Decolonising the professional ballet dancer's senses through learning in ballet class[1]

Descolonizando los sentidos de los bailarines profesionales de ballet en el aprendizaje en la clase de ballet // Decolonizando os sentidos dos bailarinos profissionais na aprendizagem na aula de balé

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1 Research article: This paper explores some of the results of four years of doctoral research about multisensorial learning experiences of professional ballet dancers in London ballet classes. Based on the concepts of the sensorium, *corazonar* and decolonial sensing and ethnographic methods, I advocate for the democratisation and decolonialisation of the dancer's senses uniting sensorial, reason and emotions as principal elements to explore their technique and artistic expression.

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Abstract

This research addresses the role of emotions and multisensorial experiences in a professional ballet dancer's learning experiences during ballet classes in London gleaned through ethnographic methods. Based on the concepts of the sensorium, *corazonar* and decolonial sensing, I advocate for the democratisation and decolonialisation of the dancer's senses uniting the sensorial, reason and emotions as principal elements for learning dance.

The ballet dancers exhibited a diversified sensorium in the learning process, a practice that expanded the notion of the five senses. The dancers perceived and learned differently with and through their senses, from distinctive backgrounds, cultures, and habits. This underscores the idea that a more egalitarian use of multiple ways of sensing by professional ballet dancers can promote a new way of learning in ballet class, which leads to broadening the understanding of how dancers' senses and emotions can help them to explore their technique and artistic expression.

Keywords

Ballet; culture; emotions; learning; senses

Resumen

Esta investigación aborda el papel de las emociones y las experiencias multisensoriales en el aprendizaje de los bailarines profesionales en las clases de ballet de Londres a través de método etnográfico. Partiendo de los conceptos de *sensorium, corazonar y decolonial sensing*, abogo por la democratización y descolonialización de los sentidos del bailarín uniendo sensorial, razón y emociones como elementos principales para el aprendizaje de la danza.

Los bailarines de ballet mostraron un *sensorium* diversificado para aprender que amplía la noción de los cinco sentidos. Los bailarines perciben y aprenden de manera diferente con y a través de sus sentidos, a partir de antecedentes, culturas y hábitos distintivos. Un uso más igualitario de múltiples formas de percepción por parte de bailarines profesionales puede promover una nueva forma de aprendizaje en la clase de ballet. Ampliar la comprensión de los sentidos y las emociones de los bailarines les ayuda a explorar su técnica y expresión artística.

Palabras claves

Aprendizaje; ballet; cultura; emociones; sentidos

Resumo

Esta pesquisa aborda o papel das emoções e experiências multissensoriais na aprendizagem de bailarinos profissionais nas aulas de ballet em Londres através de método etnográfico. Com base nos conceitos de *sensorium, corazonar e decolonial sensing*, defendo a democratização e decolonização dos sentidos do bailarino unindo o sensorial, a razão e as emoções como elementos principais na aprendizagem da dança.

Os bailarinos mostraram um *sensorium* diversificado para aprender ampliando a noção dos cinco sentidos. Os bailarinos percebem e aprendem de forma diferente por meio de seus sentidos, baseados em suas origens, culturas e hábitos distintos. Um uso mais igualitário de múltiplas formas de percepção por bailarinos profissionais pode promover uma nova forma de aprendizagem nas aulas de

ballet. Ampliar a compreensão sobre os sentidos e emoções dos bailarinos os ajuda a explorar sua técnica e expressão artística.

Palavras-chaves
Aprendizado; ballet; cultura; emoções; sensações

Introduction

This paper discusses the professional ballet dancer's sensorial learning in the environment of the ballet class. Professional ballet dancers acquire and refine specialised knowledge of the technique and artistry in their daily class through multiple sensorial modalities which are prioritised and interconnected differently. Each ballet class has its own social and cultural setting, and it is never a neutral space; rather, it is a complex practice where dancers make sense of the world through the sensorial. The senses are culturally framed and there is no consensus between the theoretical perspectives concerning their division/typology or how they are felt.

The notion of what constitutes bodily senses, its classification and functions vary across different cultures. The philosopher, Aristotle (ca. 350 BC), discussed the selection of five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch in his work De Anima (2002 [1968]). Based on the physics and physiology of perception, Aristotle (2002 [1968]) argues that each sense has a sense-organ (e.g., eye, ear), a medium to be felt (e.g., air, water), and its own proper object (e.g., sight – colour, hearing – sound). For Aristotle (2002 [1968]), perception involves the relation between the sense-organ and an external object in a causal process.

Many Euro-American scholars still prioritise one or more of the five primary senses of Aristotle's (2002 [1968]) model and consider those to be key for the composition of the sensorium. The dance anthropologist, Andrée Grau (2011), explains that ballet is rooted in Western culture, where vision is culturally dominant. Therefore, when ballet is practiced in different cultural environments, in many parts of the world it still prioritises an ocularcentric perspective of the world. To investigate how dancers feel and use their senses to learn, my methodology involved ethnographic work (based on models by Spradley, 1980; Hsu, 2008) at the English National Ballet, Ballet Black and Dance Works from 2016-2019, including participant observations and participant experience of ballet classes, and interviews with twelve dancers.

1. The dancers' sensoria

In twentieth-century dance studies, dance anthropologist Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull (1997) found that in ballet practice and performance, dancers prioritised the sense of seeing, whilst dancers in contact improvisation privileged the sense of touch, and traditional Ghanaian dancers gave primacy to the aural sense. Although Bull's study provides a generalisation of the dancers' prioritisation of one sense associated with a particular dance genre, it still broadens the conversation about ways in which the dancers used their senses in various forms. According to Bull (1997, p. 282), ballet is 'highly organised by the visual sense', yet it is also 'strongly related to the sense of touch'. Yet, dancers feel other sensorial modalities in ballet. In my study dancers feel tactile-kinaesthetic-visual-aural sensations which help

them retain a memory of the touch of the teacher or on their own bodies (Field note, 25.04.2017). This interconnection of the senses was observed in the ballet classes in London.

Foster (1997) analysed cultural aspects of five different dance techniques: ballet, Duncan, Graham, Cunningham and contact improvisation. For Foster (1997:237), 'the dancer's perceived body derives primarily from sensory information that is visual, aural, haptic, olfactory, and perhaps, most important kinaesthetic'. The sports scientist, Susanne Ravn (2009), conducted a cross-cultural study which investigated professional dancers' perspectives of sensing movement in ballet, butoh and contemporary dance. Ravn (2009) notes that in ballet class, rehearsals and performances at The Royal Danish Ballet, the dancers' principal senses and ways of sensing movement were vision, hearing, energy, weight, and kinaesthesia. Another study that further developed Aristotle's model exploring other sensorial modalities is dance scholar Angela Pickard's (2015) work on the cultural aspects of the ballet class. Pickard explains how amateur dancers become mindful of the movements they make through sensations of pain and pleasure.

Investigating contemporary dancers' sensory experiences, anthropologist Caroline Potter (2007) participated in dance classes at the London Contemporary Dance School and explored the amateur contemporary dancers' sensorium, which consisted of intertwined sensory experiences of kinaesthesia, heat, pain, taste, touch, sound, and vision. Potter's (2007, p.24) aim was to identify the relation of the sensorium with the formation of the cultural identity of 'becoming' a dancer. The dance scholar, Cynthia Roses-Thema (2007), analysed dancers' breathing, core temperature, heartbeat, and health issues, such as chronic pain, as feelings of the internal state of the body (interoception) in performances. The dancer's perception of the audience's visual contact and energy, the musical cues and the lights, and the use of costumes were considered responses to stimuli originating outside of the body (exteroception). Roses-Thema (2007) found that dancers monitored the background state of the body continuously and interoception became conscious when something unexpected happened, for example, pain and injury. Drawing on the studies by Foster (1997), Ravn (2015) and Pickard (2015) on ballet dancers, and Potter (2007) and Roses-Thema (2007) on contemporary dancers, I investigate the professional ballet dancers' sensoria in relation to their learning, considering different social and cultural contexts where classes occur. I focus on the multiple ways ballet dancers use their senses and how these ways of sensing are interconnected.

For example, in my study the dancers' ways of breathing promoted different qualities within the movement, such as the case of 'movement breath', when dancers' control their breathing, to breathe in and out, coordinated with the execution of particular movements (Freeman-Sergeant, interview, 13.04.2018), which enables their expressiveness to be enhanced. Some dancers learnt to regulate breathing with the movement, as well with the music - melody or tempo (Larkings, interview, 20.05.2018). The dancers' ways of breathing (feeling out of breath, breathing to calm themselves down, and gathering energy to move) can help or hinder the execu-

tion of movements and use of musicality in class. Therefore, to think about decolonising the dancer's breathing means to consider professional ballet dancers' breathing as a perceived sense which accompanies sensations of movement (e.g., breathing expands the internal elasticity of the movement), rhythm (e.g., breathing during phrases of music to coordinate movement; internal rhythm heartbeat), and an emotional dimension (e.g., breathing management connected to feeling calm and confident to move).

2. The sensorial aspect of embodied knowledge

The idea that knowledge is embodied implies recognising that it is an activity involving multiple sensorial modalities. Scholarship outside dance studies shows that it is possible to extend sensorial perceptions far beyond the Aristotelian model. Looking to expand Western thought on the five bodily senses, in her study of the sensorium of the Anlo people in Africa Geurts (2002) discovered other senses, such as balance, kinaesthesia, pleasure, and pain. For Geurts (2002, p.253), 'Western European/Euro American folk ideology of the senses limits sensory modalities to bodily functions by which the mind can obtain knowledge of the external world'. Moreover, Howes (1991) and Classen (2012) explained that the notion of the 'five senses' influences the way people think and learn in Western cultures. These studies broaden understanding of the notion that sensorial perceptions vary according to the cultural environment. The approaches of these studies inspired me to investigate how ballet dancers learn with multiple and interconnected senses in class. Examples of this include expanding analysis of ways of breathing, feeling haptic sensations and seeing, all of which are conceived of as elements that form their sensorium because of their cultural account of sensorial perception.

Dancers encounter an abundant variety of sensory perceptions, to which cannot be attended all at once. For this reason, dancers may shift their attention between multiple senses in class. To study the dancers' senses, it is necessary to explore their perception and the sensations that accompany them as they impact the way they learn technique and artistry. Although not studying ballet, philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2012 [1945], p.230) defines bodily senses as a means by which human beings perceive and engage with the world. Merleau-Ponty (2012 [1945]) theorises bodies as physically embodied and environmentally embedded. According to his phenomenological theory, sensations are a function of the senses. The perception or awareness or accumulation of bodily memory are experienced through the senses. Merleau-Ponty's theory is in tune with the epistemologies of the North because it expresses a universal human characteristic to explain bodily cultures and power relations.

By contrast, in the epistemologies of the South, Santos offers the notion of Southern ways of knowing with a different framework of the senses from Aristotle. Santos (2018, p.165) states that 'knowledge is not possible without experience, and experience is inconceivable without the senses and the feelings they arouse in us'. For Santos (2018, p.165), 'the senses are essential for knowing' and broadly interconnected with culture. Santos (2018, p.93) argues for a deeper engagement with the senses, for ins-

tance, in Euro-Western notions of 'bodily knowledge' in dance.

I follow Santos' (2018, p.165) premise that 'the epistemologies of the North' need to recognise non-Western knowledges and consider the senses 'as sources of knowledge'. As an example of deep sensing, Santos (2018:171) suggests that the researcher should take into account that 'bodies' are 'unequal', and these differences define the ways in which they are 'seen', 'see themselves', and 'see the researcher'. In this way, Santos includes an element of reciprocity to the analysis of the senses. Santos (2018) recognises other ways of knowing, the notion of individualised bodies, which feel a variety of ways through deep sensing in social and cultural relationships of struggle and experience. Santos' (2018) expands the notion of *corazonar* and how a sense can be perceived and analysed. Based on this, I explore how knowledge from the epistemologies of the South can bring new information to my study.

Santos conceptualises senses as means of perceiving the world associated with feelings and reasoning. By analysing one's senses, including feelings and reasoning, Santos considers the person as a whole. For Santos (2018), individuals embody relations of social domination through their senses. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge how the senses are used and conditioned to change a situation of struggle and inequality. Aristotle's (2002 [1968]) model of five senses constitutes a limited framework based on the causal relationship of a sense-organ and an external object. In contrast, the epistemologies of the South offer a broader understanding of the senses, through the notion of deep sensing, corazonar, and the multiple interpretations one can give to what they sense.

Based on Santos' (2018) perspective which considers a person's feelings, reasoning, and emotions in each social context, I explore how key professional dancers' sensorial modalities can promote more democratic learning in ballet classes.

3. Decolonising the dancers' senses promotes democratisation of the ballet class

Santos' (2018) concepts of *corazonar* and deep sensing, as types of human knowledge, show an expanded model of sensing. Santos (2018, pp.100-101) defines *corazonar* as emotions/affections and emotional or affective ways of knowing, including a spiritual dimension from a decolonising perspective. According to the dance scholar, Janet O'Shea (2018, p.751), the term 'decolonisation' in dance means actions against the conditions created by colonialism. For O'Shea (2018, p.751), dance scholars need to adopt 'a new epistemological frame' which gives agency and visibility to those previously marginalised, considering a 'geopolitical configuration of different kinds of knowledge'. I expand O'Shea's idea to call for decolonisation and democratisation of the professional ballet dancers' senses.

Some studies of ballet as a cultural space from the North/Western scholarship make decolonial shifts and their research represents an analogue to corazonar. For instance, Grau (2011) explored which elements compose human knowledge in a cross-cultural study of dancers' corporeality, spatiality and sensibility, with examples from ballet, Balinese, and

Tiwi dance. For Grau (2011, p.7), 'human experiences are not all of the same order. Sensing, feeling and thinking, for example, are all part of human knowledge and they do not operate in isolation'. From a similar perspective, a study by philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2000, p.360) considers that young dancers' bodily knowledge and their acquisition of skills occur through mental, emotional states and tactile-kinaesthetic sensations, continuously remembered in movement as 'habit memory'. These unique studies inspired me to explore how dancers in the daily ballet class acquire knowledge through sensing, thinking and feeling in multiple, culture-specific ways.

Ballet dancers learn in multiple ways with their senses in class. In a study carried out by the dance teacher and psychologist, Christine Hanrahan, and the psychologist, John H. Salmela (1990, p.19), the use of imagery by intermediate ballet dancers indicates improvement of their performance based on 'sensations that the dancer has already seen or felt'. The quality of the image can help dancers feel the nature and direction of the energy flow[3] in movement execution and expression. This study aligns with an investigation by the dance scholar, Paula Salosaari (2001), which entailed an inquiry into young dancers' visual and internal conceptualisations of imagery in ballet class to stimulate particular movement sensations and how it developed their creative interpretation of set ballet vocabulary.

From early on in ballet education most dancers learn how to use mental imagery from their teachers. A



Camila Galindo. Fotografía: Diego Fernando Melo. 2021

3 For psychologists Jeanne Nakamura and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2002:90), flow is the experience of performers or athletes being deeply immersed in an activity, in a state of flow the person is fully confident in their ability with 'intense and focused concentration' merging action and awareness, and 'experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding'.

study of modern dance professionals by Hanrahan and the sports psychologist, Ineke Vergeer (2001), classifies multiple uses of mental imagery, helping dancers to build confidence, calm down, prepare for a performance, and choreograph. Furthermore, the dancers used imagery, 'seeking to integrate mind, body and spirituality not only into their dance training and performance contexts but also into their lifestyle' (Hanrahan and Vergeer, 2001:249). The sports scientist, Bettina Bläsing, and psychologists Emily Cross, Corinne Jola, Juliane Honisch, and Catherine Stevens (2012, p.304) identify how dancers use mental imagery as a tool for learning and optimising movements to memorise 'long complex phrases and to improve movement quality in terms of spatiotemporal adaptation and artistic expression'. For dance researcher Tanya Berg (2016, p.219), dancers feel 'artistic freedom' when teachers suggest mental imagery in class. These studies reveal how dancers enhance their awareness, the kinaesthetic feeling, and the quality of movement execution with the support of visual images in their minds. In my study, ballet movements were saturated with images, and the use of imagery in class changed the way dancers understood their senses when moving.

As independent scholar Elizabeth Robinson (2017, p.42) argues, 'in bodily work, it is not sufficient to only watch or to take in through all the senses while learning a technique or skill. The technique must also be actively expressed and reinterpreted back through the senses'. This means that the learning process depends on the dancer's sensorial, emotional and rational engagement with the elements of the class. Following this idea, I draw on a study by Elisabeth Gibbons (2007) to help me explore the term democratisation in the ballet class. For Gibbons, three key elements are important for learning: both dancers and teachers can make decisions in class; there is an acknowledgement that dancers and teachers may have familiarity with different teaching styles, and that teaching involves previous and conscious decisions. I bring Gibbons' (2007) notion of dance pedagogy to investigate the democratisation of professional ballet classes through the dancers' perspective of their sensorial learning. Ballet dancers respond to different stimuli which influence the way they utilise their senses in class; one instance of this is the teacher's pedagogic method.

In my study, ballet dancers face situations daily in class and make individual choices of action. For this reason, I use the concept of agency developed by sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984, p.9) defined as the power and capability of acting as a person wishes. This power of action is what I mean by agency – when dancers monitor reflexively themselves and are able to act. For example, when dancers use their breathing in different ways, based on the teacher's guidance, who then lets them decide what suits them best.

To discuss the decolonisation of dancers' senses, it is important to consider that the ballet class is a society, with members who learn and teach through an intensive, tacit, informal, and weakly sanctioned set of rules. These rules guide how the dancers must use their senses, promote specific behaviours, and embody ballet technique and *habitus*. As Giddens (1984, p. 22) states, 'as social actors, all human

beings are highly learnt with respect to knowledge which they possess and apply in the production and reproduction of day-to-day social encounters'. For this reason, I foster a broader and inclusive perspective of the dancers' different sensorial ways of learning in professional ballet classes.

4. Dancers' sensorial learning in the professional ballet class

Given that it is a constant part of the professional ballet dancer's life, the daily ballet class is a rich terrain for a study of the dancers' senses. My findings indicate that the cultural and social context of the class stimulates different sensorial experiences. The idea that ballet is a particular cultural practice and an ethnic dance of European cultural heritage, with stylised Western customs and aesthetic values; for instance, dancers' long and slim bodies was articulated several decades ago in the seminal work by dance anthropologist Joann Wheeler Kealiinohomoku (2001 [1983]). The works of Kealiinhomoku (2001 [1983]), Rosa (2015), and Santos (2018) each investigate different topics, though they all discuss the influence of cultural forms of Western customs and values on the embodiment of individuals of a group.

As noted by anthropologist Elisabeth Hsu (2008, p.433), the 'sensory experience is socially made and mediated', presupposing a primordial bodily experience in which the mental and the physical are interconnected with a cultural form. The notion of the sensory experience culturally framed connects to the theory of epistemologies of the South proposed by Santos (2018).

In their social encounters in the ballet class, dancers acquire cultural knowledge on how to perform 'codified and stylised movements and postures', as discussed by the performance scholar, Deidre Sklar (2008, p.88). Sklar (2008:91) argues that dancers may have 'lucid moments of seeing themselves' when performing a *plié* in the studio, while agreeing 'to the perceptual, ideological, and aesthetic conventions of a sociocultural system that values ballet'. At this moment, the dancers may consciously feel the 'sensations of toes gripping, quads clenching, spine extending, wrist softening, breath suspending' and may additionally use visual imagination (Sklar, 2008, p.91). Such 'cultural background influences what one perceives and how one interprets what she perceives' (Sklar, 1991, p.8). Sklar (1991) considers the cultural knowledge embodied in movement as an embodied emotional experience associated with cultural learning. Sklar's discussion is relevant to my research because I consider ballet dancers' subjective bodily engagement in class as tacit and internalised through sensations of moving. I examined each ballet class in the three institutions in London as particular manifestations of the ballet culture, and their prioritisation of sensory preferences.

Furthermore, Sklar (2008, p.85) argues for the examination of felt dimensions of movement, in particular, the 'kinetic vitality as an overlooked aspect of embodied knowledge'. As a researcher, who dances and writes about dance, I tried to make sense of my own and other dancers' embodied knowledge, using my body as analytical insight. I follow Sklar's (2000, p. 71) approach of relying on the way I feel sensations as 'dimensions of movement experien-

ce', which I consider as sensorial learning. Sklar's (2008) work in the dance context can be examined together with Santos' (2018) concept of *corazonar*, given that both explore the specificity of feeling the body through the senses and emotions associated with the values and conventions of a particular sociocultural system.

The way a person senses and perceives depends on how accustomed they are to a sensation and what it means to them. Whilst individual in form, such sensations may also be learnt and shared across members of a cultural group. Outside the context of dance and sensing, the anthropologist Greg Downey (2010) studies how culture may affect the embodied learning of athletes and capoeira practitioners. Downey's (2010, p.35) theory of a skills-based model of culture considers that 'embodied knowledge' in a particular culture is modified by behaviour, training, and experience. For Downey (2010), different forms of expertise amongst members of the same training regime are a result of their individual cultural experiences (such as their background, perceptual acuity, physiological conditioning, ways of processing information, training, own coaching, and technique). Dancers in each ballet cultural setting in my study are also individuals who share classes (education), so their embodied learning, may be seen as a skill-based model of (ballet) culture.

Ballet technique is a dance form of embodied skill with over four hundred years of cultural history. It is articulated as a shared education regime with recognisable core elements of verticality, turn out, five basic foot positions, pointed toes, grace, precision, placement, lifted and extended limbs. These elements are described as socio-cultural traits by the dance historian Jennifer Homans (2010, pp.19/20). Despite the changes in ballet technique, its core elements are not discussed in depth regarding their impact on dancers' senses in class. For instance, in my study, I identified that dancers' sense of verticality may influence their breathing. Homans (2010) observed historical changes in ballet, such as class structure, gender, costume, the notions of an ideal body and the dancer's physicality. All these elements of the class may affect the dancers' senses. For the dance scholar Jennifer Fischer (2015), ballet technique adapted over its history in accordance with its socio-cultural shifts.

Ballet's long history evolved with the discovery of other ways of understanding the body. According to the ballet master Carlo Blasis (1830), ballet was conceived and codified as a technique with an emphasis on the presentation of the shape and form of the movement. Since its conceptualisation during the Renaissance in European courts, ballet technique celebrates a physical, ethereal form, already explored in the Foster's (1995, p.1) study.

Despite the differences[4] between ballet methods, schools and styles, the ballet technique disseminates particular values through a 'ballet culture' which is not universal. Yet, ballet technique perpetuates similar characteristics, (promotion of hierarchy, a specific type of similar dancing bodies in space and time, disciplined bodies) in which visuality is the main sensorial avenue of communication. This means dancers may internalise technical knowledge from diverse international ballet backgrounds. For instance, even though ballet is still rooted in

4 There is a variety of teaching that is internationally known and still used in ballet classes in London.

Western-centric/European form of dance, many participants in my study are not from Europe. Many of these dancers did their ballet education in international ballet schools that teach different[5] ballet methods, schools, and styles. Nonetheless, all share a training regimen, working in dance companies in London, such as ENB, or BB. The dancers' learning occurs in specific cross-institutional and cultural contexts, involving and nurturing particular and different sensorial modalities. To think about ballet as a culture implies considering where it is rooted, how it is disseminated, who participates in the class, how dancers' relationships are organised (with the teacher and their peers), and which social and cultural codes they value (styles and pedagogic values the teachers and dancers share).

5. A more democratic perspective of the ballet class

The dance scholar Geraldine Morris (2003) notes that the ballet class is not only a way of thinking about movement, but also a social attitude which impacts the way a dancer processes all sorts of contextual information and value systems around it. For Morris (2003), there is a need in the professional ballet class for ballet teachers to acknowledge and incorporate the stylistic diversity from the works of different choreographers, instead of perfecting the technical movements of a single method, school, or style. According to Morris (2003, p.17), the structure of the ballet class that prevails since the middle of the last century is 'almost entirely teacher-led and gives the student little opportunity for dialogue'. The dancing body is a site of negotiation in relations of resistance and self-surveillance with the members of the class. The philosopher Michel Foucault (1977, p.175) studied surveillance as a powerful means between members of a group to learn the norms of discipline and punishment in their engagement with an institution, in particular prisons, schools and hospitals. The relations of power occur through mechanisms of control, examination and classification of members (Foucault, 1977). In my study, dancers learn in their relations with the members of the ballet class, the norms and values through the surveillance of their senses.

The sociologist Anna Aalten (2004) analysed ballet dancers' physical-emotional sensations of strength, power and control in an ethnography of ballet as a cultural practice. For Aalten (2004), teachers, rehearsal assistants, choreographers, and artistic directors teach dancers in class the ideal technique and body accepted in the ballet world, operating as gatekeepers to the profession. Based on Foucault's theory, dance scholar Jill Green (2002-03, pp.110/111) scrutinised the qualities of the 'perfect body' disseminated by such gatekeepers to dancers. According to Blasis (1830), many elements are part of the ballet classroom tradition as a regimented practice, for example, codified positions, structure of the class in barre and centre exercises, and use of the mirror. These elements can still be considered core in the ballet classes investigated in London. Even in the past several decades, it can be observed that ballet technique remains resistant to change. My investigation of the ballet classroom

5 Examples from my study showed the dancers' varied educational backgrounds in ballet. For instance, two dancers who are Americans, Cira Robinson and Damien Johnson, were educated at the Dance Theatre of Harlem School in New York City, which follows the Balanchine/SAB style. One Brazilian, Fernanda de Oliveira was educated at The Royal Ballet School in London based on the system of training disseminated by Ninette de Valois. Another dancer, Jose Alves was educated at the Bolshoi School in Brazil which follows the Vaganova method.

in the twentieth-first-century partly aligns with the statement made by the dance historian Sandra Noll Hammond (1984). Hammond's (1984, p.63) analysis of the early nineteenth-century ballet class retained some elements from the traditional class described by Blasis, 'while incorporating other material which is vastly different'. Sports psychologist Sanna Nordin-Bates (2014) argues that the problem for dancers trying to fit an ideal body and perfect technical movements is that they create unrealistic expectations, which can lead to burnout and impact their motivation. Bringing such considerations into my study is important, given that the dancers learn norms about how to use their senses in particular ways through their social relations in class, engaging with a disciplinary process of their senses.

Although no studies consider the sensorium as a culturally-rooted deployment of senses in a professional ballet class, several studies provide useful leads for this investigation. The notion of democracy in ballet is discussed through different perspectives. For former dancer and ballet teacher Julia Gleich (2015, p.10), an inclusive company model entails 'dancers of different shapes, sizes, and colours, and a varied repertory'. Gleich (2015, p.11) adds that 'teachers are asked to create a syllabus, in which they define their teaching practice within a fairly limited choice of extremes', for instance 'Vaganova or Cecchetti, RAD or Russian, Bournonville or Balanchine'. Gleich (2015, pp.11/12) argues that a ballet class must offer 'the opportunity to discover and then expand beyond a common vocabulary to create dancers who can dance' varied styles and dance genres, instead of limiting ballet to labelled techniques. Gleich's (2015, p.12) premise is that dancers experience a series of energies and vectors in 'a collection of directions of movement, rather than shapes' in different technical and aesthetic approaches to ballet. Although they do not discuss specific senses nor suggest a decolonial approach to ballet, these studies by Morris (2003) and Gleich (2015) argue for another type of learning, one which involves a more democratic approach to the ballet class. These studies by Western scholars discuss the ballet class from a democratic perspective which inspired me to investigate the importance of the decolonialisation of dancers' senses. I propose that a more democratic and decolonial perspective of ballet learning can be achieved through the investigation of dancer's sensorial modalities.

According to the philosopher and education scholar John Dewey (1922, p.115), 'education is a social process'. A democratically constituted society recognises 'mutual interests' between members of the group as 'a factor in social control' and can stimulate 'change in social habit' through continuous readjustments to new situations (Dewey, 1922, p.100). A society which provides participation of 'all its members in equal terms and which secures readjustments of its institutions through interaction of different forms of associated life is in so far democratic' (Dewey, 1922, p.115). The Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire (1987[1970], p. 23), who represents Southern epistemologies, explains that to fight a culture of domination and violence, the 'oppressed' need a humanistic and liberating education which, first, awakes their perception of the domination they suffer, and second, transforms their being through a pedagogy which destroys the myths created by the 'oppressors'. According to Frei-

re (1987[1970]), education as a practice of freedom is an interactive process, which must occur through dialogues to promote the expression, transformation, and creation of knowledge, as opposed to a pedagogy of the oppressed. The term 'democratic pedagogy' is used by the dance scholars Becky Dyer (2009:119) and Anne Burnidge (2012:38). Democratic pedagogy uses a student-centred approach to empower the dancer to critically reflect and assume agency over their learning and their movements. In line with existing decolonial models in education and the ballet class, my study contributes to the scholarship by bringing attention to dancers' sensorial approaches, for instance in terms of how they sense their breathing, touch, and vision to learn. These sensorial means serve as a way to increase democratisation by integrating a holistic perspective into the daily ballet class.

Despite its evolution and studies on pedagogic democratisation in the field of ballet teaching, the ballet class still requires deeper attention to sensorial understanding. It needs to be scrutinised with respect to its socio-cultural context because it aims to prepare dancers to work in novel ways.

Final considerations

My study is an empirical investigation, carried out through ethnographic methods, of how professional ballet dancers prioritise certain senses in some classes in London, and how this impacts their learning. Nonetheless, the historical contextualisation shows that visuality is main sensorial avenue of communication in ballet, which continues to go unquestioned.

The dancers internalise the norms and ideology of their ballet culture cognitively, but also through their senses, which occurs distinctively according to each dancer at each venue, even when they take classes with the same teacher. My findings indicate that the three institutions, ENB, BB, and DW, differ from each other as 'cultural' environments of ballet classes in London. Yet, most DW ballet teachers are or were dancers, or are teachers in the ENB, BB, and The Royal Ballet companies, suggesting that they transfer cultural values from one institution to another.

The cultural setting of the class impacts the dancers' senses and their acquisition of particular skills in a specific environment. The dancers' engagement with values and beliefs practised by the members in class influence their cultural judgment and interpretation of their senses. In the social environment of the class, dancers learn to use self-surveillance, follow a rigorous discipline, and try to control their sensations to fit the technique. My analysis indicates that dancers criss-cross their senses differently depending on their relations and engagement with the environment of the class. The ballet dancers investigated sense, think, and feel emotions, resulting in the development of a special knowledge of how to move with artistry in a culturally embodied process. This is similar to the concept of *corazonar*, and I have named it multisensorial learning.

In my analysis, I was inspired by Csordas' (1993, p.138) argument that to attend to a bodily sensation is 'to attend to the body's situation in the world'. My findings indicate that the dancers' sensorial learning was personal. For this reason, I extend Santos'

(2018) theory of deep sensing as ways of knowing in which each person develops their ways of sensing according to their personal backgrounds and the cultural environments they experience. Half of the dancers discovered individual ways of breathing to help their movement execution and application of artistry. Their sensorial knowledge also in some cases gave rise to heightened states of their bodies. Furthermore, I propose that in the ballet class dancers socially learn through varied deep sensing.

Perhaps there are more Southern concepts and knowledges that could be included in future studies. This means that by broadening the spectrum of the dancers' ways of sensing, the ballet class can be more democratised. The epistemologies of the South offer modes by which the senses intersect as ways of knowing through deep sensing, creating this effect of democratised multisensorial learning. Several studies engage with various elements of the ballet dancer's socio-culturally situated practice. Different from these, my research addresses the gap in scholarship of detailing the sensorial information acquired by professional ballet dancers in several daily classes, at different social and cultural contexts in London-based institutions, and how such elements inform the constitution of their sensorium to learn. Different cultural institutional settings create different learning cultures. Even inside the same environment, the dancers learn differently through their senses, feelings and reasoning.

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