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Only Human: Critical Reflections on Dance, Creation, and Identity

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we consider the relationship between artistic creation and the negotiation of social identity in multicultural contexts. Our discussion is largely grounded in the scholarship on critical multiculturalism, socio-cultural theories of artistic production, and on dance identity and education. Through an arts-based, narrative analysis of our re-viewing of select performance DVDs from the amateur dance collective of which we were both members, we take the position that dance in multicultural contexts can create important opportunities for a critical reflection on how an artistic identity (i.e. “dancer”) and a form of cultural production (i.e. “dance performance”) - can both challenge *and* reinforce normative understandings about social identity (i.e. “gender”, “race”, “class”, etc.). We discuss the implications of this contradiction for dance creation, performance and education through the analytical themes of “Training, Technique and Choreography”; “Social Organization and Hierarchy”; and “Diversity and Inclusion”.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, dance education, dance community, social identity, inequity.

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1.0 Introduction

The foundation of thinking is in moving and this began in the womb. Sheets-Johnstone (2011) asserted that tactile-kinaesthetic consciousness remains central to our concept of self throughout life. The act of

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dance and reflection upon it, in turn, can provide us clues directly from our own bodies about who we are, what we need and what we want. As we connect to the innumerable sensations and feelings within and around us, the better prepared we are to “dissect cultural constructs when they are released through the body” (Snowber, 2012, p. 56). Sheets-Johnstone (2011) claimed,

Our capacity to make sense of ourselves, to grow kinetically into the bodies we are, is in other words the beginning of cognition. In making kinetic sense of ourselves, we progressively attain complex conceptual understandings having to do with containment, with consequential relationships, with weight, with effort, and with myriad other bodily-anchored happenings and phenomena that in turn anchor our sense of the world (P. 118).

Since artistic dance creation and production is shaped by both the cultural and artistic identity markers of its choreographers and dancers, in this article, we will suggest further that, both in and out of dance, our bodies move in codified ways that signify how we make sense of the world through navigation of our ethnic, racial, gendered, and classed social identities. As both artists and academics, we reflect on our experiences as members of a community-based dance group, Only Human Dance Collective (OHDC), embedded within Toronto, one of Canada’s most multicultural cities. We engage in a narrative, arts-based process to pause and take note of ourselves in motion by viewing previous OHDC performance DVD’s. This helps us to explore how dance has shaped us and how we moved through dance and, in turn, our world. Our analyses are theoretically grounded in critical multiculturalism, dance education and women’s embodiment scholarship. The article is uniquely structured, in part, as a “conversation” between the two of us. Our identities and experiences as dancers and artists are quite varied, so we wish to capture the interplay of our different voices.

1.01 Theoretical framework

Canada’s national identity as a multicultural society is one that is firmly entrenched in our collective imaginations. While multiculturalism in Canada is also entrenched at the federal level as a governmental policy, “multiculturalism” in Canada is generally imagined as also being the celebration of our diverse citizens’ foods, music genres, fashion styles, and cultural festivals (what Stanley Fish (1997) referred to as “boutique multiculturalism”), as well as the opportunity for all citizens to participate, equally, in public life. What this means in reality, however, is rather difficult to articulate. There is a conceptual ambiguity of “multiculturalism” in Canada because, as Li (1999) argued, there is no agreement in both the political and social spheres, on what, exactly, “multiculturalism” means. This ambiguity is a result of “the confusion of myth and reality” (Moodley, as cited in Li, 1999, p. 148). Li wrote, “[multiculturalism] has connotations of a public policy, an ideology, and cultural diversity” (p. 148). Multiculturalism has been interpreted at five levels of meaning (Fleras & Elliot, 2003):

- as an *empirical fact* – statistical data show that Canada is, indeed, made up from people from a multitude of cultures
- as an *ideology* – modelled after liberal values of freedom, tolerance and respect for differences, normative statements about what Canada “ought” to be are offered
- as a *policy* – explicit government interventions whose purpose is to transform multicultural ideas into multicultural realities for Canadian citizens
- as a *practice* – in order to gain access to both symbolic and material resources, political parties’ and minority groups’ interests are promoted
- as a *critical discourse* – challenges, acts of resistance, and calls for a transformation of the social distribution of cultural power in Canada

This “conceptual ambiguity” can be considered a signifier of multiculturalism in a modern liberal democratic state, which both envisions for and engenders within its citizens a broadly shared faith in the power of social institutions to advance an agenda of liberty and enlightenment (McDonough, 2011). Martin (1998), however, articulated a tension within such an agenda:

...[M]ulticulturalism marks and divides a double relationship. From the perspective of the state attempting to police a national [multi-culture], it is the refusal of any given identity to be contained within the center [sic], to abide by the institutional boundaries which the state allots recognition [...]. From the perspective of those multiple identities, it is the insistence on the unruly polyvocality of difference that hints at what is formative not of nations but of society (pp. 108-109).

In 21st-century “post-modern” times, however, this doubled relationship has become ever more strained, as “... faith in the nation state, under pressure from centrifugal forces of both increasing pluralism and global neoliberal economic forces, can no longer be assumed as a source of legitimacy for the ideals of [multiculturalism] in liberal-democratic societies” (Martin, 1998, p. 91). Implicit within this statement is the notion that the state is either ill-equipped or ill-positioned to address the current realities of diversity and “multiculturality” in Canada. That being said, we agree with Fleras (2002) that “... official multiculturalism is neither all good nor all bad, but good or bad depending on the context or criteria. More importantly, multiculturalism is simultaneously both good and bad *in spite of the context*” (p. 9, our emphasis).

Given this, we take the position that adopting a critical stance towards multiculturalism is necessary (see: Banks & Banks, 2004; Boyle-Baise, 1999; Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2004). This entails constantly questioning assumptions about the nature, and practice(s), of “multiculturalism” in various social, political and, in the case of this article, artistic spheres. Critical multiculturalism rejects liberal – or modernist - notions of “unified and static [...] identities and communities [with] fixed sets of experiences, meanings and practices” (Henry & Tator, 1999, p. 99), as expressed by official, state-sponsored forms of multiculturalism. Instead, it recognizes the fluidity and contextuality of identity and identification, and provides a framework for interrogating cycles of oppression and “articulat[ing] [new] goals and practices of liberation” (Henry & Tator, 1999, p. 98). Moreover, because critical multiculturalism “... contends that power is a fundamental constituent of human existence that works to shape the oppressive *and productive* nature of the human condition,” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001, p. 9, our emphasis), it allows for a focus on the intersections of various axes of difference (namely, race, gender and class), and for a consideration of how these intersections affect experiences of both oppression and privilege. Our intention is to use our personal reflections and analyses of our time with the Only Human Dance Collective to bring out, in sharp relief, these experiences, thereby foregrounding the possibilities of dance to contribute to the “critical turn” in multiculturalism discourse, and vice versa. Conceptually, we draw from Martin’s (1998) notion of the “composite body”, which is “... less an empirical type than a heuristic for thinking the physical constitution of complex social relations” (p. 110). For Martin, this conception of the body is not

... a stable presence already available for appropriation but as a composite entity mediated across a conflicted space of the imaginary [...] and the performative [...]. Dance both appears in the conjecture of the imaginary and performative spaces and puts the constitutive features of a composite body on display. *For dance is both a bodily practice that figures an imagined world and a momentary materialization through performance of social principles that otherwise remain implicit* (p. 109, our emphasis).

Dance enables individuals to explore their unique expressions of corporeality (Snowber, 2012) and negotiate their own authorship in identity-making through community engagement. The imaginative and performative aspects of dance, therefore, offers a space, a framework, a language for the culturally diverse student and community members of OHDC to engage in the creation of imaginative worlds where new ideas, perceptions, and possibilities are enfolded, and brought to a visceral reality. It is this “visceral reality” that forms the basis of our reflections.

2.0 Dance identities

2.01 Indrani

My mother put me in ballet and gymnastics at four to assist me with balance. While I do not remember, I was given the choice of which to pursue and I chose gymnastics. I loved gymnastics as a child. My recreational time with girlfriends was spent on grass stretching, cartwheeling, doing walkovers, and eventually handsprings and aerials. I felt strong and accomplished in those feats-alive in my body. I remember making up dances in Grade Four with a girlfriend. The moment when we synchronized our movement to Wham after continual practice was sheer delight. I did not enter a dance studio until I was thirteen, and took a jazz class. I loved it but looked and felt different from the other girls, who formed cliques and were notably thinner than I. I remember being conscious of my defined muscles the other girls did not have. I quit studio dance after that and found myself obsessed with dance at nightclubs throughout my teen-aged years. I cared much more about crafting each gesture and transition than socializing. I could dance for hours at a time. Dance gave me great emotional release and satisfaction.

Dance moved from a more peripheral to central part of my life the year before I entered the Holistic and Aesthetic-focused doctorate program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, where Dominique and I met. We became friends instantly. After taking hip-hop classes for a few years, I decided to try other dance forms. I took ballet, jazz, and modern classes. When I was admitted to OISE, I ended my career as a Youth and Family Counsellor, and could no longer afford studio classes. I researched dance opportunities at the University of Toronto and discovered the Only Human Dance Collective. I was ecstatic... A FREE way to learn and feel the joy of dance!

2.02 Dominique

Like Indrani, my mother put me in dance at a young age (five). She had always wanted to dance as a child, but was never given the opportunity. I don't remember much about my feelings about taking dance classes back then. It was just something that I did. I do remember, however, the first time I understood what it meant to be a dancer.

I was about six years old, and my parents took me to see the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. One of the pieces they performed was "Firebird". I only remember one detail – a brilliant, red and orange plumed ballerina descending from above. She was gorgeous. What made her even more powerful in my eyes, however was that she was also Black.³ Just like me. And having once informed my mother – with all the world-weariness that a child can muster – that I could never perform in *The Nutcracker* ballet because "there was no such thing as a Black Sugar Plum Fairy", seeing Firebird (in fact, seeing the entire Alvin Ailey company) stirred something in me that, to this day, I don't really have the words to describe. All I know now is that somehow, my understanding of "dance" began changing from something that I *did*, to something that I *was*.

For the next twenty years, I trained in ballet and modern dance. I began with a children's arts program directed by a professor at a local university, and then majored in Dance at my arts-based high school. Upon entering university, I spent three years in the on-campus modern dance company. Dance was such a part of my life, that I couldn't imagine ever stopping. But I did.

For nearly six years, I hardly danced at all. The chronic knee and lower-back pain that I'd had since high school was getting worse, and my doctors recommended that I stop dancing. I started graduate school at OISE, and entered an intellectually- and creatively-stimulating environment, where I absolutely thrived. Yet, on some level, I still felt "empty". Deep down, I knew that the reason was that I wasn't

³ We chose to capitalize the first letter of "black" and "white" when discussing race, in order to highlight that they are socially-constructed categories of identity, not definitive biological markers.

dancing. In one of my doctoral courses on education and the arts, I met Indrani. We became friends quickly, and she invited me to a performance of the Only Human Dance Collective. I had never heard of the company, but Indrani was in the show, so I wanted to go and support her. Additionally, I was truly excited about seeing dance.

The show that year (2003) was entitled “Naked”. In some ways, watching it made me feel like an élitist snob (it was an amateur company, after all); still I felt the “pull” to join the company myself. I felt it deep in my body, like an actual, muscular memory that was yearning for recognition and acknowledgement. It twitched, poked, and nudged at me all that summer. Finally (and without telling my doctors!), I joined OHDC.

3.0 Analysis

3.01 Only human dance collective

The Only Human Dance Collective is a culturally diverse student-run dance company at the University of Toronto, which has existed since 1999. Membership has ranged from approximately fifty dancers to over one hundred, due in large part to OHDC’s inclusive policy: anyone may join regardless of their dance ability. The Collective is founded on giving people at all stages of dance, from beginner to expert, the opportunity to dance and perform in a semi-professional show. Novice dancers are mentored by seasoned dancers, and seasoned dancers are able to share their skills and knowledge by choreographing the additional pieces in the show.

Unsurprisingly, OHDC is comprised predominantly of women; in any given year, about one-tenth of the members are men. In addition, the majority of members are of Anglo-European descent; approximately 20% of the company is made up of dancers from Afro-Caribbean, Asian, South Asian, and South American heritages. OHDC does not brand itself as a “multicultural” dance company; however, as a result of its mandate, the performances can be made up of a broad variety of dance styles. During our time with the company, we were exposed to: flamenco, belly dance, highland dancing, jazz (in its lyrical, classical, and more contemporary forms), hip-hop, modern, ballet, disco, salsa, tap, classical Indian dance, and West African dances and musical styles. As a result of this, we enriched and expanded our aesthetic sensibility. The uptake of our embodied storied creations from these assemblages of dance and music enabled us to explore various points in history of varying cultural mosaics. It was an empowering experience, a fully embodied expression of ourselves without cognitive dissonance or interference.

Altogether, the two of us performed in seven OHDC shows: *Naked* (Indrani); *Embrace* (both); *Cut the Rug* (both); *Eclipse* (both); *[r]evolution* (both); *In Transit* (Dominique); *Ascent* (Indrani); and *Observing Emotion: A Study of Human Behaviour* (Dominique). Dominique was a Creative Director for *Eclipse*, the show for the Collective’s 2005-2006 season. Indrani, though she did not fit the “typical” classically-trained dancer, choreographer, and teacher profile, held the same position, by herself, for *Ascent*, embedded within in University of Toronto’s annual Festival of Dance 2009.

Our long history with the company allows us, now, to critically and narratively explore the relationship between artistic production, cultural identity, and social in/exclusion, through an analysis of the dancers who choreographed and/or performed in OHDC’s annual shows. We re-viewed the following Only Human Dance Collective performance DVDs: *Embrace* (2004), *Cut the Rug* (2005), *Eclipse* (2006), *[r]evolution* (2007), *In Transit* (2008), *Ascent* (2009), and *Observing Emotion* (2010).

3.02 Methodological approach

Our inquiry incorporated a narrative, arts-based research design. Narrative work centres on apprehending the universal quintessence from an individual's own experience (Patton, 2002). Likewise, "the premises of arts-based inquiry lie in creativity and the use of arts for personal exploration" (Estrella & Forinash, 2007, p. 380). According to Chase (2005), narrative inquiry centers on "biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them" (p. 651). We included aspects of narrative inquiry to collect and represent the storied constructions of our autobiographical experiences. We also drew upon the principles of arts-based research (ABR) - which incorporates the artistic or aesthetic elements of creative arts (Leavy, 2009) - to inform the data collection, analysis and interpretation of our work. Data collection occurred through our re-view of performance videos and chosen dance pieces from several OHDC shows. We then conducted a narrative-based thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) for personal meaning and significance. By utilizing a narrative arts-based approach to our research methodology, we hope to give voice to aspects of our own ever shifting identities that have previously been underexamined through dance.

Dominique took the approach of recording her impressions, memories and analyses in whatever order they appeared in her mind. She watched the shows (and, where applicable, their accompanying documentaries) in chronological order, fast-forwarding through the ones that failed to capture her analytical interest. Afterward, she reread all the notes and colour-coded them thematically. She did not have a predetermined set of themes, though she was trying to pay particular attention to instances that seemed to have a lot of potential for being analyzed through a "multiculturalist" lens.

Indrani's methodological approach involved an intuitively-guided writing system. When she came across a piece she was in and/or felt drawn to, she acutely focused on technique, oscillating between critique and enamour. Then she reviewed pieces a second time to brainstorm/write notes. She filled her journal with poetic, narrative and academic writing. As she re-viewed these performances, she viscerally remembered what OHDC membership meant to her. She attempted to imbue herself with the culture of OHDC. It was a moving musical embodied culture, and also a culture rift with competition and hierarchy.

4.0 Findings

Our analysis revealed three emergent themes: Training, Technique, and Choreography; Social Organization and Hierarchy; Diversity and Inclusion. We will discuss each of these in turn.

4.01 Training, technique, choreography

4.1.1 Dominique

A dancer's training and technical abilities were one of the first things I noticed in each OHDC piece. It is an automatic gesture for me, likely the result of my own years of technical training. As I reviewed each performance, I noted that I always referred to the dancers with ballet and/or modern dance expertise as being "classically-trained", while dancers with other forms of expertise (be it in flamenco, Irish dance, or hip-hop) were not identified as such. Furthermore, the designation of ballet and modern dance as "classical" reinforced the Eurocentric assumption that *only* ballet and modern are classical dances while, for example, Bharata Natyam (a style that derives from Indian dance forms that are literally thousands of years old), is not.

I also noted the influence of dancers' training in their choreographic styles, and in their choices of which other dancers to include in their piece. It seemed to me that the more "classically"-trained and advanced a dancer was, the more I could recognize common movements, patterns, and other creative choices in their work. This was especially true for dancers who appeared to have been trained at studios that focused on competitive dance: their choreography always seemed so *normative* to me, even if I also found it to be aesthetically pleasing or interesting.

I use the word “normative” deliberately, because what was most significant to me about the level of training and technical expertise of OHDC dancers was how the “classical”, “advanced” dancers implicitly reinforced norms of racial and gendered hierarchies. With only a few exceptions (of which I am one), all of the dancers who fit this profile were White females. While not all of them were “ballerina thin”, their bodies all still conformed to normative ideas of what an attractive female body should look like: slender, muscular-but-not-too-muscular, etc. Relatedly, the aesthetic of all their dances reinforced ideas about how the female body should move and “behave”: either prettily and beautifully, or sexily and suggestively.

4.1.2 Indrani

Dance highlights the tensions between perceiving the body as an object and experiencing it as a source of agency, depending on the form and philosophy out of which the genre evolved (Albright 1997). As a member of OHDC, this tension played out for me in both the hip-hop and modern dance forms I inhabited. As a teen, hip-hop was my entry point into codified dance. I enjoyed it immensely. When I was cast in an advanced hip-hop piece after three years of trying, I was thrilled. I was driven to perfect the technique and speed. As Dominique noted, sexually suggestive movement was prominent, but I focused on the felt empowerment by the mastery of the sharp, fast-tempoed movement.

As I viewed myself dancing again, I saw that both I and the audience were perceiving my body, as well as the other dancers, as a sexual object. This felt disempowering. Bordo (1993) validates that the female body is trained “in docility and obedience to cultural demands while at the same time being experienced in terms of power and control” (p. 27). Internalized self-surveillance is perceived by many women as a sense of self-mastery and empowerment, rather than submission to the pervasive bombardment of popular culture imagery about how women should look, feel, and conduct themselves, usually in nurturance or sexual service of others, predominantly male. With a more critically feminist lens, I now question whether my feelings of empowerment for achieving physical technical feats included fitting into an internalized, hypersexualized mold for other’s pleasure.

Modern improvisational dance, inversely, enabled me to feel and create my gestures from within my body. Sheets-Johnstone (2011) asserted that, “Spontaneous movement is the constitutive source of agency, of subjecthood, of selfhood, the dynamic core of our sense of ourselves as agents, subjects, selves” (p. 194). I felt myself creating the path as I danced it and came to know myself through creating. I additionally felt attuned to my fellow dancers. Improvisational dance can foster empathy for peers that are culturally diverse (Indrani 2013).

Given the site of the dancing body as a performance of, or resistance to, normative bodily control, OHDC, as a collective with a wide range of choreographies and technical styles, reflected both, sometimes simultaneously. This tension was also reflected – through choreography, technique, and training – in the broader social organization of the Collective.

4.02 Social organization and hierarchy

4.2.1 Indrani

In *Embrace* (2004), I remember one of the creative directors spoke to our 80-member collective before a show. She had been made aware of dancers speaking about other dancers’ performance ability in negative ways in the change rooms. She proclaimed, “That’s not what we’re about. This collective is for everyone and that is not cool.” I appreciated that, both as a social worker attuned to how group leaders can model and foster inclusive equal treatment of members to create healthy group dynamics, and as a novice dancer viscerally aware that I was not part of the technically-trained “in crowd”. I remember wanting to dance in the fast jazz and hip-hop pieces but rarely was I chosen. When I finally

was cast in a hip-hop piece, I remember overhearing other dancers tell the choreographer he should not have cast me. He kept me out of the technical hip-hop sections after that. Upon reflection, as a choreographer, I understand the desire to include highly trained dancers that can more precisely execute the vision of the piece. As a less advanced dancer, who trusted in the mission of the company and inspired to rise to the choreographer challenge, I felt unsupported and betrayed by the incongruity.

4.2.2 Dominique

During my first four years with OHDC, there were two distinct social sub-groups: one of highly-trained modern and ballet dancers, and one of dancers who, while also “classically”-trained, preferred to choreograph and perform in jazz and hip-hop pieces. At auditions for the member-choreographed pieces, almost without exception, these two sub-groups only cast their friends. Now, I know firsthand that the imaginary dancers in a choreographer’s head may not match the actual dancers who audition for them. So, if a dancer doesn’t fit the part, then we don’t choose them. It’s not personal; that’s just how it works. “Fitting the part”, however, is not a neutral act: “... dance comes to us packaged in the messy social contexts of consumer capitalism, class culture, and gender and race relations” (McRobbie 1997, p. 209). The Only Human Dance Collective is no exception. An example:

For *Cut the Rug* (2005), one of the dancers from the “advanced modern/ballet” group choreographed a jazz piece to a fast-paced 1960s’ rock song. I auditioned for it, because this dancer was an incredible choreographer, and I wanted the challenge of being in her piece. I wasn’t chosen. Like I said earlier, however, a choreographer’s decision not to cast a particular dancer isn’t necessarily personal. So, although I was disappointed that I hadn’t been chosen, I was not upset.

During one of our final rehearsals in the theatre before opening night, I heard a couple of the other members of OHDC talking about this jazz piece, which had just been onstage. Apparently, the choreographer had wanted a certain “uniformity” among her dancers. This made me think back to what they had looked like: female, thin, ~ 5’5” tall, White. Only the first two categories applied to me. When I re-watched this piece for this article, I noticed that, in addition to their physical sameness, the dancers were wearing “nude”-coloured jazz shoes. If I were to wear nude jazz shoes, they would not look “nude”: they would just look... light-brownish.⁴

I am not suggesting that I wasn’t cast for this piece because “nude” jazz shoes don’t suit me. Nor am I suggesting that the choreographer was being deliberately racist in her desire for uniformity among her dancers. I am, however, using this specific episode to point to the ways in which Eurocentric social norms are generalized across artistic spaces, thereby reinforcing the Othering of non-dominant bodies, even when that is not the intent.

4.03 Diversity and inclusion

4.3.1 Indrani

One of the most powerful impacts of OHDC is seeing people without dance training have the opportunity to dance and choreograph. Witnessing the structured and informal mentorship was an inspiring display of community. The pull of seasoned dancers to share their experience and dance wisdom, and support beginner dancers by participating in or assisting with choreography was one aspect I particularly enjoyed. The amount of validation and support given to me personally to practice, rehearse, observe dance, and choreograph was sensational. The glue that held us together was dance. We were invited to bring our creative expressions and emotions and let our diverse bodies speak for

⁴ This speaks to the invisibility of Whiteness in both social and artistic spaces (see: Rivière 2008). It is beyond the scope of this article, however, to discuss this issue in detail.

themselves revealing our stories, fantasies, tribulations and aspirations. The collective's name speaks for itself as Only Human.

The importance of inclusivity in creativity opens my mind to more readily accept desires, needs, and ideas when I actively pursue an open-hearted attitude to the unfamiliar in bodily forms. That mitigates judgments, and spills over into other aspects of my life where embodied difference transposes from something to be rejected/feared to something to be explored with wonder. *Greene's (1995)* seminal work speaks to the possibility of the arts to form new thoughts about ourselves and experience joy and beauty, expanding the possibilities of who we allow ourselves to be, stretching the boundaries we set for ourselves or establishing them in relationships. Dance engagement has enormous potential for learning about self and relationships, difference and likeness.

I remember feeling pure delight in the large circular movements of an African Jazz company piece in *Eclipse*, which choreographically and musically expressed celebration and community. The choreographer was Dominique's co-Creative Director that year. In an informal email exchange, Amanda explained, "previous years lacked some of that extra spice needed to make a great show", and that "being from a West Indian background and... actively involved in an Afro-Caribbean dance troupe" she wanted to give the company a taste of where she comes from. As Creative Directors, Amanda and Dominique's presence, choreography, and values brought a progressive element to the traditionally Eurocentric perspective of previous OHDC shows.

The cultural element held something else for me too. Learning a new movement genre from a culture unfamiliar yet with some hint of geographical resonance, felt empowering. Witnessing racial segregation as a child in Apartheid Cape Town, South Africa (where my dad was born and raised) is where I most viscerally learned my Whiteness meant I had privileges that Black children did not, and recognized the values behind a culturally diverse city. For example, I loved a huge waterslide at Muesenberg beach in Cape Town. At 6, I played on it for hours. At 8, as I ran toward it, my father held me back. He said nothing but I looked up and knew it was because children who looked different from me were playing on it. I hated the separation and could not make sense of it. I remember crying as we drove by perforated tin boxed segregated communities. I didn't understand the separation but neither did the adults around me who were supposed to have the answers. Dancing in this piece held a particular pride for me to learn and actively create space for Black Dance. *Headley (2012)* posits that Black Dance, "represents cultural and regional stories and realities of people from and of the African Diaspora, regardless of the ethnicity of the performer," (p. 60). I feel privileged to live in a culturally diverse city, even as the contesting narratives show that multiculturalism in Canada is both "good" and "bad" for different groups.

4.3.2 Dominique

Despite the social segregation within the Only Human Dance Collective, there were many pieces that upheld the mandate of including dancers with a wide range of ability. There were also pieces that would conventionally be deemed "ethnic" (e.g. Afro-Caribbean, Indian, Irish), and which were open to all members of the company. In the documentaries for each DVD, these two facts were almost universally cited as the reason dancers joined OHDC, or kept returning.

Diversity and inclusion in art, however, walks a fine line between valuing difference, and being culturally-appropriative. I'm not sure that OHDC ever really succeeded in avoiding the latter. As *Desmond (1997)* writes,

"[a] whole history of dance forms could be written in terms of such appropriations and reworkings occurring in both North and South America for at least the last two centuries and continuing today. Such practices and the discourse that surrounds them reveal the important

part bodily discourse plays in the continuing social construction and negotiation of race, gender, class, and nationality, and their hierarchical arrangements" (p. 33-34).

Given this, how might the tensions around diversity, inclusion, and hierarchy offer insights about dance in highly multicultural contexts?

5.0 Conclusion

Watching the show DVDs again reminded us of how much *fun* OHDC could be: the sense of community; the commitment to master timing, technique, and performance quality, feeling the music in our movements; the camaraderie during Production Week; and the sheer *collectivity* of coming together for the sole reason that we all loved dance. We additionally recognized the unique potency of a visual arts-based analysis that deepens researcher engagement and fosters both thematic and narrative connections. We recommend other researchers explore arts-based methods. The immediacy of dance performance provides a heightened awareness of both external and internal stimulus. During the performance, there is no reflective or meta-thought, only intense concentration, where "a kinetic intelligence is forging its way in the world" (Sheets-Johnstone 2011, p. 424). There is no I, no others, only movement consciousness: lengthened arms, angled elbows, soft fingers, pointed feet, core held kicks, gravity defying jumps.

These truths about dance performance, however, do not invalidate the other truths about what it means to perform in a dance company; that is, to perform in a company which is deeply embedded within wider social contexts, *and* deeply connected to the broader social identities of its members. Our analytical themes - hierarchies of technique and choreography, social organization, and the questions raised about the limits to "inclusivity" - suggest that, if dance is to engage seriously with "multiculturalism", then we need to place the fact of its embeddedness within broader structural inequities front and centre, holding that in tension with the fact of its transformative power. In borrowing from Fleras & Elliot's (2003) levels of interpretation of multiculturalism, OHDC included multicultural components within its ideology - of inclusivity across dancers' movement styles, and the cultural/ethnic dance forms choreographers chose, as well as its practice - as an avenue to share, promote, and celebrate dance forms that originate in a minority group's culture. It did not, however, succeed in opening up a space for critical discourse and reflection amongst its members/and or audience on the organizational structure and Eurocentric culture formed and maintained throughout the choreographic, dancing and production process.

The implications of these contradictions necessarily lead to further questions about dance, creation, and identity. What is the role of dance teachers and choreographers in helping dancers to negotiate the tension between the embodied, engaged, and communitarian nature of dance and the embedded, critical, and societal nature of dance performance? How, then, does navigating this tension manifest and reflect itself in the creation of dance, both from the perspective of the choreographer(s) and from the perspective of the performer(s)? Finally, if, as we argue, a dancer's identity - social, cultural, personal, artistic, etc. - is always and already present (if not necessarily foregrounded), how might their experiences be interpreted and understood in multicultural contexts such as Canada?

In our view, much like "multiculturalism", itself, our experiences in the Only Human Dance Collective are *both* an example of people transcending differences in the name of a common identity (dancers), *and* a reminder that our identities (and, therefore, dance) reflect an unequal context. Therefore, when the dancer's body is interpreted and understood as a site where dance and cultural plurality interplay and perform the ever-changing negotiations of our identity markers, then opportunities are opened up for dance, creation, and identity to not only allow for artistic and cultural engagement, but critical engagement, as well.

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