. In this regard the note was to open eyes and ears to what is developing in the performance.

In Katie's workshop, we did a lot of exercises with eyes and ears, and this became the basis for most of the improvisation work. She did exercises where we would move between close-range, medium-range and far-range with our eyes, noticing how what we see changes how we move and relate to a partner. We would start simply by rolling across the room; face down looking at the floor at "close-range", and face up looking to the ceiling at "long-range". She also introduced "eye-balling" a partner, or practicing a soft focus which she calls "moving room" in which images swim passed the eyes as you move. The next task was to switch between these different ways of using the eyes, allowing them to lead our movement, and then thinking about how movement leads the eyes. In Katie's workshop we were encouraged to use our eyes – a lot – and to think about what we were doing with them. I used many of these exercises with my group, but it was usually separate from the "sensing body" and somatics based work that we spent the rest of the time exploring.

Then I found an exercise in Ruth Zaporah's *Action Theatre* called "Focus In/Eyes Out" (1995:43), which helped me to link the two ideas.

Zaporah (1995:44) says the following about this exercise:

Some people's attention is so fixed on their own experience that they're blind to what's going on around them. Others attach their attention onto what's going on around them so

much, that they lose connection to their own experience. Most of us tip the scale one way or the other depending on the day, our mood, or what happens to hook our attention... In “Focus In/Eyes Out”, students play with shifting from inner to outer attention and back again. They may even discover the ability to hold it all simultaneously.

Building on from this inner/outer awareness focusing, Zaporah suggests a mirroring exercise. For this, one person is the leader, and the other is the follower, and the aim is for both partners to move in exact mirror image. Once each partner has had a turn in the different roles, the game opens up so that the partners can decide when they should follow, and when they should take the lead. For Zaporah (1995:46), the task is to “truly lead when leading, without self consciousness inhibiting your actions, and to truly follow when following, graciously and generously”.

I think that often people are shy to take the lead, because they feel that it might be arrogant or showy, but if nobody leads an action, then nothing happens. Also there is great responsibility in following, because that commitment is what gives the leader space to develop something. Sometimes you can also follow simply by acknowledging what the other person is doing.

Before I introduced Katie’s performance structure of “Pause, Flow, Exit” (entering and exiting to lift and change the energy of the space), I was completely puzzled as to how I would bring into practice this idea of group awareness – where everything that happens in the space becomes part of the performance, and that in order to move forward we need to notice this. Zaporah’s exercise became increasingly important in our process, especially when we moved into longer improvisation sessions where group awareness needed to be exercised.

Maurice Mearleau-Ponty explains how our consciousness of self is dependent on our consciousness of others when he (1948:86) says that “I never become aware of my own existence until I have already made contact with others. My reflection brings me back to myself, yet for all that it owes much to my contracts with other people”. This makes sense to me when I think about how I came to understand the mechanics of my own body through exploring how another body is organized in the bodywork exercises that we do at the beginning of contact improvisation classes. When I teach contact improvisation basics, I find it very necessary to start with bodywork because it helps to practically understand the mechanics of the body. Also, you can come to know a lot about a person through an understanding of how their body is organised, and what it feels like. The texture and temperature of a person’s skin alone can give

information about the decisions that they might make. It's just that we have become unaccustomed to reading this information.

Mearleau-Ponty's concept is helpful also when thinking about how we need to relate to each other in improvisation, and especially when we are trying to develop something together. It seems that actions we choose only have significance based on what others in the group will do with them, yet we always have a responsibility to these actions. Mearleau-Ponty (1948,2004:27) describes an "inescapable ambiguity", whereby we have to accept responsibility for our actions even though the significance of everything that we do is dependent on the meanings that others give to them. It's useful to remember this in performance.

### ***Time to play – Who is watching?***

*Dear Nicky*

*Tomorrow I will take the group to Kenton-on-Sea. I found a large sand dune there, that I think will be great for some improvisation play. I was very tired when I went there last week, and as I lay in the sand, collecting it towards me, I remembered that day you reminded me how to play. It was out on that piece of grass, where the highway spirals at the end of the M3 in Muizenberg. Do you remember? You asked me to come watch your improvisation with the yellow balloon, and take a photo or two. It was really windy that day, and the balloon popped pretty soon, but you continued to play, to follow your curiosity of being in that space. I followed you down the hill and through the trees. I didn't consider it then the way I do now. I was still thinking very much in a performance kind of frame, but after my time at the beach last week, I realize now that what you actually taught me there was what it means to play. To be engaged in the enjoyment of discovering something. Finding games, and leaving them to find new ones, you allowed me to watch you and to share your game. I thought of it as a performance, but you weren't performing for me, you simply allowed me to observe you play, and then you invited me to play, by opening a space for watching me. I considered it an improvisation with the space, but I see now that it was nothing more than just playing, exploring and following delight. I think it was the most sustained improvisation I'd ever done, just playing there in the grass, throwing stones and climbing hills. I found a golf ball, remember? How strange, and I began to play with it, but then I lost it. I didn't have to perform my disappointment, I felt it deeply, a loss of greater magnitude than just a simple golf ball. And I let you*



*watch it. You seemed to understand. It's interesting what improvisational play can bring up. I wonder why we don't do this kind of playing anymore.*

The performances that we presented at *Theatre in Motion* raised a lot of questions for me about how to present the improvisation process that I facilitated with the group. I drew on Katie's performance strategy of choosing a space in which the action will happen as a platform to choose "pause", "flow" and "exit" in movement and sound. This format offers a way for performers to collaboratively negotiate a spontaneous performance, through entering and exiting with actions that lift and change the energy. In this way we are all mobilized to create an art work, through listening to each other and noticing what begins to develop. But also, I have to acknowledge that this improvisation work is very much process based, and that perhaps it was premature to share it with an audience after only 5 weeks of working together. It certainly takes longer than the time we had to train that openness of self to be engaged in process but still giving something to an audience.

I felt somewhat dissatisfied after the last performance at *Theatre in Motion*, but I think that in this way it becomes more of a teacher for me. If all went well and we managed to create an enjoyable performance, then I might not have this same insight on which to reflect. In the last performance, there seemed to be less happening. And I felt very anxious, because an audience had come to watch something, and then nothing was really happening. Afterwards I thought about how could I find a strategy for this "nothingness" not to happen, a way for the performance to always be successful, but then this got me thinking, why does the performance have to always be successful? What was witnessed by the audience is where we were all at, it was an insight into the process, and the people involved in it. Not much happened, because maybe we were nervous, and we stayed on the peripheries, but at least we performed ourselves honestly. We allowed time to pass with no pressure to make something happen.

So I had to rethink what kind of methodology I was hoping to articulate. Was I facilitating a performance, or a process? Was I more concerned with the quality of the performance presented to an audience, or with the experience that the members of the group would gain? These questions could provoke further argument about what it is that we consider "performance", and also about the role of the audience at an improvisation performance. Certainly, the role of a witness to improvisation work is important because it gives a space for something to happen. Performers become witnesses for each

other often in this kind of process; watching, observing and allowing each other to figure things out, before encouraging, inciting and provoking things further. The magic of improvisation is when both performers and audience/observers come to make understandings about events that they witness unfolding together. And then it's not so much a product, but more about what is learned through allowing yourself to be watched, and then also learning how to guide or influence someone, in the way in which you actively observe them.

This kind type of performance then, has a somewhat political agenda, not through any concept that it attempts to bring across, but rather in the structure of how it is set out. In remaining true to the integrity of the process, this type of work resists productivity. It does not make anything or conclude, it is simply ongoing, an ongoing process of people coming into contracts with each other, negotiating something, noticing an experience, and then moving on to something else. There is no product, nothing to repeat, no resale value.

### ***Closing with a letter***

*Dear Nicky,*

*I was reading Cixous today. She (1991:114) talks about a "second innocence" at one point, "the one that comes after knowing, the one that no longer knows, the one that knows how not to know". I thought it's like the kind of play we try to find in improvisation, when we start to move passed what we've learned, and begin to approach each new situation with a sense of naivety and wonder. It reminded me of that day at the bus stop in Frieburg when I said "it's like knowing that you're being watched, but not minding too much". You thought that was particularly insightful, and then I felt quite shy after I had said it because of the way you looked at me. I guess I realized the innocent place from which it came and then felt uneasy about sharing it because of the way it revealed me.*

*But what if I hadn't tried to hide my sheepishness, then I might have performed a "second innocence" for you, to let you see me experience the situation without hiding behind what I thought was appropriate.*

*I remember an exercise in a workshop once, where we had a chance to practice this "second innocence". The task was to follow a simple instruction given by a partner. No embellishing or adding, just keep to the instruction. I told my partner to take a sip of water from all the bottles in the room. He did so,*

*without overstating anything, and he let me watch. It was funny, it was sad, and it was also quite beautiful. How simple.*

*It's the same when observing children playing, they can amuse themselves for hours, and be completely uninfluenced by those watching. I think this is what we search for in performance, but when do we lose this ability? Why do we have to search a second time to be able to reveal ourselves openly and innocently? I suppose it's a socialization thing, when we begin to understand our actions and behavior as performances of ourselves, we become conscious of what others think, and we begin to protect, to mask and censor our actions.*

*Cixous says that it is only after we "have travelled a great deal" and "rubbed and exhausted our eyes" that we can begin to approach a second innocence. It reminds me of that section from T. S. Elliot's "Four Quartets"*

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.*

*It was helpful for me to read this, it gives me a bit of faith in the idea of "process", and that working with people in improvisation is not working towards a definitive end product, but rather just working, on and on, in concentric circles as things slowly begin to illuminate. I'm also thinking about how it was only through asking or allowing someone to watch that I was able to practice a "second innocence".*

*Through relating to someone, or having them watch, we can note the things that we decide to do, or not do, and we can also question why, and maybe dare ourselves to move into those places that we might not show. The other person becomes a benchmark for what we choose to share, and the more we practice sharing and not minding too much the more I think we can begin to achieve this "second innocence" in performance.*

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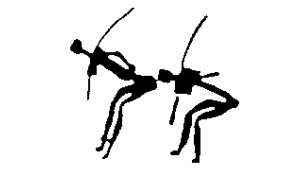
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### **Part III - Workshops**

## ***“BODY ECOLOGY” SOMATIC MOVEMENT EDUCATION.***

***KM Kraimer***

Body Ecology provides a framework for participants to explore a play of metaphor with experiential movement awareness through embodiment and expression. Considering the conference theme; Confluences: Dance and Spirituality, concepts of religion as form and technique, are paired with spirituality; an essence of movement, felt as flow and grace. The role of gravity to coordination will be explored through perceptual and relational exercises, in light of dance performance and human movement potential.

This workshop draws from ecological principles of adaptability and interrelatedness, with emphasis to gravity orientation as the common denominator for all earth inhabitants. Participants explore experientially, concepts of support, coordination, connection, and self-care. Perceptual awareness exercises include micro/macro movements, use of sound and breath. In an atmosphere of open-ended discovery, participants are supported in nonlinear play to become more intimate with their own body systems, sensations and silent level experience. The workshop invites participants to develop quick and tangible options for efficiency in movement, coordination and relational capacity.

The world grounds itself on the earth, and the earth juts through the world. But the relationship between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another... The opposition of world and earth is a striving.  
Martin Heidegger

The body as a living subject, that finds oneself in an embodied being, inhabiting a world containing others.” Edmund Husserl.

Theoretical underpinnings for somatic movement education draw from phenomenology and in particular, this teaching incorporates tonic function theory. Body Ecology also integrates embodiment with ecological principles; the relationship between living things and their environment. Whether looking at functional anatomy in relation to gravity, to how we meet the world and interact with in our professional and peer communities, there is always opportunity to grow our unique and authentic expression while being connected to a universal and dynamic unity.

Phenomenology believes subjective reality influences objective reality and considers the body a living, dynamic and expression, always in movement, always in relation. Higher levels of ordering, analyzing and knowledge are in the realm of cognition, informed through body wisdom. Posture and coordination are an expression of one's constant interaction to the field of gravity happening below cortical measure. Developing body awareness, in present time offers dancers and humans, more internal resources, a felt sense of connection, and personal empowerment. The living body is a portal to consciousness through one's ability to remain immediate to their center of experience.

This workshop provides cues to access an expanded sense of reality, through perceptual sensory awareness techniques.

Phenomenal embodiment is the immediacy of our experience. This approach in understanding our experience challenges objectification, a distancing of body through self image or mind. Western society's tendency to separate our experience into body-mind - spirit is common ground for disconnection and discontinuity. Formal dance trainings can reinforce an attitude in body objectification although, in the final product of dance we see a unity of both subject and object moving in relation to the environment which includes the audience.

The exchange between subject/object, self/other, inner/outer, becomes part of the teaching's framework, as we explore subtle transitions of our experience. Body consciousness and personal awareness combine to notice how the perceiver meets the perceived; the self meets other, and inner experience interfaces with the outer world we live in. Body Ecology invites us to touch the sacredness within and be touched by contact with the world around us.

Drawing from a professional background in Rolfing® Structural Integration, Kraimer weaves an understanding of tonic function theory, a physiological understanding of gravity's influence on coordination, into playful embodiment opportunity. Gravity is essentially our first dance partner. Our ability to balance and coordinate functional movement in all moments of life, to organize incoming information for expression, seen as posture, to high levels of performance. Heightened awareness optimizes this relationship towards efficiency.

Gravity, is our first interactive relationship. Our gravity response system, takes precedence in early embryonic development. The nerves of the vestibular system are the first to myelinate, which acknowledges the importance of our relationship to this field of gravity. Coordination is an orientation to placement. It is our need to know at all times where we are located in space. In this workshop gravity orientation is the baseline for relational capacity, as attention is turned toward the nuances of self and other, objective and subjective, inner and outer experience. Conscious embodiment offers increased options for dynamic and adaptable body movement experience. Conscious embodiment further offers dancers and humans more potential to feel and make choices as empowered, living information-organizing matrixes, ecological systems for diverse expression in complex relational capacities.

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## ***FINDING DUENDE IN THE FLAMENCO DANCE CLASS***

**Linda Vargas**

Duende is a term used in flamenco which is vehemently debated amongst aficionados: many regard it as sacred and others use it more casually without fully understanding what they mean. Federico Garcia Lorca describes it most eloquently: “it is a power, not a work...a struggle not a thought... a mysterious power which everyone senses and no philosopher explains.” In my experience duende is everywhere and it often appears without warning. It is the illusive nature and mystery of ‘duende’ which impels me to go to the theatre, where I secretly long to experience this “mysterious power” and leave saddened if it fails to appear. In my study of dance and flamenco I have come to realise that while duende is earnestly sought in flamenco performance, it is not exclusive to it. All dance provides a physical gateway to the soul. If in performance, physical technicality is present without the very core of the individual, the performance will surely result in a hollow experience for all. If “spirituality is the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos,” (Parker Palmer, 2010) then perhaps duende, in dance, is the yearning to be connected with something more than the body and the ego and is the experience of the magical interchange of individual and universal consciousness. In this workshop I explore dancing with ‘duende’ where the boundaries between the spiritual and physical, the individual and universal, are not clearly defined, but fluid.

**Linda Vargas**

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This workshop provides cues to access an expanded sense of reality, through perceptual sensory awareness techniques.

Phenomenal embodiment is the immediacy of our experience. This approach in understanding our experience challenges objectification, a distancing of body through self image or mind. Western society's tendency to separate our experience into body-mind -spirit is common ground for disconnection and discontinuity. Formal dance trainings can reinforce an attitude in body objectification although, in the final product of dance we see a unity of both subject and object moving in relation to the environment which includes the audience.

The exchange between subject/object, self/other, inner/outer, becomes part of the teaching's framework, as we explore subtle transitions of our experience. Body consciousness and personal awareness combine to notice how the perceiver meets the perceived; the self meets other, and inner experience interfaces with the outer world we live in. Body Ecology invites us to touch the sacredness within and be touched by contact with the world around us.

Drawing from a professional background in Rolfing® Structural Integration, Kraimer weaves an understanding of tonic function theory, a physiological understanding of gravity's influence on coordination, into playful embodiment opportunity. Gravity is essentially our first dance partner. Our ability to balance and coordinate functional movement in all moments of life, to organize incoming information for expression, seen as posture, to high levels of performance. Heightened awareness optimizes this relationship towards efficiency.

Gravity, is our first interactive relationship. Our gravity response system, takes precedence in early embryonic development. The nerves of the vestibular system are the first to myelinate, which acknowledges the importance of our relationship to this field of gravity. Coordination is an orientation to placement. It is our need to know at all times where we are located in space. In this workshop gravity orientation is the baseline for relational capacity, as attention is turned toward the nuances of self and

other, objective and subjective, inner and outer experience. Conscious embodiment offers increased options for dynamic and adaptable body movement experience. Conscious embodiment further offers dancers and humans more potential to feel and make choices as empowered, living information-organizing matrixes, ecological systems for diverse expression in complex relational capacities.

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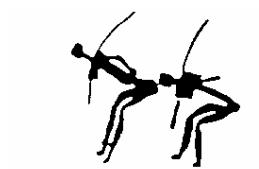
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## **Part IV – Lecture Demonstration**

## **MOVEMENT AS CREATIVE RESEARCH**

**Millicent Johnnie**

**Southern Methodist University: Dallas, TX, USA**

Presentation/Demonstration

*Seventeen years ago, I openly participated in a felt demonstration of how the magical power of the Universe works, an exchange that would change my life forever and serve as a foundation for assisting my soul into alignment with the natural rhythm, dance and flow of life. I am a MOVEMENT MAGICAN.*

First and foremost my deepest gratitude and love to my sister-friends, aunties and all of my artistic mothers and fathers in my artistic family and community. You inspire me simply by your presence. Your immense capacity for loving me and my work unconditionally has shaped me into the woman that I am. Thank you for your unique ways of teaching me patience, loving kindness and generosity through spirit, light and love. Thank you for showing me parts of myself at times I did not want to see, loving me in spite of my imperfections and welcoming me completely into your lives by accepting me whole-heartedly as a sister and friend. Your healing gifts and steadfast friendship will never be forgotten.

To our wise and powerful teacher Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Artistic Director of the Urban Bush Women in New York City- thank you. Your words, encouragement, generous support, guidance and spirit will forever remain infused in our work. You gave us opportunities that were only imaginable for someone like myself, a young small-town girl from the back roads of Louisiana. You helped nurture my artistic and creative work into existence. When it came time for me to walk, do my own thing, although it hurt you, you slowly but surely began to let go. You recognized this release was necessary in order for me to develop and learn independence and self-reliance. For this, I am grateful. Without your mentorship, creative energy and lifelong lessons of relationship; I would not know or understand that tuning into our emotions is a *real* strength. Thank you for leading us towards and through the fears because without you, we would not have known how to transform them into love.

And finally, thanks to our ancestors, spirit-guides, Mother Earth and Father Spirit for orchestrating this wonderful journey of light, love and ceremony.

***Perform “Beyond Words” movement sketch to A Piece, A Chord by Bobby McFerrin***

I was 15 years old when I first met Jawole. I was in North Carolina for the International Association for Blacks in Dance Conference with the Grace Hamilton Academy of the Arts and it was my first time away from home without my family. Urban Bush Women presented their own evening of work as part of the IABD professional showcase series. I remember sitting in the audience watching “Transitions” being mesmerized with Maria Earl’s height, Deidra Dawkins athleticism, Carolina Garcia’s bodacious nature, Michelle Dorant’s grace and Christine King’s infectious voice. My spirit quickly urged me to pay attention as it said definitively, “You can do this.”

Prior to that moment, I had only heard my spirit speak in this way one other time in my life in Mr. Richard’s (pronounced RHEE- SHARD’s) 6<sup>th</sup> grade science class when I found myself doodling the word “choreographer” all over my notebook. As I doodled, I filled the negative space with my full name, Millicent Marie Johnnie. Then my spirit whispered, “Establish your name. Start now.” And so I spent the rest of fourth period fine-tuning the broad strokes and subtleties of my signature, Millicent M. Johnnie.

After the show, I crossed paths with Kwame Ross, whom at the time was an outstanding dancer and musician with the company and whom later became our Associate Artistic Director. He looked extremely exhausted and although I wanted to speak and congratulate him on a successful performance, again my spirit whispered, “Let him be. One day he will be your friend.” So I walked away and joined the rest of my party at the post-performance reception.

By the end of the weekend, I had convinced myself to stay an extra day in Raleigh so that I could attend the Jacob’s Pillow Summer Auditions taught by Ronald K. Brown. It was the best audition I had ever had, but because I stayed the extra day, Ms. Grace and the other dancers had already flown back to Louisiana without me. I was thrilled about my performance in the audition but I was terrified about the return flight home.



The concierge at my hotel told me not to worry about getting to the airport. He assured me that there were more than enough people registered with the conference in route to the airport that day and that I would surely find someone to share a cab with. Shortly after, he placed me in a car with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Founding Artistic Director of the Urban Bush Women. It was just the two of us and although we were generations apart, we talked like old girlfriends the entire ride to the airport. It turned out that we were both flying Delta through Atlanta and because Jawole sensed my anxiety during our cab ride, she wanted to make sure that I was properly checked in and that I knew where I was going. The Delta Sky Cab attendant asked me had anyone other than myself handled my bags and I said, "Absolutely, the hotel attendant, the concierge, the cab driver..." Jawole immediately interrupted me and told him that this was in fact absolutely NOT what I meant. She assured him that no one else had handled my bags and he let us continue with our check in.

During our layover in Atlanta, we shared lunch together and she began telling me about her dance institute that was going to launch the following summer. I remember telling her how much I loved their performance and how exciting it would be to study and train with the Urban Bush Women, but that those kinds of opportunities just didn't happen where I was from. I also told her I would NEVER become a professional dancer because that just wasn't the kind of thing you did back home. Little did I know what the Universe was conspiring. Jawole gave me a post-card with the UBW address on it and told me to write her because she was really interested in keeping in touch with me. She also encouraged me to begin taking class more consistently if I really wanted to give this dance thing a try.

So as soon as I landed in Lafayette, I called Ms. Grace to tell her about my experience and I immediately began taking classes with her four times a week. When I couldn't train with Grace, I trained with Kenneth Jenkins, Jawole's former classmate who was a professor of dance at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. As my training grew stronger, my relationship with the dance department strengthened.

One Sunday, after visiting with my great-grandmother at her nursing facility, something in my spirit urged me to drive by the dance department. I saw several cars in the parking lot, which I found fairly odd for an early Sunday afternoon. I walked in and whom did I see? Michelle

Dorant and Deidra Dawkins holding auditions for “Bitter Tongue” one of Jawole’s signature works. I walked over to Kenneth and asked if I could audition and he politely told me that it was a closed audition for current dance majors and USL alumni. Michelle Dorant overheard him and she said, “I think it would be a good experience for her. We don’t mind. Does she have dance clothes?” Lucky for me, one of the dance majors let me borrow a pair of loose fitting sweats and a form fitting t-shirt. I auditioned and landed the lead role that I shared with one of USL’s most prestigious alums.

That was the start of it all. Later that year, I joined Michelle and Deidra for a second-line at UBW’s first community engagement project in New Orleans. And although I was on the prom court, I attended my senior prom late, moments after walking off stage from performing the solo in “Bitter Tongue” at the Hyman Performing Arts Center for University of Southwestern Louisiana’s Dance Department’s “State of La Danse”. The following July, I danced the same role in “Bitter Tongue” with Carolina Garcia but this time, as a duet for the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual UBW Summer Dance Institute in Tallahassee, FL.

I was only 15 years old when I felt like God had strategically placed me in a sister-hood that could foster a safe pathway for me to make my way out into the world. Sometimes it happened as a singular movement and other times it happened gradually and in stages. I look at these relationships as a part of my extended journey, as an important stage in progress towards existing as a light-being conscious of our divine intelligence working on behalf of the Universe to teach and prepare us for our next ritual, our next exchange, our next ceremony.

When you typically think of research you think of a systematic investigation or study of materials and sources in order to establish facts that lead to new conclusions but the research I’m referring to is more about absorbing and observing what is naturally occurring around you in order to reach new conclusions where experimentation, learning exchanges and exploration is valued and encouraged. In other words, research that accesses a type of creative magic to influence the creative work by using mysterious or supernatural forces found within the choreographic process.

Today, I plan to focus on two significant interdisciplinary projects; *Party People* directed by Liesl Tommy and *Cry You One* directed by Kathy Randels.

A primary focus of my work is to present a diagnostic view of social, political and cultural issues. I seek to embody the experiences that reveal to humanity, new ways of thinking, feeling and expressing ideas, thoughts and concerns by acknowledging traditional movement forms and contemporary styles, synthesizing them into new multi-layered approaches to choreography—Movement Magic.

**Show YouTube clip of “Party People” Promo))**

**<http://youtu.be/1QgK7HEZrng>**

### ***PARTY PEOPLE***

**Written by Universes, Directed by Liesl Tommy, Choreographed by Millicent Johnnie**

**Project Description:** *Party People* is a high-energy, infectious mix of theatre, poetry, jazz, blues, hip-hop, boleros and salsa that digs into the story and legacy of an American revolution. Four decades ago, the Black Panthers and Puerto Rican Young Lords were young activists providing food and health care in their impoverished communities while in a desperate struggle to survive the systematic dismantling of their movements. Now they are 60-somethings untangling a traumatic past and an unclear future. In ensemble, Oregon Shakespeare actors and UNIVERSES toggle between then and now in this meticulously researched, compelling work of fiction. The National Theater Project, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival American Revolutions Cycle and the Ford Foundation have provided funding for the work.

**The Story:** An opening at an art gallery of works inspired by the 1960s and '70s activities of the Black Panthers and the Young Lords presents a unique opportunity for members of both groups to gather and reflect on the past and present. As those from younger generations confront party members, they wrestle with how the ideals of yesterday are reflected in the present. Old lovers reconnect, and friends who haven't talked in 25 to 30 years reunite. Meanwhile, former frenemies—and informants, too—meet and catch up. As the evening proceeds, however,

certain facts that were taken as truths come into question. Songs and poetic monologues flare up to reveal the inner thoughts of party leaders as well as rank and file who had contributed to the party's cause. By evening's end, history does not seem as black and white as it sometimes reads in history books.

**Process:** The work was created in a four pronged process: materials were researched on the Black Panthers and the Young Lords at the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics at NYU; workshops that each had a different focus (writing, music and writing/music/dance) and were fed by the exploration of research materials as well as oral histories with central figures as well as the rank and file of the Black Panthers and Young Lords; and a six week period of rehearsal which culminated in performances by UNIVERSES and company members of the Tony Award winning Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

***Upcoming Venues: Center Theatre Group***

*Party People* is being presented at Los Angeles Center Theatre Group, a preeminent non-profit theatre company known for presenting high quality groundbreaking new works, explosive productions of the classics and hit Broadway plays and musicals on three stages – the Ahmanson Theatre, the Mark Taper Forum and the Kirk Douglas Theatre.

My choreography changes depending on the needs of the larger creative work; however, each work is linked by recurring formal concerns. Each body of work is determined by subject at hand, which informs the choreographic direction and architectural landscape needed to convey the message. During the research and production phase new areas of interest arise and often informs what my next work will be.

***Show Clip from Cry You One May Sketch))***

***CRY YOU ONE***

**Created between Mondo Bizarro, Director Kathy Randels, Grammy nominated Cajun fiddler Louie Michot and Choreographer Millicent Johnnie**

**Project Description:** *CRY YOU ONE* is a site-specific performance and an outdoor procession that will highlight how rapidly one of the world's most vibrant cultures is disappearing, as it is shared

on the sites of extinction where water is reclaiming land once occupied by people's homes. Through the mediums of music, storytelling, dance and cooking we explore what becomes of embodied cultural traditions when the land that sustains them disappears. *CRY YOU ONE* features the work of: Jeff Becker (Designer), Nick Slie (Performer), Hannah Pepper-Cunningham (Performer), Will Bowling (Performer), Phil Cramer (Performer) Sean LaRocca (Composer) and Monique Verdin (Photographer).

**The Story:** Travel to the communities of South Louisiana and witness how a woman's fingers are the vestiges of the earth she once tilled, her palms hold the memory of some marsh. Louisiana is disappearing. It is breaking apart into the sea. In the last forty years alone, we have seen more of our shoreline fall prey to the waters lapping at our banks than any other region in the world. Our bodies are an extension of this rapidly vanishing countryside, vestiges of the land's memory—its phantom limbs so to speak. *CRY YOU ONE* will use our bodies and the music, dances and stories of South Louisiana to celebrate that rapidly eroding land. Like a New Orleans jazz funeral, this theatrical event is generative because when we hold a funeral here, we celebrate. We cook and play music; we parade the body through the streets, stopping at landmarks that were significant to the life of the departed to regale stories and memories. Now, take this form of a jazz funeral, complete with all the elements just described, subtract the focus on a single person and imagine such a funeral for the land itself.

***CRY YOU ONE*** is a roving celebratory procession. Music and visual spectacles lead you to pre-determined landmarks in which you will witness stories, of, for example, the fifth generation farmer who tilled the soil and witnessed the bounty of the alluvial plain now washing into the sea. These landmarks—old farms, marshes, and boathouses—are each distinct theatrical spaces complete with seating and visual installations. The procession travels to seven or eight of these landmarks for live music and ensemble performance. Along the way, our theatrical event illustrates how citizens are preparing to evacuate this land as water literally washes their homes away. *CRY YOU ONE* gives physical, oral and musical shape to the many of themes of our home: converging cultures, creativity in all its forms, human error, forced evacuation, living with water and the desire for permanence.

**The Process:** *CRY YOU ONE* is being created from such a specific context: disappearance in all of its physical and cultural manifestations. That experience is one that requires both urgency and patience. Our process responds to the timescale of the land in these communities. We think in terms of letting the environment speak to us, allowing the nuanced and ever-shifting landscape to inspire our creative process.

Our process of generating material is analogous to the way nature fertilizes the earth. Over time, trees and plants drop thousands of seeds; with only a precious few actually taking root and still fewer survive long enough to bear fruit. Our creative team generates hours of material (scenes, design sketches, songs, physical sequences), in search of the theatrical moments that bear fruit. Throughout development, we note which ideas, poems, songs, sculptures, physical actions have taken root, which are bearing fruit and which need to be altered in response to our environment or the narrative we are trying to tell. The most compelling material from this development period is kept and sequenced into the theatrical procession we are building. We will then share the material as a work-in-process with our partners and local citizens in each community, at each location over a three-month period before the premiere. This will allow us to test ideas, gather feedback and make adjustments to the material.

**The Venue:** The theatrical processions will be developed and take place outdoors, on land that borders water in three communities with which we have personal, professional and ancestral relationships—three communities on the verge of extinction. Two of these, South Lafourche Parish and the United Houma Nation of Point Aux Chien, will be forced to relocate in 5-10 years. The third, the once thriving Islenos fishing community of St Bernard Parish, has shrunk from 300 families to just 30 people in seventy years.

***Performance excerpt of “Ma Negresse” source material used for CYO))***

I create in and around pop- culture, which has included me in a new breed of choreographers and educators who take the influences of our collaborators, producers and directors and create a cohesive choreographic narrative that creates a fluid interface between the entertainment world and academic scholarship, honoring tradition while recognizing the need for expansion.

**((2:00 YouTube clip of Symphony for the Dance Floor)) [http://youtu.be/WibmszE\\_V9k](http://youtu.be/WibmszE_V9k)**

**Millicent Johnnie**

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## **Part V – Research Seminar**

## THIS THING CALLED DANCE AS RESEARCH NARRATIVE , (AUTO)BIOGRAPHY AND DANCE AS RESEARCH

Gerard M. Samuel

### **Abstract**

*Stories have remained a powerful tool in the transmission of knowledge within societies. What is the place of Dance as research that could convey old and new knowledges especially when the pen and instrument of the story is the body? This position paper was first delivered as part of a research seminar at the University of Uberlandia, Brazil in April 2013. It argues for a more fluid interpretation and acceptance of biographer and narrator as primary storyteller. The paper is expanded here within the setting of Confluences 7 -Dance Religion and Spirituality conference.*

### **Research as central to the Dance**

I am pleased to have a session dedicated to the scholarly activity of Research within Confluences 7. It is the bedrock and cornerstone of the academy. For some ( hopefully outside this space) Dance as Research is an oxymoron. To dance is performative and creative but the dance as a respected, independent piece of research, for some remains doubtful. In my view, dance scholars and practitioners themselves can change this paradigm by valuing their output more and recognizing how such production meets the strict academic criteria of Research work. I therefore position my own dance work, 'Place of Grace' under such scrutiny to argue for it to be considered as Dance as Research.

Contemporary Dance works such as 'Place of Grace ' a made for dance film need to be more widely accepted as so called traditional research. As the recipient of a Creative Arts Award from the Gordon Institute for the Performing and Creative Arts (GIPCA) based at University Of Cape Town in 2010, I was excited to work for the first time in the medium of film with the producer of twospinningwheels productions, Shelley Barry. I hold a strong view that there are many examples<sup>1</sup> of such work with multiple facets : choreography , direction, design that are all inextricably inter-twined. These production activities have as their heart , the fundamental axis that are contextual (usually specific in time and place); philosophical; that test a theoretical hegemony. In short, they are 'Dance as Research' . It is my observation that such work follows the conventional (read in the Social Sciences and Humanities) structural manoeuvres ( see afterword below). Traditionally, a researcher begins with a topic and a key /critical research question. Next s/he establishes a background and rationale (contextual frames and reasons) for the study. The process usually takes up its position amongst existing bodies of similar work which could be considered a 'Literature Review'. It often follows, or comments on a particular theoretical position or mode of operation. Very often it attempts, experiments and unearths a new idea carving new territories. The research methodologies are finely described and limitations/parameters of the study are set out. Finally, it draws to a close, even if this is not always conclusive with findings and recommendations. Most researchers, who guard against

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<sup>1</sup> My short list would include SA choreographer, Associate Professor in the UCT Drama dept. Jay Pather's *City Scapes*, *Qaphela Caesar*. Director Magnet theatre and Head of Drama dept. Associate Professor Mark Fleishman's *Cargo* which he directed for Jazzart Dance theatre. Artistic Director, Flatfoot dance co. Lliane Loots', *Skin*, *Mapping Nostalgia*, *Bhakti* and Rhodes University's Prof. Gary Gordon's *Bessie's Head*



plagiarism, acknowledge all works cited in an extensive bibliography. The programme or credits (in the case of a film) almost always detailed the works cited. So how is a contemporary dance work like 'Place of Grace' not an example of Dance as Research?

***The beginnings of 'Place of Grace' .***

Shortly after Nelson Mandela became president in the mid 1990s he renamed his official residence Tuynhuis in Cape Town, "Genadendal" which translated from Afrikaans<sup>2</sup> into English means 'Valley of Peace'. Genadendal is also a town in the Overberg area of the Western Cape Province, South Africa and home to the oldest mission station in the country which was established in 1738 (Welcome to Overberg - Enter Genadendal - View Overberg, 2002).



Illustration 1 : Genadendal Mission Station ( c. 1849) by George Angas

Together with a group of post-graduate students, I began research as we wanted to develop a film about forgiveness and grace. What does it take to reach the end point of a 'made for dance film' as a piece of research? Courage and grace. For many South Africans today, on both sides of the racial divide the process of reconciliation is filled with mixed emotions guilt, anger, embarrassment and pain. What excited me about this research project were the possibilities of interdisciplinary approaches that could be explored to comment on the geographic space/ temporal dimension and the spirit of this specific area. The region of the Cape was still very new to me.

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<sup>2</sup> The origins of Afrikaans as a language particular to South Africa are many including Dutch, German and Malay. However, this is complex territory as on the one hand it is strongly associated during Apartheid as the language of the oppressor and on the other, nineteen years into democracy Afrikaans is being regarded as an indigenous language.

## Key Impulses for the Film

A senior student of the UCT School of Dance, Mdu Nyembe had worked with Pina Bausch<sup>3</sup> some years before. He had an idea to go to people's homes in the township of Genadendal to offer cups of tea in order to open doors and conduct research about their plight. This could be seen as ethnographic research. He hoped their stories/ biographies might provide evidence of the harsh lives and legacies of people in the Coloured townships surrounding Cape farm lands. Specifically he sought to establish, how they were making peace with all that had happened to them? They appear to live in great poverty and in dusty roads, and yet could have contentment. This is in sharp contrast to the productive farmlands and relatively surrounding towns like Greyton, Grabou and Elgin which are relatively near to Genadendal. The views from the perspective of the so called rich could also be a site for future research and investigation.

I noticed that tea drinking is a very common cultural practice in my own home. Could this be as I have a British and Indian heritage? Many people associate tea with India and China. It seems every 10h00 and 15h00 and any excuse in between, my family has tea. Tea is drunk when we are happy and when we are sad... To some extent tea drinking as a practice by middle classes in Cape Town has been replaced by coffee in the 2000s (The South African Coffee Index, 2013). No doubt Brazilian coffee is a worldwide phenomenon.

The research team began its work through Story boarding which Thalia Laric ( then an honours student ) pursued in earnest. We gathered snippets of ideas for scenes and after an initial so called 'haphazard' selection we worked to establish a timeline/thread for the film. We were adamant that the actual film would not have a clear narrative – beginning, middle and then end but rather would actively seek a poetic expression that was open to varied interpretations, just as many other contemporary dance works.

We also conducted costume research. This was spearheaded by Christy Giesler who looked at what each character should wear, when and where. The specific colour, tone and overall complementary and/or contrasting views in relation to the set was also mediated. Leading Cape Town fashion designer, Malcolm Stellenboom was our consultant designer. Props were also very meticulously selected to suggest a colonial and Afro-historic period feel (though there are one or two continuity mistakes).

Music was a key component and later editing proved to be a time consuming affair for Shelley Barry and her technical team. The audio phrasing and motion in each scene became its own dance. In my opinion, it is because of Shelley's sharp eye and mind that we have such a beautiful evocation of an abstract theme such as forgiveness and grace.

We conducted so called conventional archival research (books , maps, articles, websites ) of Genadendal and unearthed historical facts regarding early Missionary work in the country. This led to the story of German missionary, George Schmidt who arrived in the Cape in the mid 1700s ( 9<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> German founder of tanz teater, Bausch had developed unconventional methods for her dance works that included gestural motifs , repetition, topical social commentary, gender role reversals and site specific works.

July 1737 to be precise almost 276 years to the date of this paper). Schmidt established the first missionary church – a Moravian Church in Genadendal and set about teaching the Khoi to read and write. He returned to Germany (relatively soon) in 1744. Author of *The United Brethren/ Unitas Fratrum*, Dr Jaap de Boer writes

but the fact that a start had been made, successfully to lead the Khoikhoi to a sedentary life, by helping the emancipated slaves to find a new base for their lives, but above all by leading the people to put their trust in Jesus Christ, not being disturbed anymore by fear evil spirits and omens, by being able to resist the attractions of alcohol, dances and promiscuity. (De Boer & Temmers, 1987:24)

These loaded, arrogant comments and reference to the evil/power of dance made within colonial history and other sources fuelled my own Dr Schmidt fictionalisation. What could some of reasons for his actions and sudden departure be? What were the day to day challenges facing such pioneers? These are often complex and was brought to life by the lead dancer Mdu Nyembe. Initially Mdu was to be the film's choreographer and I, its Director but given Mdu's multiple characters in the film, we agreed that he withdraw from that responsibility.

After the first 3 months Shelly and I felt we needed to expand the film from a solo work with Mdu and to explore a triangulated tryst. We introduced a women character. This phase could be likened to the re-writing process that almost every researcher is familiar with. Masters student, Jamila was chosen as the perfect, brooding counter foil to the intense and introspective Schmidt. Finally, I invited another artist, lecturer in the department, Ilona Frege to join us. Ilona is also a founder member of the well known South African dance company, First Physical Theatre co based in Grahamstown. She was an equally fearless experimenter and embodied the character of the maid, Johanna-Katrina with ease and grace.

The research team scouted various venues both outdoors and indoors including beaches, forests, gardens, farms, bathrooms, and gentleman(sic) studies. Thankfully, Cape Town has many beautiful vistas for the adventurous film director –researcher like myself. An exploration of lighting with everything from scenes with candles only, to torches shone on faces... to filming at dawn and dusk, was undertaken. We experimented with light and shadow – interrogating our own *Blair Witch Project*<sup>4</sup>. These though very dramatic and striking scenes were left out and considered overwritten, repetitious and superfluous.

In another example, we spent three weeks on developing the a shipwreck scene to conjure the Oceanid<sup>5</sup> that provides a metaphorical link with the early colonialists who trod the virgin (sic), African shores. The cast grew with three other dancers (Louina Prinsloo, Kirsty van Buuren and Sherman Smart). We created and rehearsed the shipwreck scene until ready for filming adding almost a full 10minutes, of balletically stylised choreography. The scene was set to Ravel's, *La Mer*.

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<sup>4</sup> This American film within the horror film genre was ground breaking in 1999 for its use of homemovie style camera work and improvisatory feel.

<sup>5</sup> An oceanid is Greek mythological figure that roam the seas, lakes, rivers and ponds. They are mostly female though some cases of male nymphs/ sea creatures are also described.

In the final cut this entire scene was axed and replaced by a 10 second clip - a loud gasp for air/ the so called drowning scene with the Woman in a bath full of rooibos tea which I hope audiences find more arresting.

The nature of a project such as this meant that several experts, and friends were roped in to assist..In the tradition of good research we too stood on the shoulders of these giants, thereby strengthening our literature review.

### **Conclusion**

I return to my rationale for the study – a comment on colonialism and apartheid - two enduring issues in South African theatre alongside the more contemporary questions of hybridity, heritage and legacy. The producers of rooibos tea in the Cederberg and Clanwilliam area could be seen as wealthy and yet many of the farmer workers in the same region are extremely poor. Farm workers strikes continue to beset the region as can be seen from the cartoon by Zapiro in 2013.



Illustration 2. Zapiro.

We began to fictionalise relationships that may have existed in settlement Genadendal . De Boer noted that

It served as a centre for the government in power to obtain military personnel and for the farmers to recruit labour. The government also used Genadendal as a spring- board to start other mission stations such as Mamre and Enon, since the value of mission stations became evident for the development of the colony. (de Boer & Temmers, 1987, p. 36)

What was the nature of the sexual relationships between the house slave and the master that may have begun seductively over cups of tea? How did the inherent power dynamics shift? How could we show the problematic of stereotypical gender roles within these contexts? These questions manifest in the film in scenes like the drowning woman; the flirtations between Johanna- Katrina and the Man? What is the significance of the ceramic cup or white tin mug?

After this year long process I am even more convinced that Dance as Research can be articulated through trans- , interdisciplinary approaches. Research that reflects both narrative, an (auto)biography are also effective tools especially when at this juncture (July 2013) one asks, who should write the biography of a icon like Mandela and a nation like South Africa? Does this matter when an aesthetic shift and jolt in one's understanding of humanity can be powerfully evoked through Dance? This 'made for dance film' reminded me that as dance researchers we have multiple modalities from which to dance - we write, film, choreograph, sing, and design Contemporary Dance work. Research that undergoes the processes described above can be potent and as groundbreaking as any so called conformist research in the Humanities.

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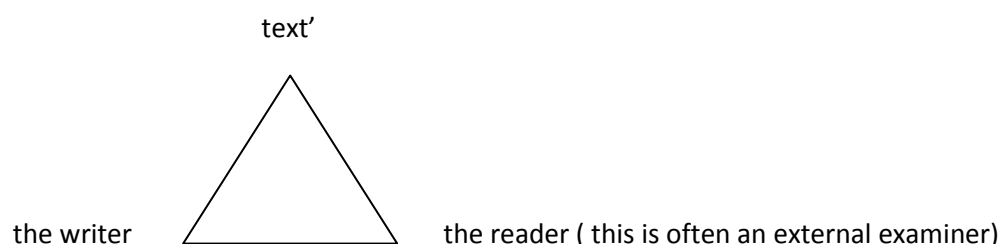
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### Afterword

Research -consider a triangulated relationship between



At the centre is academic writing...

Some fundamental issues to reflect upon:

- Re-SEARCH ...a process of re-LOOKING/ detailed observation
- Attitude of curiosity & enquiry
- The dissertation is primarily an argument a not a poetic story /journalistic narrative. Theorise...
- It can be based on case studies , own life research, performance as research.
- It follows strong academic conventions in each university .
- What to do with Writers block: Write ...in order to re-write, no self editing ( Prof. John de Gruchy, 2011)
- The Supervisor & Student ( set goals , expect realistic outcomes; entering into a MOU

### Some structural moves in academic writing

(based on Prof. Michael Samuel guidance in 2008)

In academic jargon	In student's language
Research topic	Does the research have a focus..what, where, who, when?
Introduction	Provides a brief context for the study and clarifies how should we follow the main arguments of the dissertation / thesis
Background to the study	Overview & context
Rationale	Reasons for the study. Why should we even know this?
Research Question/s	What is the Main question & sub questions. Hypothesis. What do you want to know ...or 'Is this a question?'  How is .....; what is the impact of ...(usu. Masters level)  What explains...why does the....( usu.PhD level)
Literature review	What have other scholars/authors said?
Theoretical Frame works	What are some the main theories that you will base your argument on
Research Methodology	Eg. Field work, samples, Data gathering, interviews. Data analysis
Findings & recommendations	What were your sensitive observations?
Limitations of the study	What is being left out
Conclusion	summative statements, pulling together all

	the threads
Bibliography	Do I have the seminal texts, in 2000 – till now. Do I reflect geographic positioning north- south  All 'works cited' in absolute correct referencing style eg. Harvard, APA
Appendices	Additional materials, 'nice to haves', posters, photographs

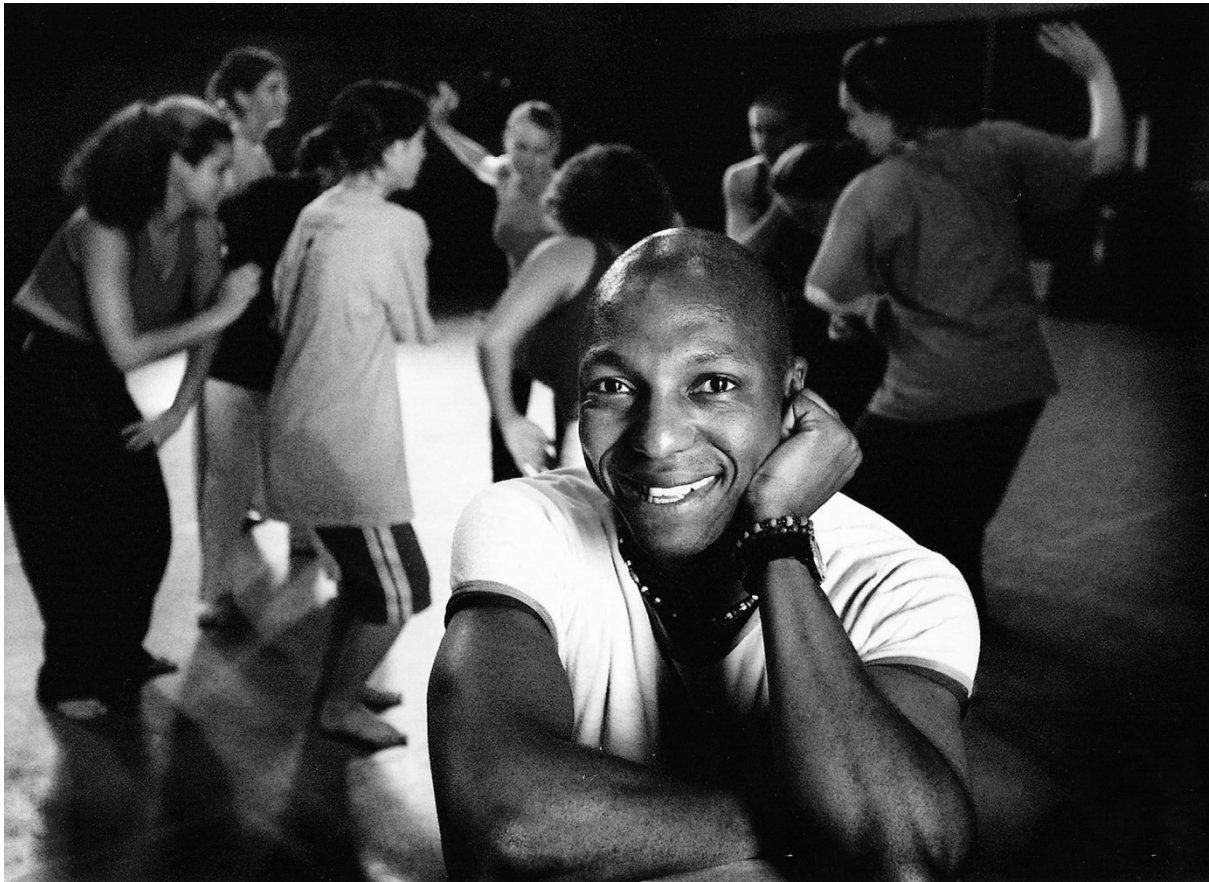
Table above was prepared by Gerard M. Samuel . April 2013



**Biographies**



## KEYNOTE



**Vincent Sekwati Koko Mantsoe** was born and raised in the township of Soweto, South Africa. Although born in the middle of Apartheid, his desire was not to be a politician, but rather to focus his interest on cultural growth. As a child, he and his siblings woke every day to the sound of drums as his grandmother, mother and aunt greeted the Ancestors. A descendant of a long line of Sangomas, (traditional healers) Mantsoe participated in traditional rituals involving the use of song, dance and drumming. However, Mantsoe believes that he is not a Sangoma although he possess their spiritual energy. Mantsoe`s family is a combination of collective cultural diversity; mainly, Southern Sotho, Ndebele, Xhosa and Pedi.

During his formative years he danced in a youth club, called the Joy dancers, practising street dances and trying to imitate, forge and develop the dance moves seen in music videos of Michael Jackson, Wham and Fame and give them a township groove. Among his peers, and beside him in dancing, was Mantsoe`s friend Gregory Maqoma, who today has also made a difference in South African dance and created his own company `Vuyani Dance Theatre. In the 1990s, he began his training in Moving Into Dance Mophatong (MIDM), a Johannesburg based dance company under the artistic direction and mentorship of Sylvia Glasser. With MIDM, he was able to study different dance techniques in South Africa as well as in Australia in Sydney and Melbourne (Victorian Collage of the Arts)

The philosophical approach in Mantsoe`s work is based on the transformation or progressive preservation of cultures in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and a balance of the differing forces of African,

Contemporary and Asian movements. His unique version of 'Afro fusion' or 'contemporary African' dance, is today a form in itself that may be characterized by its highly energetic, spiritual and physically demanding movement style. His keen interest is to pass this information to artists from different backgrounds. Already he has inspired many dance artists across the globe.

Vincent Mantsoe's choreographic debut took place in 1992, while he was still a performing member of MIDM. Throughout the 1990s, he contributed to the company's repertoire with a number of solos and group works, among these *Speaking with Tongues*, *Gula*, *Matari*, *Plotlo*, *Naka*, *Men-Jaro* and *Hanano*, *Blessing of the Earth*. From 1996 – 2001 he was Associate Artistic Director and resident Choreographer of MIDM. International choreographic commissions from the mid 1990s include *Sasanka* for Harlem Dance Theatre (USA), *Inbal* Dance Theatre (Israel), *Bodika* for COBA (Canada), *Majara* for Skanes Danse Theatre (Sweden), *Letlalo/Skin* for Ace Dance and Music (UK) *Lefa* for Introdans (Netherlands) *Sunduza-La* for Cie Entre Deux (Canada) *Thari* for Ballet Theatre Afrikan (South Africa).

Around the turn of the millennium, international demands on his solo performances and teaching increased. Mantsoe has presented his solo works around the African Continent, for the Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela's presidential inauguration in 1994, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, and on numerous tours to Europe, Asia and North America. As a prize winning young choreographer, Vincent Mantsoe has been invited to partake in several collaborations. Apart from South Africa, especially strong relations have been forged with artists in Japan, France, Sweden, USA, Canada and the UK. Mr. Mantsoe is now the Artistic Director of **Association Noa-Cie Vincent Mantsoe**, based in France, which was created in 2005, since then he has created various works for Cie.

Mr. Mantsoe has been invited to collaborate with dance students in the Universities and Colleges in South Africa, USA, France and South Korea. Both in 2011 and 2012, Mr. Mantsoe played an important role in the South African project CROSSINGS which was initiated by Michel Kelemis, with help from the Institut Francais South Africa and South African partners; Dance Conner, Dance Umbrella/Forum, Moving Into Dance, Dance Factory and Vuyani Dance Theatre.



**Anna Morris** holds a Masters in Dance and Somatic Movement from the University of Central Lancashire (New York program) and a BA in Drama and Human Kinetics from Rhodes University. She began her professional dance training as an apprentice with Tumbuka Dance Company in her native Zimbabwe in 1994. She has since performed with the First Physical Theatre Company in South Africa as well as Lightwire Theatre and the John/Allen Project both based in New Orleans. Anna has taught dance technique for the Dance Foundation Course in Zimbabwe, the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, the New Orleans Ballet Association pre-professional program, Tulane University Department of Theatre and Dance and is currently teaching and rehearsing Tumbuka Dance Company.



**Balu Nivison** is a qualified Social Worker, and an honours graduate from UCT and Rhodes University. After winning the final year dance award at Rhodes, Balu went on to complete the community dance course from the Laban College in London. Clothing designer, award winning dancer and choreographer, Moving Art Originator, and scholar of ancient spiritual wisdom, Balu has been teaching dance and running transformational workshops, using dance as a vehicle for healing, expression and connection for the past 28 years. She was a leading force in the ground breaking production of Abamanyani (Unity) (1986), which heralded a spate of important struggle productions, with which she was integrally involved. Her choreographic work 'Wild Honey' was the invitation piece for Dance Umbrella 1991. Through her dance teaching she discovered that she was tapping into the Kabbalistic blueprint, deeply ingrained in her roots. Balu currently works with movement as a therapeutic medium with clients at an eating disorders unit, as well as running ongoing classes and 'Beloved of the Soul', 'Art of connection' workshops. She anchors her teaching in the weaving together of spiritual wisdom and dance practice.



**Dr Doreen Gordon** is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work at the University of the West Indies. Dr Gordon previously carried out her doctoral fieldwork in Salvador, between 2005 - 2007. Her research focussed on the black middle classes, which she related to wider social and historical forces in the region, including the Caribbean. Subsequently, she was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, where she conducted comparative research on race.



**Dr Elena Calvo-González** has an MA in Social Anthropology from the University of Edinburgh and a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Manchester. She is currently a lecturer in the Department of Sociology of the Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brazil. Her research interests include race, biotechnology, and the body.



**Gerard M. Samuel** is a senior lecturer and Director of the University of Cape Town's School of Dance since May 2008. He is a pioneer of disability arts and integrated arts projects in South Africa having established LeftfeetFIRST Dance theatre group. Gerard has taught in several dance companies and universities in South Africa, and in various centres for children and young people with disabilities in Denmark. He is Editor of the first peer reviewed scholarly publication devoted to Dance, the South African Dance Journal, and Chair of *Confluences* – international dance conferences based in Cape Town. He has presented several conference papers, written groundbreaking articles and has a book chapter published in *Post -Apartheid dance - many voices many bodies many stories (2012)*. He has a diverse choreographic portfolio of works including neoclassical ballet -*Prabhati*, contemporary dance - *Milky Tears* and children's theatre - *Who says, The Ugly Duckling?*, which has toured Hungary, Denmark and South Africa. His most recent praxis as research work includes *Place of Grace* a 'made for dance film' supported via the prestigious Creative Arts Award of the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts (GIPCA) in 2010. Gerard is a PhD candidate exploring the nexus of ageism , disability and Otherness in Dance



**Hylton Howard Arnolds** is an educator from Cape Town teaching geography. As an educator he is involved with environmental education school projects. He is a Masters student in the Department of Geography at UNISA. He studies the role of cultural heritage festivals. His interests include the geography of tourism and heritage.



**Anna de Jager** is a lecturer in the Department of Geography at UNISA. Her teaching interests are in human geography, including the development of urban space, the geography of services provision, the geography of everyday living and the geography of tourism. She is also currently involved in a community tourism development project which forms part of a community engagement project of the Department of Geography, namely “Roots Driven Rural Development, North West Province and Global South”.



**Ilona Frege** holds a BA (Drama) from Stellenbosch and a BA (Hons) from Rhodes, majoring in Dance and Choreography Studies as well as Acting. She was a founding member of *The First Physical Theatre Company* under the artistic direction of Professor Gary Gordon. She still performs ad hoc and has appeared in Spier's *Infecting the City* (2009), and in the dance film *Place of Grace* (2010), directed by Gerard Samuel. Ilona lectured Movement and Dance at both the University of Stellenbosch (1989-1996) and Wits University (1998-1999). She has written the dance unit for text books for schools (Grade 8 and Grade 12) and been involved in teaching the dance component in workshops for teachers in Arts and Culture. She lectured in Choreographic Studies and Dance Teaching Methodology at UCT School of Dance from 2003-2013 where she also assists in postgraduate work. She regularly examines externally at various universities and participates on panels. In 2012 she choreographed *Alter*, for *Underground* Dance Theatre for the AFTA conference at UCT. *Alter* was also performed by *Underground* Dance Theatre at the Theatre Arts Administration Collective in Cape Town. She participated in a Dance and Film workshop hosted by GIPCA (2012), creating a short dance film screened at the Baxter Dance Film Festival (2012). Ilona has practiced yoga for fifteen years and is a certified yoga teacher (Ashtanga Vinyasa).





**Jacki Job** began her independent, professional dance career in 1994. She has conceived more than 50 original works, with performances in Africa, Asia and Europe. Her achievements include a solo for Nelson Mandela and the Dutch Royal Family (2002), residencies in Portugal and Vienna (2003/2004), engagements as the Artist in Residence at Session House, Tokyo (2006-2010), and dancing the lead role in Tokyo Disney's New Year's Countdown Show (2011). She was awarded the Bunka Cho Fellowship Program in Japan (2005) and a First Class Honours Degree in Dance Research at UCT (2012). She lived in Tokyo from 2004-2011 where she studied Butoh, collaborated with eclectic musicians and dancers, and taught at several Japanese universities. Her current Masters dissertation concerns Butoh and Ballet. As an artist she wishes to continue to integrate and fine-tune her multiple identities in this performance of life, and hopes to still be dancing at 90.



**Dr N Jade Gibson** is an anthropologist of art, as well as a visual artist, with a background in anthropology, art and medical science. She grew up in the UK, North Africa and the West Indies and is half-Filipino and half-Scottish in ancestry. She is currently a postdoctoral fellow in the Humanities department at UWC (Cities in Transition) project and works across arts and other disciplines. Her interest is in trans-disciplinary disciplines and practices, exploring the role of creativity within social integration, particularly within Cape Town. She is also a part-time resident artist at Greatmore Arts Studios where she combines creative and academic work in both artistic and research outputs. Her practical work and interests have included exhibitions and workshops, the Minstrels Carnival, the UWC/HCI Cape Town Transport/Mobility Museum project and living in a rainforest for seven months helping set up the Loru Environmental Centre in Vanuatu, in the South Pacific. As a UWC postdoctoral fellow, she has presented at conferences and seminars in Lisbon, the UK, Belgium, Berlin and Paris, as well as in South Africa. Her academic research work bridges social dance, visual art, museums and heritage, and the city. She was also shortlisted for the Dundee International unpublished novel prize and Virginia unpublished novel prize and writes and performs poetry. She has great passion for dance, and regularly dances 'salsa' and 'Cape Jazz' in Cape Town.



**Dr Jill Green** is a professor of dance at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She is Director of Graduate Studies, conducts research and teaches somatics, body studies, and pedagogy. In addition, she is a certified Kinetic Awareness® Master Teacher and directs a teaching program at her studio. Her work is published in a number of journals and books. Dr Green is a Fulbright Scholar (Finland) and former co-editor of *Dance Research Journal*.



**Kima M Kraimer** teaches Somatic Movement Education internationally, freelancing with academic institutions, independent dance companies, musicians, athletes as well as varied groups of individuals. She is assistant faculty at the Rolf Institute for Structural Integration, Boulder, Colorado and maintains a Rolwing® Structural Integration practice in Northern Michigan, USA. A graduate of University of Central Lancashire's Dance and Somatic Well-Being post graduate program, Kraimer is excited to offer innovative embodiment practices combined with principles of ecology and spirituality in workshop format to creative arts communities. Drawing from phenomenological human science methodologies, Kraimer is curious to discover what potential exists for individuals and humanity in these body-based processes of being and becoming more human. In what ways do embodiment practices orient one in nonlinear, immediate lived experience, and how do these practices effect relational capacities to self, other, and environment.



**Linda Vargas (Lynn Fernandez)** is an educator, a visionary motivational facilitator and an expert in communication and rhythmical dance education. Her vision is to see people from a diversity of backgrounds and cultures engage with one another. Linda's talents and experience are vast as she facilitates educational and corporate workshops, performs, teaches and examines flamenco dance (a Spanish form) both nationally and internationally. She lectures and writes and presents papers for international conferences. She holds a Masters Degree in Education (full dissertation, cum laude) as well as B.A. Honours in Drama, LISTD (ISTD, London) and the coveted Checchetti Final Diploma. Beyond her day-to-day passions, Linda co-founded the international organization Alianza Flamenca and is a member of its Board of Directors, as well as its panel of international examiners and syllabus committee. She founded the Linda Vargas Flamenco Dance Company in 1985 and is currently the Director. She performs, examines and gives workshops internationally (working mostly in Europe and Australia). Along with dance fellows, Linda has made regular performances at the Spanish Embassy in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Linda has also choreographed numerous opera productions including La Traviata, Amal, Faust, Salome and Carmen and performed in the SABCTV productions of 'Tango'



**Lisa Wilson** is a dance academic, performer and choreographer from Jamaica. She currently lectures at the University of Cape Town, South Africa in Contemporary Dance, Dance Teaching Methods and Western Dance History. She is a multi-faceted independent artist with over 20 years of professional experience in the performing arts. Her international performance history includes Broadway, New York, Black Arts Festival, Atlanta, the Commonwealth Games Arts Festival in British Columbia, Canada, Sydney Olympics Harbour Festival, Bodies Contemporary Dance Festival, Australia and Jomba Contemporary Dance Festival, South Africa. Her choreography which tends to reflect a strong social and spiritual consciousness has been successfully staged in diverse educational and professional dance settings. Her passion for dance and education keeps her exploring the physicality of the mind, body and soul and researching ways to nurture this interconnectedness within students. Her research interests are situated in dance education and African Diaspora dance studies.



**Mariene Hundertmarck Perobelli** is an actress, an inventor of stories, tales and other forms of art. She is a founding member of the Ser Com Arte Institute. She graduated in Arts from the State University of Santa Catarina, holds a Masters in Education from the University of Santa Catarina and a PhD in Theatre Arts from the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro. She is currently Professor of Theatre at the Federal University of Uberlândia and a Member of the research groups Alteritas (UFSC), GEAC (UFU) and GPECPOP (UFU). She continues with Research in the Performing Arts and poetry especially about childhood. She particularly enjoys listening to the stories of both old and young out of which she creates new forms.



**Maxwell Xolani Rani** is a lecturer at the University of Cape Town School of Dance. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Dance from the University of Cape Town and is currently a MMus candidate. He is the founder and the creator of the African dance technique called *Intsika* meaning the "pillar" or the "strengtheners". He is experienced in teaching every level of African dance technique and in contemporary works. He is convener for the course which encompasses practical and theoretical studies in African dance. Rani has produced works and taught in South Africa, Senegal, London, Brazil, Germany, United States, China, Jamaica, France and Canada. He has presented papers at the daCi conference, (Bahia-Brazil) and Confluences Conferences (Cape Town, South Africa). Rani is a published scholar, he is a co-author of *Post-Apartheid Dance –many bodies many voices many stories* (2012) and currently on the board of the advisory committee of the Western Cape Department of Education.





**Millicent Johnnie** received her BFA and MFA in Dance at the Florida State University. She currently teaches on the dance faculty at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX. She served on the dance faculty at Tulane University and Dillard University located in New Orleans, Louisiana after touring as resident choreographer and rehearsal director of the Urban Bush Women in New York City. Johnnie moved to New York City after teaching Hip Hop and Jazz movement several years as a veteran staff member of the Universal Dance Association based in Memphis, Tennessee. Millicent co-founded the Phlava Hip Hop and Jazz Dance Company based in Tallahassee, Florida receiving a Prague International Dance Festival “Best Choreography” award and “First Place International Dance Title” for Hip Hop Choreography entitled Wrath. She has served as a choreographer for the New York City Opera/ Parable of the Sower workshop, U.S. Cultural Ambassadors of Music- Universes Poetry Theatre/ Amerville, The Krannert Performance Arts Center/The Hip Hop Project, Grammy Award Winner Bill Summers/ Los Hombres Caliente and notable directors Peter Sellars, Rhodessa Jones and Chey Yew to name just a few. Millicent believes that researching, identifying and clarifying similarities between these forms of dance will allow for continued creation of this hybrid form of movement distinguishing itself uniquely as a part of Hip Hop culture.



**Merle O'Brien** is Africa's foremost Odissi danseuse and a PhD candidate trained in India's oldest codified dance form. She is a member of UNESCO Dance Council CID and founder of Odissi Niketan Africa. Merle holds a MPhil Future Studies (USB), BA Drama (UCT) and is a PRISA Fellow and former President as well as a curator for World Design Capital Cape Town 2014. She received her foundation training in Odissi from Guru Smt. Yogini Gandhi and trains at the Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre in Bhubaneshwar, Orissa.



**Nicola Elliott** grew up in Cape Town and studied at Rhodes University in Grahamstown where she obtained a Master's degree in Drama (*cum laude*) in 2010, specialising in Choreography. Based in Cape Town, she is a freelance choreographer-director, an occasional performer, and a dance educator and facilitator who works in the fields of Physical Theatre, Contemporary Dance, Integrated Dance and Improvisation. Apart from her own projects, she has choreographed extensively and performed for the First Physical Theatre Company; facilitated workshops with the Chaeli Campaign and Remix Dance Project at Cape Town schools; taught and lectured at the Rhodes Drama Department, the UCT School of Dance and the South African College of Music. Her choreographic work has received several accolades: In 2006, she received the Jonathan Marks Prize for Choreography from Rhodes; in 2010, *Spyt*, which featured her choreography, won an Anglo-Gold Ashanti Fyngoud prize for Best Production at Aardklop; *Loss and Having* (which she co-produced and co-choreographed) won a 2011 Standard Bank Ovation Award for Excellence; she was nominated for a KykNet Fiesta award for *Proximity Loss and Having* (2011); *Keepsake Minus 3* (which she co-produced with Underground Dance Theatre and which featured her work *Keepsake*) won a 2012 Standard Bank Ovation Award for Excellence and a 2013 KykNet Fiesta Award; and she was nominated for a Naledi Award for Best Original Choreography for her work in the play *In the Wings* (2012). For more information, visit [www.nicolaelliott.com](http://www.nicolaelliott.com).



**Dr Petrus du Preez** graduated from the University of the Free State where he studied Communication Science. He completed his Masters and Doctorate at Stellenbosch University where he focused on puppetry, masking and performance in liminal and liminoid African forms. He is currently a senior lecturer at the Drama Department of Stellenbosch University and the co-editor of the *South African Theatre Journal*. Petrus is still involved in theatre making as an actor, director and author. His recent research focus has shifted to puppetry and youth theatre, as well as Afrikaans theatre in South Africa. In addition, he regularly performs on radio.



**Thalia Laric** graduated BMus Honours in Choreography from the University of Cape Town School of Dance in 2010. In that same year she spent 5 months as an exchange student at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, Dance Department. In 2011 she moved to Grahamstown to perform full time with the First Physical Theatre Company. In 2012 she was invited to attend the international contact improvisation festival in Friburg Germany. She is currently completing her Master's degree in Choreography at Rhodes University Drama Department with a focus on dance improvisation and performative writing. Thalia has performed and presented work on various national platforms, worked with South African choreographers Nicola Elliott and Alan Parker, and is a founding member of award winning company *Underground Dance Theatre*.

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