

RACISM IN DANCE

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Background

- The piece I choreographed for Dance Workshop was about race, and I wanted to analyze how race was perceived by the audience as well as how music affected their perception of the piece.
- Tokenization of bodies and identities is a frequent occurrence in dance
- Dance often only gives visual cues for racial identity markers, but audio choices can add another element



Racially Charged Process -

- Segregating dancers by visual identity markers
- Employing stereotypes about race to the non-white and POC groups
- Alluding to race at CC with “hockey house incident” opening up the choreography, costuming, and the title of the piece “the Internal Review”



Goals of My Piece

- To comment on how culture and dance are put into a hierarchical “culture war” of sorts, with white forms (ie mock ballet) reigning supreme and being idealized, while non-white dance forms are being appropriated and then heralded by the white community
- To explore how certain bodies are expected and allowed to take part in certain styles of dance
- To comment on race and CC culture by playing on the stereotyping and shock value in Die Antwoord’s videos and applying it to CC’s race relations.

Questions and Hypotheses for this Final

Question: How does knowing Die Antwoord's background and usage of slurs that are present in South Africa and beyond affect the perception of my piece? Could I get away with using an overtly racist music group if I myself were creating favorable racial commentary for POCs? Ultimately, how successful was I in matching impact to intent?

Hypotheses: If the movement was strong enough, music would be overlooked because people are evaluating movement in dance spaces. Someone might call into question the validity of using Die Antwoord, but ultimately using Die Antwoord is justifiable because it is calling into question covert institutional racism.

Methodology

1. Create 20 surveys with questions about race, music, and artistic choices onstage
2. Select 30 people to fill out the survey once finished viewing the performance
3. Questions are to be filled out in order listed on paper

Received: 20 back

Mistakes: Participants usually did not identify their race as asked, process was not completely anonymous, song selection was not indicated on the survey

Here is my survey

Language of Racism AN312 Final Project Survey on "The Internal Review"

Participant's Race:

1. What was your overall perception of the dance "Internal Review?"
2. How do you think race factored into the piece?
3. How do you see race playing into how bodies are viewed onstage?
4. Did the program notes for the piece affect your viewership?
5. How did the choreographer's music selection influence your perception of the dance?

Please do not flip over until you have watched the piece

6. Die Antwoord is a South African music group known for their embodiment of the anarchist moment "Zef," which is supposed to be a working-class white movement in South Africa. The group's videos often show overtly racist content, such as the couple being painted in blackface, appropriating cultural staples of ethnic groups from South Africa, and using language specific to those communities which they are not a part of. Knowing this, how did the choreographer's music selection influence your perception of the dance?

7. In short, as a choreographer, I had a couple of intentions behind my piece:

- To comment on how culture and dance are put into a hierarchy, with white forms (je mock ballet) reigning supreme and being idealized, while an ongoing "culture war" of sorts and many instances of inappropriate appropriation still take place in the dance community.
- To explore how there is an expected segregation in who is allowed to take part in certain styles of dance, an interesting conversation which is not very prevalent in the dance community outside of CC, but is especially salient here.
- To comment on race and CC culture, by playing on the stereotyping and shock value in Die Antwoord's videos and applying it to what I see with race relations at CC.

In terms of "narrative," in the piece, white students are effectively the ones in power, blindly having fun upholding their status without really thinking about their actions. The POCs on the other hand are made to be performing the labor to take back their agency, all from a POC who has successfully made the transition to "being white." Knowing all of this, how do you think race factored into the piece?

Here is my piece



Before getting into what
people thought, here is
some info about Die
Antwoord

Who is Die Antwoord?

- Ninja & Yolandi Visser - an English man/Afrikaans woman music group founded in 2008
- Known for utilizing shock factor
- International acclaim
- Believe in Zef - a working class white Afrikaans anarchist movement from South Africa



What is Zef?

- Originally a working class white Afrikaners movement that focused on creating a national identity post apartheid and colonialism
- Issues centered around class rather than race
- Die Antwoord adopts this view, makes it “cool,” and then parodies it by not being a part of the Zef movement as rich white artists themselves
- Ultimately, they don't belong to Zef counter-culture - makes them rebels without a cause



Problematic Example



Fatty Boom Boom Problems

- Blackface!
- Ku Klux Klan Dancers
- Aggressive Black Male stereotype being used
- A white man is playing on the slavery/hip hop narrative parallel where money/hustle/acceptance into music industry is connected to slavery as in both groups were excluded from the market economy
- Language from other racialized subgroups



What Respondents Said Regarding Music

- 2/20 Responded negatively
- 18/20 didn't seem to fully understand why it may be problematic to promote music for racist artists and others acknowledged appropriation, without seeing it as problematic.
- Positive read: I was highlighting covert institutional racism and the audience's ignorance
- I was utilizing the abject by stereotyping my dancers and then switching who has the power at the end - "the Other" - this allowed me to make space for the utilization of Die Antwoord because I was also subverting their power to oppress with their music in my movement.

So, my hypotheses were correct

Still...

As one of my survey respondents said,

“Die Antwoord is profiting from a genre that is very outside of themselves, using stereotyped mannerisms and behaviors to mock those particular racialized subgroups. In a similar manner, white culture in the US, of which CC is a microcosm, broadly uses and popularizes Black talent while discarding Black people. To have a commentary on white culture using a “white power” musical group is at once hilarious and disheartening.”

And I think that’s where the real question and problem is - is disheartening humor the only way in which larger society would like to talk about issues of racism?

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