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**Teaching Dance as a Means of  
Intercultural Reconciliation:  
Devising Harambe**

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## An Introduction to ATINER's Conference Paper Series

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Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
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## **Teaching Dance as a Means of Intercultural Reconciliation: Devising Harambe**

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### **Abstract**

Wittgenstein's thought about subjectivity has been widely interpreted as the origin of the contemporary tendency of considering the mind from an abstract point of view, avoiding the importance of the first-personal dimension. By contrast with a deflationarist line of interpretation, I argue that it can be read in a fruitful comparison with the philosophy of mind of anti-reductionist inspiration, focusing not so much on the private language argument as on the positive idea of inwardness developed in the last phase of his work.

First of all, I focus on some fundamental aspects of the semantics and the epistemology of the first person authority, starting from Wittgenstein's observations on the first personal uses of language, namely on avowals.

In particular, I consider the aspect called by Soemaker *immunity from error through misidentification* relative to phenomenal avowals and the aspect called by Evans *transparency* relative to intentional avowals.

Secondly, I consider the question: what is the relation between this semantic and epistemological analysis and the contemporary theories of First Person Perspective?

The first theory I consider is Zahavi's theory of *pre-reflective self-awareness* as a non-thematic and non objectifying form of Consciousness, contrasting the higher-order theories of consciousness.

The second theory is Moran's theory of first person authority as constitutively practical and deliberative.

In conclusion, I argue that the semantic and epistemological analysis of the First Person authority started by Wittgenstein influences in a positive way and can converge with some relevant aspects of Zahavi's and Moran's critics of the higher-level theories of consciousness.

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*Why is dance a representation of welcome?*

In many instances in Africa, visitors are welcomed through the communication medium of dance. These dances communicate through the use of physical movement and this replicates “Welcome” in a different communication form. When the dance is reciprocated by visitors or person from another culture it means “Thank you”. The aim and objective of this paper is premised on dance as an artistic, teaching tool for nonverbal communication and the vehicle of culture. This paper forms part of a research study that is still in process. The rationale of the study is on apparent racial tension within South Africa post Apartheid era. In quest to define my intention with valid form of evidence, the paper examines the calculated undertones of the play Harambe “*seeking for fresh air*”. The paper aims at using dance to learn and teach different cultural diversities of South Africa to reach a state of tolerance.

South Africa is known for its cultural diversity, languages, religious and beliefs. With eleven official languages recognized in the constitution each belonging to a group of people of certain culture. History indicates clearly that these cultural and racial divisions were formed by the country historical background. Apartheid was the source of these divisions. Apartheid was a system of legal racial segregation enforced by the National Party government in South Africa between 1948 and 1994, under which the rights of the majority 'non-white' inhabitants of South Africa were reduced and minority rule by white people was maintained. The South African community has just undergone a giant ravine change and they are still busy, even now, to obtain a positive nation building. Nelson Mandela was elected the first black president to lead the new South African dispensation, a government of National unity. In 1995 TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) was established under the promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No 34 of 1995; to expose the crimes committed during the Apartheid. Focusing on victims telling their stories and perpetrators confessing their guilt; the commission aimed at reconciling the country and building unity. This was done through dialogue, a verbal communication, but I don't feel that the dialogue continued enough to foster a multicultural society.

This was evident with the racial tension that exploded between white and black students at the University of the Free State campus after the Reitz video in 2008. “The video shows four white male students humiliating elderly black cleaners; it was aimed at mocking the University's attempts at integrating black and white residences”. This incident revealed that there's still racial tension between black and white people.

With all that; it is evident that verbal communication is a major challenge in South Africa due to cultural diversity, which in turn creates lots of tension within the country coursed by racial segregation. South Africans seem to think that the plea for a better cultural understanding is only conducted from one side by the same people. Having observed this, one wonders if dance as artistic means of communication, cannot be used as a tool that can advocate inter-cultural understanding and help to bring about cultural tolerance in South Africans. The paper has the constituents of: report from interviews conducted with leaders and choreographers from different cultural dance styles. A

reflection on the idea/theory of Athol Fugard in the play “Master Harold and the boys” suggesting dance as a means of reconciliation.

### **Teaching dance as a means of intercultural reconciliation**

#### **Verbal versus Non-verbal communication**

The gravity of the way verbal communication has failed to solve some other things, can only be faintly labeled as disaster or at a stronger label as utter chaos. Let me just indicate; the concept of “peace”, United Nations, poverty, the Revonian trials, the truth and reconciliation commission etc. are all brilliant revolutionary ideas that have been affected by the poisonous bite of verbal communication.

Communication is the activity of conveying information and messages. Information and messages contained herein carry knowledge exchange between the parties involved. This kind of knowledge can range from anything being it religion or culture. The cultural values of many communities in the world are taught, for the sake of preserving and growth mostly through the use of a group language. We find that language then becomes a cultural symbol of a particular group because of its importance to communicate.

However the production of sound, in a form of a verbal language, relies on the functionality of body organs that produce a speech sound. Through assimilation, children learn the body’s reaction to a communicated thought, in short; body language. A word is associated with a particular body movement and that then forms the truth of the word in relation to physical behavior. These children, through continual observation, learn the association of mental concepts that need to be communicated and its physical implications. They learn to manipulate the association through a subtle and spontaneous replacement of verbal words with the physical language. For a brief moment, there’s no sound only physical movement. Culture can be communicated through physical movement or dance. A group or a community will have a set of physical movements that forms a common gesture in it. These gestures become a symbol of that specific group. A calculated combination of these gestures form dances that are performed at their cultural ceremonies. Dance then becomes a symbol of cultural identity in a specific community. Dance becomes a teacher of culture by replacing verbal communication. Thus, dance communicates cultural information without the guidance of speech.

The study intends to teach a cultural-physical lesson to a multicultural South Africa and the world where applicable. Cultural dances can be taught to teach across the cultures, in this instance; there are methods that can be applied in the teaching process of dance. For that sake, the paper takes a momentary look at:

#### **The Four Perspectives of Orientation, particularly the social learning orientation**

The focus of social learning theories is interactions between people as the primary mechanism of learning. Learning is based on observation of others in a social setting. Early social learning

theories in the 1940's drew heavily from behaviorism, suggesting that imitative responses, when reinforced, led to the observed learning and behavioral changes. Four processes form the cornerstones of observational learning theory. These are attention, retention (memory), behavioral rehearsal, and motivation. All four processes contribute to learning by observation. Many useful concepts emerge from the social learning orientation, including motivational strategies, locus of control, social role acquisition, and the importance of interaction of learner with environment and other learners. (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991: 124)

Dance is learned from a society and comprises of all society's physical behaviors that are arranged into movement with guidance of musical rhythm. (Merriam & Caffarella 1991: 124) suggest learning through observation i.e. visual learning and its power to enhance learning-dance through observation.

Dance has so much weight on the basis of cultural identity and can be learned. The paper aims at using dance to learn and teach different cultural diversities of South Africa and the world to reach a state of tolerance. If other cultures can be placed in an environment of another culture to observe their dances and its implications, it is possible for others to learn from others and to bring about tolerance. Dance, because of its nature of silence in sound, can be taught without verbal language, but through non-verbal observation encrypted in the culture and nature of the dance itself; learning takes place. We have learned that observation, through the observational learning theory and its four processes, indicates the possible steps through which a dance observation can be a learning tool. These steps can be broken down in the following manner for the sake of assisting the paper with its goal to teach dance:

Attention: When an individual of a different culture is placed in another environment with its culture resonated through their dances; an individual's attention will be drawn into this new image, moving image that is played in front of their eyes. They will focus on it and the mind's curiosity will be at work.

Retention (memory): The focus extends itself into a series of images observed through the time. It takes memory to recall all the other images to make sense of the present move. The individual remembers, recalls the moves and learn how to do them.

Behavioral rehearsal: Learning the moves is nothing without adjusting yourself to the attitudes attributed to the dance itself. You must learn then the heaviness of each move and what muscles are used in its execution. Rehearse how to behave around the dance, embrace the brilliance of the meaning of the dance.

And motivation: Finally, find the definition and motivation behind each attitude and its physical execution. Why this attitude or behavior for this move, what are they thinking, when they dance this, what is the dance proposing about their culture: the answers lie in the essence of finding motivation behind each move and attitude. When the process of self finding of the motive is in the process; an individual is busy experiencing and learning about the other culture and dance becomes the subtle and powerful messenger.

**Athol Fugard analogy of the world though dance**

Athol Fugard a leading practitioner of political theatre his plays focused more on the aspects of segregation in South Africa such as his play *Master Harold and the boys*...attempts resolution through his analogy of a dance competition and places a strong metaphor on black and white South Africans' lack of harmony.

Hally: There's more to life than trotting around a dance floor...

Sam: It's Harmless pleasure, Hally. It does not hurt anybody.  
(p.31)

Hally is made to see how dancing and its state of harmony can be converted into a peaceful South Africa. Sam uses an annual cultural activity to indicate the importance of learning through an art form.

Hally: When you're dancing. If you and your partner collide into another couple

Sam: If me and Maria bump into you and Hilda...Hally, Hally!

Hally: What? What did I say?

Sam: There's no collisions out there, Hally. Nobody trips or stumbles or bumps into anybody else. That's what that moment is all about. To be one of those finalists on that dance floor is like...like being in a dream about a world in which accidents don't happen. (p.36)

Athol Fugard, through the character of Sam, speaks of a world without collisions in his metaphor of the dancing environment. The world, as an environment is compared to the dance floor as an environment. The want for cultural understanding, better yet peace, is paralleled to the music that is to be danced for. The people, blacks and whites are equaled to the couples on the dance floor. This image of people dancing to the music becomes a perfect pocket for a South Africa where everyone understands the beauty of everyone's special art form and its cultural implications. He was raising a possibility of dance as a solution to a cultural-learning retarded South Africa, a South African environment without racism, hate, injustices, misunderstanding but harmony acquired through the use of movement, a dance.

Hally: Jesus, Sam! That's beautiful!

Sam: Of course it is. That's what I have been trying to say to you all afternoon. And it's beautiful because that is what we want life to be like. But instead, like you said. Hally, we're bumping into each other all the time. Look at the three of us this afternoon: I've bumped into Willie, the two of us have bumped into you, you've bumped into your mother, she bumping into your dad...None of us knows the steps and there's no music playing. And it doesn't stop with us the whole world is doing it all the time. Open a news paper and what do you read? America has bumped into Russia, England is bumping into India, and rich man bumps into poor man. Those are big collisions. Hally, they make for a lot of bruises. People get hurt in all that bumping, and were sick and tired of it now. It's been going on

for too long. Are we never going to get right? Learn to dance life like champions instead of always being just a bunch of beginners' at it.

Hally: You've got a vision, Sam (p.36, 37)

Athol Fugard was using the play *Master Harold and the Boys* as a tool to demonstrate the strength of social reformation with dance as the potential tool. He hides the delicacy of a harsh South Africa in the subtlety of his characters by exoneration. He displays his characters as victims of a social condition, cultural difference and segregation under the previous dispensation. The play reaches its maximum message point with a background-motivated argument between the characters. This feud reveals the actual nature of a separated South Africa of that time. Amidst all of this, Athol Fugard relates the story of dance as a possible solution to these collisions. He insists through Sam that the differences that are embedded in the nature of our different backgrounds can be brought to reconcile through an art form of dance.

In an interview I had with Gregory Maqoma a contemporary African dance maker from Johannesburg, South Africa, who received his training both in South Africa and in Belgium; said Aristotle viewed dance as a language, an educational tool to develop culture. It is responsible for mind and spirit used to acquire the higher mental qualities and to exercise them is unique; dance is a body instrument of communication regained by those who dance seriously. Stamping on the same idea: Dance is a form of communication, because dance is non verbal, it knows no color and has no limit and barriers, it is a way through which I can interrogate other cultures; it's also a way in which I would find my way in other cultures, to communicate and find access and accessibility to other cultures and forms in order to create, I am more informed with other cultures with a clear intentions I make sure that am more sensitive to other cultures so I put myself in a position whereby I learn a lot about the culture, not just the movement but also a background, where things originates, am fascinated by origins (Maqoma 24 May 2010: Interview).

### **Conversation with dance choreographers and dance leaders**

I had a privilege to extract wisdom out of the interviews conducted with them. These choreographers are versed in teaching cultural dance forms across most cultures. The focus of interviews was to gain external knowledge of the atmosphere created by working with multicultural groups.

Gregory Maqoma as a choreographer, teacher, dancer, artistic consultant and creative director, he has taught and presented work in the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland, Mexico, Finland, Burkina Faso, Austria, Nigeria, France, Senegal, Norway, Belgium, Germany, USA and in South Africa. He says about dance and its potential to teach:

...Any form of dance, is a form of communication and besides its non-verbal implications, it knows no limits or codes. Marabi dance, for instance, on its own has a fascinating history because it was created to unite people and cultures. Marabi art was set in a multicultural environment of Sophiatown; a setting which allowed people to mingle and possibly influence each other, regardless of cultural affiliations.

There is a strong American influence in the music in this dance form. It became an art form created not only for protest, but a platform where liberation reigned with liberated people. It allowed people from different races to unite and learn from each other. Without any cultural background, a dance will hover around without a substance platform to land on. My body needs the ability to culturally communicate; therefore I have to be certain about a culture in order to train and work with different people. I have to develop a certain culture and certain aesthetic, and that form and aesthetic is very much based on my cultural background (Gregory Maqoma 24 May 2010: Interview).

Elize Cogle, a professional and qualified dance teacher, she indicates that everyone in South Africa needs this form of reconciliation; through dance ..but I have a problem that I sometimes wonder if it is about the whites understanding the blacks, because if I look at the curriculum it looks like it is about the whites understanding the blacks that is where my worry is, my other worry is even the black people are losing their culture, so it is very good to show the world our culture but maybe we need to show them everything in our country (Elize Cogle 15 October 2010: interview).

The problem of cultural differences brought out by the distancing of each from; emanate the South African and the world's problem of human relationships. The choreographers interviewed, indicate the nature of dance to spontaneously provoke knowledge of the other by the other. Having worked with culturally varied dancers, the choreographers also promotes the possibility of dance as the release of self on the platform where it can be observed and learned. Even though Elize has a problem with the bigger problem and where it stems from, she still insinuates that the root as the main problem; intolerance. On the other hand, before the *Harambe* dancers got on stage, the plan to put dance forward as a solution was already planned. Dancers, trained and untrained, were to become the next in the study of Dance as a means of Cultural Tolerance.

#### **Devising Harambe:** Togetherness

I will relate the process of the production and the interviews on the outcomes with student dancers and the choreographer.

*Harambe-* is the story about two first year students of different races. The two had to share a room at the university's hostel residences. The two came from totally different cultural background. This was soon to be solved when they made a discovery of a shared aspiration. They both loved dancing and learned about each other through that. This was organized, in the workshop script by the students and choreographer, in a manner that displayed all the challenges that hindered the progress of tolerance for others, brought to life by the burning issue of integration within the University. These students were later to be interviewed to share their experience.

#### **Workshop Process**

A group of multicultural University of the Free State students, white and black from different cultural and language groups in South Africa, were brought together with the aim to explore an idea of a multicultural workshop production, to create an awareness/teach 'self' about the 'other' at the

University of the Free State main campus; after the Ritz video scandal. Already the first day of the meeting to discuss the production roll out and goal, the interchange of culture was engaged with through discussions of how to approach the goal. These students were expected to work together as a team; applying each one teaches one method, The reader has to take inconsideration that they are a group of different cultures. The clash of cultures regarding the selection of concepts was immense, but with concept reconciliation a beautiful multicultural concept was established. At this point it was still an idea, lying ahead of that was the actualization of the idea, meaning the physical action.

### **Rehearsal process**

The choreographer Angelo Mockie picked leaders from different cultural groups, to teach their dance to the other group of a different culture vice-verse. Once again this sparked disorder in the rehearsal studio. This confusion was a result of a cultural clash at a physical level. Each student from a particular environment was accustomed to a particular way of moving, that reflects itself a unique way of their cultural dance. It was another problem that had to be solved, remember the students were converged for the sake of a calculated result. In that case the quest to solve the problem continued daily, until one day none of its tracks of different dance styles were traced in the groups. The group started to analyze each other's way of moving, experiencing it and learning it. They rehearsed, now, with an attitude followed by memorizing and finally finding motivation for each physical move. They learned from each other the combination of culture as a passenger of physical actions.

### **Production showcase**

After some time of rehearsals, the students were offered to showcase their product to the community at large. Every one of the students invited their loved one to come and witness their creation. Bearing in mind the variety of our student dancers, the audiences of different cultural backgrounds were also going to be part of the gathering. The theatre was filled with different kind of people; a multicultural South Africa gathering for the same goal .i.e. those who have learned were now going to teach those that have not learned and vice versa.

### **Interviews on the outcomes of the production with the choreographer and students dancers**

To investigate the possibility of teaching dance as a means of intercultural reconciliation, the paper looks into the interviews conducted between the student dancers and choreographer. They were asked what dance is, the challenges that they faced in the creation of the production, what racial tension there was in the beginning of the production, can dance unite a society, what lesson's they learned and whether they viewed dance as transmission of culture. Even though the responses varied per interview, there was sense of similarity in most of these interviews.

On dance and its uniting potential, Angelo Mockie, a choreographer says

“Dance is a realization and social awareness of your own environment to meet people and a way to communicate and understand them in a more relaxed setting. It was a student initiative; we came together seeking a way to resolve the separation or rather racial challenges that we were facing together by using dance as a medium of communication. Motivated by the 2008 Reitz sage; the students chose to use the production *Harambe-* as a tool to encourage interracial relations. This created a platform for student interaction on a social, as well as, intellectual level. The major challenge that we were facing or rather discovered was communication...” (Mockie 4 March 2010: Interview)

The different students were united and dance was the language that they were going to use to direct their message. There were challenges that they faced in the making of this production; Mockie remembers...

“...One incident that occurred was when one of the black students was frustrated with the language that the white students were using, which was Afrikaans and she told them that she does not understand it can't they speak in English, the language that everyone understands. Then we discovered that it is not that they don't want to work with each other, but it is because of lack of communication due to language barrier. But once they start dancing all of that was put aside and they become one big family. If you get to know the 'other' you will be comfortable around the 'other' and vice-verse, and it is easy for someone to understand dance. To learn different languages so dances can be one of the vehicles that transport culture...”(Mockie 4 March 2010: Interview)

The students were at this stage working towards making dance the alternative medium of communication to improve tolerance among the students themselves. Nthabiseng Diphoko second year drama student and a dancer in the production, further speaks of the cultural tension and in her speech she mentions segregation:

“...white people would be in their corner and blacks in their corner and coloreds being the ones running in between two groups...” (Diphoko 10 March 2010: Interview)

This was precisely the aims of this exercise, to put together people of different cultures in one room, with the intention to find resolution through the dance medium. However, the researcher was also aware of the challenges embedded in its quest. To resolve this, student dancers had first to be united. Uniting them for cultural exchange was facilitated subtly through the exchange of knowledge about the 'other'. When Nthabiseng was asked about the lesson learned in this process, she said;

“...I wanted to learn more about the 'other' and developed a sense of comfort. I realized that it is not impossible to learn from other cultures, because sometimes I used to look at the 'other' culture and think to myself, this is not for me, and it is boring. But having learned their cultural dances, I have also grown fond of their music as well. Another lesson I learned was that; when I started joining the group thought that

they would be more black people than white people, because I thought that they cannot dance like we do, but I actually learned a lot from them, so I learned not to be prejudiced..." (Diphoko 10 March 2010: Interview)

Marnel Bester also lead dancer in the production said about her learning results as follows;

"...I have learned that if you want to get along with other races, cultures, and dances also to understanding other people, you need to be open to it, if you're open to them, you can make a success of it, it all depends on you. We were fortunate enough to get an awesome and wonderful cast that could come together and create that great production and at the end we were one big family..." (Bester 15 March 2010: Interview)

Jefferson J Dirks-Korkee a postgraduate student in drama and theatre also gives his view on learning as an acquisition from dance as a reconciliatory tool.

"...I learned that white people are comfortable in their own language mainly because they come from Afrikaans schools and families, so everything is from their background, with the blacks they went to black schools where they spoke Sesotho but were taught in English. Coming to the University they are still been taught in English, they get comfortable in that language as well. Dance is a form of nonverbal communication. We all can understand the same message and in the language of dance, it does not matter which cultural background you are and language you speak, but if we all speak nonverbal language we understand each other and that language is dance. (Korkee 15 March 2010: Interview)

The other lesson I learned was, not only at the production, but throughout the whole process of creating the production, from rehearsals to the end, it does not matter which racial group or cultural background you are from, we can work together. Because we were blacks and whites and the way we worked the results of the production and the rehearsal speaks what we went through..."

The other question that centered on these interviews was that of dance as a carrier for culture. The students used their experiences to answer this question. Jefferson J Dirks-Korkee articulates his experience in this manner:

"...Yes, I learned as much as I wanted and yes it does carry culture, even though I am not a dancer but I learned a few things, especially when we did the *Marabi* dance. We discussed the many moves we did, that helped in understanding why certain moves are done and it gave us an insight into the life in the township. So I think yes, dance is a carrier of culture, because all those dances came from different diverse races and cultures and took its own form..."(Korkee 15 March 2010: Interview)

His notion of dance as the carrier of culture was accompanied by many other responses from other students. The similarity in their responses was also inevitable and indicated itself in various forms. For instance, Marnel Bester's response runs in symmetry with Jefferson's response.

“...dance is not verbal communication. When we start to dance you deal with the inner person, when the music comes, you get to learn about the other person without them saying a word, they express themselves in a cultural way whether being happy, sad or any emotion that makes a cultural person, you get to experience it in dance. There is a sense of culture in dance. I got to learn not to underestimate people and put them in boxes. Also to look at them as people and not just as color, not only as they are good at that and not at this but as one and dance was the communication that we needed, a language that unified us. Dance eventually at the end of the production was the winner, having placed all those different cultural dance styles in one and danced together as a group. It brought us close to knowing each other better. Dance is the carrier of culture and the answer to our cultural intolerance... (Korkee, Bester 15 March 2010: Interview).

With every challenge defeated, tolerance was premised between the students. Some of the aims were to incite togetherness within the institution, above all to have fun despite their racial grouping and political ideologies and other factors relating to segregation of the ‘other’. The play, like the study, was brought to life because of the burning issue of integration within the university. Based on the interviews on dance; it is evident that you can’t separate dance from human nature and environment, his culture and moral values. Dance can teach; it has a culture and social element that is rich in representation of who we are as different South Africans. Its means of communication and cultural lessons can be conducted through the use of this medium.

### **Conclusion**

This is not a contest against all the other forms of communication; it is rather an alternative to fill in the gaps in finding a solution to a cultural tolerance. There is a notion in African culture that says; if you speak my language, you are moving closer to knowing me. Ngungi said ‘Language has the duality of being a means of communication and also a carrier of culture’ (Ngugi 1986:4) using the argument of Ngugi on language, the question arises if dance can also be used to communicate certain aspects of culture, act as a carrier of culture and promote understanding, respect and reconciliation between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. The paper aimed at looking into the value of dance as another tool for reaching a South Africa of self understanding without the demarcation of cultural background. Thus far the research reflects that there is a need for cultural activities like dance for cultural exchange. The information collected suggests that people learn about ‘self’; and the ‘other’ effortlessly through nonverbal communication. Since the research is still in progress, the study seek to scientifically measure if dance can be an effective medium of creating understanding and tolerance between different cultural groups and the ‘other’ and the ‘self’ on the Free State campus and elsewhere. The study might be a prime example of promoting understanding, awareness and inter-cultural tolerance. If proven, it will form part of first year University movement module in the Drama and Theatre arts.

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