

WHITE WAYS OF KNOWING: A Written Accompaniment to the WWOK Performance
or
Fortify: The Protection and Propagation of Whiteness in Dance Education
or
White Dance: Hoarding Whiteness in the Dance Studies Classroom
or
Invisible Center: Attempts at Thwarting the White Scholarly Artifact

I. BIOGRAPHIES

Sarah Ashkin was born and raised in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She recently completed her tenure as a faculty member and administrator in the dance department at New Mexico School for the Arts. She attended Wesleyan University where she earned a double degree in Dance Performance & Composition and Environmental Studies. She also holds a certificate in Hybrid Performance Studies from Headlong Performance Institute in Philadelphia. Sarah Ashkin is currently working towards her Masters in Dance, Politics and Sociology from the University of Roehampton in London, UK.

Sarah Ashkin was born a white girl in 1989 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her mother Jessica Doyle, was born a white girl hailing from the slave owning aristocracy of Maryland. Her father, Gary Ashkin, was born a white boy in Upstate New York into an upwardly mobile Jewish family, who have accrued millions of dollars of wealth over his lifetime. Sarah Ashkin is currently working towards her Masters in Dance, Politics and Sociology from the University of Roehampton in London, UK.

Sarah Ashkin received a high school diploma from an elite private preparatory school in Santa Fe, New Mexico. By 18 she was bilingual, an honors student in math and science, and had been exposed to a sizable portion of the literary canon. She then was accepted to join her peers at a premiere East Coast university with a 17% acceptance rate. Upon graduation, Sarah received high honors on her 150 page thesis, and had made the President's List of High Academic Achievement in her courses in Literature, Sociology, Anthropology, Spanish Language, Biology, Archaeology, Gender Studies, African-American Studies, and Dance. Sarah Ashkin is currently working towards her Masters Degree in Dance, Politics and Sociology from the University of Roehampton in London, UK.

Sarah Ashkin has received 17 years of private dance education in the following forms: Ballet, Jazz, Lyrical, Release, Cunningham, Limon, Horton, Contact Improvisation, Physical Theater, Solo and Ensemble Improvisation, Bharatanatyam, West African Dance, Butoh, and Composition for the Stage and Site. She has been invited to perform as a professional dancer in 9 full scale productions. She started her own dance collective and curatorial platform, GROUND SERIES, in 2012, for which she has produced, choreographed, and danced in 14 original works and curated over 25 performance events. She has been invited as Resident Artist at Judson Memorial Church, Joshua Tree National Park, The Foundry, Center for

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Contemporary Arts, Earth Dance, and Liberty Land Park. She has been the student of Anna Halprin, Eiko and Koma, Meredith Monk, Anne Carlson, Kyle Abraham, Jennifer Monson, KJ Holmes, Robert Battle, Doug Varone, Ishmael Houston Jones, Andrea Olson, Jawole Willa Zolar, Liz Lerman, and Irene Dowd. Sarah Ashkin is currently working towards her Masters Degree in Dance, Politics and Sociology from the University of Roehampton in London, UK.

Everyone is rooting for Sarah Ashkin. It's basically impossible for her to fail. Sarah Ashkin is currently working towards her Masters Degree in Dance, Politics and Sociology from the University of Roehampton in London, UK.

Sarah Ashkin has been a white girl for close to 10,000 days. For those dead and alive who make it their business to determine the value of her life, her humanity has been secured in the color of her skin. Sarah Ashkin is currently working towards her Masters Degree in Dance, Politics and Sociology from the University of Roehampton in London, UK.

Sarah Ashkin wonders if she, as a white woman, can do less damage. This thought assumes she can transcend her skin. For Sarah Ashkin, there is no exit. Sarah Ashkin is currently working towards her Masters Degree in Dance, Politics and Sociology from the University of Roehampton in London, UK.

Sarah Ashkin is looking at some things and she has some feelings about those things. She does not want your pity or congratulations. She very much wants your support as an accomplice in getting in the way of White Supremacy in the Dance Studies classroom. Sarah Ashkin is currently working towards her Masters Degree in Dance, Politics and Sociology from the University of Roehampton in London, UK.

II. DATA

The required module for the post graduate students of the various Dance Studies tracks for the first term of 2016 was entitled 'Ways of Knowing'. The module syllabus describes the course's scope of activities and goals:

You will explore processes of knowledge generation in dance, and develop an awareness of how methodological approaches enable independent and diverse avenues of research. The module aims to inform and empower you by exposing the foundations of existing dance research methodologies, disciplines and approaches – dance analysis, ethnography, philosophy, history, postcolonial studies, choreography and practice as research – and to inspire you to conceptualise, test and research projects related to your field of study.

1. Of the 90 articles students were given to read in the 'Ways of Knowing' module, 84 were written by white scholars. There were 6 articles in the curriculum written by scholars of color.

2. Though other dance forms and movement practices were included in our readings, over the 40 hours of lectures, professors (11 of which are white, 2 are women of color) focused on theory in relation to Western Concert Dance forms, save for the following instances:

- One hour lecture on impact of Afro-Brazilian history, aesthetics, and dance practices in Brazil. However this lecture did pivot on the case study of a Western Concert Dance company Grupo Corpo in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.
- One hour lecture on the gender interchangeability in dance practices of the Tiwi peoples of the Melville and Bathurst Islands.
- One speaker on a panel who discussed Community Dance Practices with people with Parkinson's disease, however these participants were working inside of a ballet context.
- One speaker on this same panel who discussed the listening capacity of Capoeira.
- Contact Improvisation was intermittently mentioned in lectures, however though it is not a concert form, CI can arguably be included within the legacy of Western Concert Dance, as it was generated by dancers who trained and benefited from this legacy.

3. Over the course of the 'Ways of Knowing' module the curriculum focused the works of 13 Western Concert Dance choreographers, 12 of which were white, and one who was not.

4. Students took part in 4 embodied sessions in the dance studio as part of the module. All 4 sessions centered around the dance practices of white people, be it working with the choreography of Bronislava Nijinska or Yvonne Rainer, learning Contact Improvisation, or investigating the model of the proscenium theater.

Because there are so few outliers, according to the data above, the module description could be rewritten as:

You will explore processes of white knowledge generation in white dance, and develop an awareness of how white methodological approaches enable independent and diverse avenues of white research. The module aims to inform and empower students interested in white subjects and white knowledge by exposing the foundations of existing white dance research methodologies, disciplines and approaches – dance analysis, ethnography, philosophy, history, postcolonial studies, choreography and practice as research – and to inspire you to conceptualise, test and research projects related to your assumed white field of study.

III. TO BE READ ALOUD

IF DANCE IS a luscious lap dancing stillness made small and heartbreaking, a quiver, a showering, a way to talk to dead people, a piece of trash found in your pocket, a gay gay pinky toe, a little tired and sad, a moment that we hold to the light, you and me with our candles to her

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womb, to your armpit, to the inside of the downy underneath, a slick fish, a rock underwater, sinking, flying, fighting, loud as fuck, scary as fuck, lullaby, night night you little flower little star.

I AM OBSESSED with trying to do something. Dance Studies, Dance Pedagogy, Dance Making, Dancing as a way to do something, to resist manmades that disavow the body (read disavows laborers (read slaves) read bodies of women (read child bearers, read house cleaners, read sustenance providers), read the less able (read the sick, the elderly, the not the same) read those bodies too poor to sit at a desk (cuz those who sit at desks are not bodies they are BRAINS, maybe HANDS), read bodies of color (read slaves again, read the Brazos program, read our Mexican Immigrant kitchen staff, read Chinese Immigrants that built the railroad, read Native American peoples forced to demolish their own places of worship and rebuild cathedrals using the same stones) read bodies that unmake toxic masculinities (read queerz, read sensi boys, read the female orgasm)), to resist an understanding of the successful self based on a material end product (as in fucking Marx's alienation, as in we transfer ourselves to the material objects of our labor and this object becomes us and this object becomes our full worth), to resist the scientific method as the only truth tool, to resist apathy (for performance is doing something) and to insist on being seen, and heard, and felt in real time and that this opening of the aurora borealis between us, can heal us.

BUT DANCE IS OFTEN a means of stuffing many bodies into one rigid body box. Ya ya we've heard it all before, so many artists, scholars are not trying to recreate HER over and over again, but really let's look, she is with us, she is with us, she is ours, she enables me to be here, I am white like her. I am her. I benefit from her legacy everyday. This little white dancer. There is no undoing while simultaneously doing. Dance Studies, Dance Making is not by default of pretending to love the bodies, a way OUT somehow from White Supremacy, but just another way IN.

SO WHAT DO WE DO (I told you, I am obsessed)? This is too precious, the stakes, the fleshy steaks are too high, this is this thing that you all tried to convince me of in words in words in articles over and over again in Ways of Knowing, that the body is the keeper of indispensable knowledge and wisdom. Trickling estuaries of softness, and volume, a way to see behind me, a gut, gutted, bubble, a bowl, a boat, a deep wet ancient teeth marks, all inside. All inside. And here when I think of racism thrashing yet another little sinewed lunged shape soft thud, I know that it's only certain bodies that matter even in this supposed paradigm in all which bodies matter. Fuck that, again fuck that. If we believe in the power of bodies, then we need to celebrate, teach, hire, learn, smell, lie with, caress, mourn, pay, shake with, struggle with, what's that, 5, 6, 7, 8 with, now slower, now faster, now with your heart, now with your lymph, you're not very good at this and that's ok, this is for god, i am god, i am learning, i am here, i am a body, i am my body. Instead there's just one. Her. Marsha Marsha Marsha. So if we champion the body, the dancing, then what are WE DOING about racism deeply rooted into the body box, the histories, the philosophies of silence (We is you, the very real white lecturers reading this outloud to yourself, and me, your student, a white lecturer in training, who is angry and hopeful and obsessed with doing something because I can't do shit)? In what we choose to write about, how we conduct our research, who we choose to cite in our writing, what assumptions we make

in our writing about who is reading our writing, who is teaching beside us, what are we teaching, who is in our classrooms, how can Dance Studies affirm the multiplicities of our place, of our body. By OUR , I mean us, with bodies, our body our perfect body, what really is dance? Lets learn in public. Lets be OUT about the deformed ways of knowing racism has given us about the moving body in history.

IV. *INVISIBLE DANCE BAG:*
Only Invisible to Those Carrying It and Very Visible for Those Who Do Not

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life [as a dancer and dance maker]. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African- [Latinx-, Native-, Asian- American] coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact cannot count on most of these conditions. (Slightly modified introductory paragraph from Peggy McIntosh's *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*)

1. The majority of choreographers, dancers, designers, technicians, audience members of Western Concert Dance look like me.
2. I am made to feel welcome in in the lobby, theater and bathrooms by fellow patrons, staff and artists at both large and small Western Concert Venues.
3. Choreographers easily and often cast me in "raceless" characters, both narrative and abstract.
4. There are no consequences to my career or safety if I choose to take conceptual/physical/political risks in my choreographic work.
5. I can be sexy in my dancing without being exotisized.
6. My hair is ballet bun ready, my feet are arched, and my lower lumbar curve is small.
7. I have always been welcome to train Western Concert Dance forms by studio owners, fellow students, and parents.
8. The pigment of ballet shoes and tights are made based on the color of my skin.
9. I can dress/speak/smell/be late for Western Concert Dance classes without my teachers or peers making assumptions about me due to the color of my skin.

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10. I can make mistakes, struggle, and fail in Western Concert Dance classes and compositional experiments and my teachers and peers will not make assumptions about me based on the color of my skin.

11. I am never asked to speak about the experience of all dancing white people.

12. Due to imperialist histories, the forms I am trained in are considered to be the most revered dances in the world, and the term Western Concert Dance (which includes the legacy of ballet, modern, and postmodern dance) is commonly reduced to simply “dance” or “the dance” or to represent all of “dance history”.

13. Because the color of my skin has enabled the high quality of my training, and unquestioned acceptance into Western Concert Dance communities, I have access to large network of white presenters, funders, and audiences who support my work.

14. Because of the color of my skin, I am considered a highly valuable and powerful member of the Dance community. When I advocate to address racism in the Dance Studies Classroom, I will not be misconstrued as a self-interested trouble maker.

15. For my final assessment for Ways of Knowing I can accuse my professors of blatant eurocentrism, and complicity in fortifying white supremacy in their Dance Studies classroom, and I will pass.

V. White Ways of Knowing: A Timeline

White Desire

White After Christ

White Men

White Desire

White Power

White Money

White Royalty, White Desire, White Writing, White Priests, White Design

White Family, White Breeding

White Enemies

White Food, White Fabric, White Ships

White Faces

White Brains

White Masters, White Rapists

White Industry, White Modernity, White Monopoly

White Talk

White Guns

White Books

White Cycle

White Canon

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White Furniture

White Winning

White Desire

White Scalpers, White Diseases

White Wars

White Aesthetics, White Philosophy, White Anthropology, White Sociology

White Form, White Pride, White Etiquette

White Ladies

White Sex

White Concert Dance

White Concert Dance Scholarship

White Ladies who train in White Concert Dance Forms

White Ladies who teach White Concert Dance Forms to other White Ladies

White Ladies who teach the scholarship of White Concert Dance Forms to other White Ladies
who practice White Concert Dance Forms

White Guilt

White Out

White Problem

White Ladies who teach scholarship of White Concert Dance Forms to Non-White Ladies who
practice Non-White Concert Dance Forms

White Ways of Knowing are the Best Ways of Knowing

White Dance is the Best Dance

White is the Best

Three weeks ago a 15 year old black boy bumped into a 62 year old white man on his way out of the grocery store. The white man, carrying a gun on his person, called the young man “another piece of trash,” and shot the him there in the parking lot and left him to die. Then the white man drove home and made some dinner and had a beer with his friends. (Charleston, West Virginia, November 21st, 2016)

**VI. *Ways of Knowing Whiteness with Sara Ahmed:*
 *Examples in Western Concert Dance***

If whiteness allows bodies to move with comfort through space, and to inhabit the world as if it were home, then those bodies take up more space. Such bodies are shaped by motility, and may even take the shape of that motility (Ahmed 2007).

1. The actual shape of the body of the white ballet dancer is a product of their ballet training. The training of the white ballet dancer remains to be largely enabled by their body being white.
2. In the case of a white choreographer who sets vocabulary generated solely from his body on his cast, the cast becomes the many bodied home for the choreographer's

body. The motility of the white choreographer becomes multiplied to any desired number.

3. This is why everyone at the Contact Jams is white. So comfy...

In a way, whiteness itself is a straightening device: bodies disappear into the 'sea of whiteness' when they 'line up'. This is not to make 'the fit' between bodies and spaces natural: white bodies can line up, only if they pass, by approximating whiteness, by 'being like' (Ahmed, 2007).

1. A Chorus Line.
2. Unison.
3. Identical costumes and hair.
4. Type Casting.
5. White Casting.

Husserl and Merleau-Ponty describe the body as 'successful', as being 'able' to extend itself (through objects) in order to act on and in the world. Fanon helps us to expose this 'success' not as a measure of competence, but as the bodily form of privilege: the ability to move through the world without losing one's way. (Ahmed, 2007).

1. Western Concert Dance as a supreme example of the successful white body.
2. The white choreographer, not only extends his body into and through the bodies of his dancers, but through the apparatus of the proscenium theater. The stage, the lights, the set, the costumes, the dance shoes, all become extensions of his body.
3. The white dancer walking into an audition for most Western Concert Dance productions looks around and sees that most people look like her. She is in the right place. She is not lost. Heck, judging by who is here, she might even get the part.

A phenomenology of 'being stopped' might take us in a different direction than one that begins with motility, with a body that 'can do' by flowing into space (Ahmed, 2007).

1. Black ballet students being told to tuck in their asses, that their bodies are wrong.
2. Black/native ballet students being told their feet are too flat, they will never go on pointe.
3. White women continue to dominate the dancing body of the Western Concert Dance Stage, and White Men continue to dominate the role of choreographer (Marsha Marsha Marsha).

We are not just talking about citation within academic contexts. We are talking about what I think of as screening techniques: how certain bodies take up spaces by screening out the existence of others. If you are screened out (by virtue of the body you have) then you simply do not even appear or register to others (Ahmed, 2013).

1. Ways of Knowing Module at my Post Graduate Programme in Dance Studies

Rather, whiteness studies should involve at least a double turn: to turn towards whiteness is to turn towards and away from those bodies who have been afforded agency and mobility by such privilege. In other words, the task for white subjects would be to stay implicated in what they critique, but in turning towards their role and responsibility in these histories of racism, as histories of this present, to turn away from themselves, and towards others. This 'double turn' is not sufficient, but it clears some ground, upon which the work of exposing racism might provide the conditions for another kind of work. We don't know, as yet, what such conditions might be, or whether we are even up to the task of recognizing them. (Ahmed, 2004).

1. What is 'Identity Safety Model in Somatic Methodologies in the Dance Studies Studio'?
2. What is: 'The goal is to create a community of learners, where individuals may teach each other, feel responsible for each other. According to the conceptions of knowledge, knowledge is shared and constructed by all participants' in the Dance Studies Classroom? (Fine, 2004).
3. What is 'An assignment in which students analyse the way in which White Supremacy frames, functions, enables, disables a piece of Western Concert Dance'?
4. What is 'An assignment in which students analyse dance/movement practices that expose, resist, contest White Supremacy'?
5. What is 'A Ways of Knowing Curriculum that turns towards the ways whiteness functions to construct our knowing about dance and the body, and then turns again to a reading list, lectures, and embodied practices of that amply include scholars, experiences, and the dances of people of color'?
6. We're dancers. We love to turn.

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