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Analysis study

Two pieces of work of similar length have been selected and observed. They have been selected based on their different contexts which include political, historical, social and cultural aspects. The differences and similarities in settings, staging, design, movement languages and other artistic choices made by the choreographers have been analysed.

Tundra was created by Spanish choreographer Marcos Morau with input from his assistants Marinba Rodruguez, Lorena Nogal and Lee Johnson, and performed by National Dance Company Wales, initially as a section in a greater piece called *P.A.R.A.D.E*, which is based on the Russian Revolution. The dancers also had some involvement in creating parts of the piece through the five week process (NDC Wales, 2017). The success and popularity of the award winning *Tundra* has resulted in it being toured independently across the United Kingdom and worldwide (Company Wales, 2020).

According to National Dance Company's resident Choreographer Caroline Finn, she tasked Marcos Morau with the theme "revolution" as an

inspiration for the piece. His interpretation of that was connection and community with inspirations of Russia. A contrast was made with the name *Tundra* as that is "a barren landscape where things won't grow" (Company Wales, 2017). Marcos Morau often names his productions after places (Winship, 2015), so this one is no different.

The piece begins in darkness with the sound of a Russian song being sung, A red light creeps in to reveal a single figure in a long dress slowly spinning around in a circle, the face is covered. This could symbolise the beginning of new things out of the darkness, the face is covered because we do not know who we are yet or who we will become in this new changing world. The appearance of eight dancers surrounded by a square light which raises up as they begin to move is the beginning of the unity and connection which is significantly portrayed throughout the rest of the piece. Each dancer both male and female wears the same costume, a long floor length patterned dress and moves closely around in small movements. This is cleverly done in a way which gives the illusion of them gliding across the floor. Their upper bodies are still as their feet move quickly with small steps to create this. Inspiration for the movement and the costume has come from Russian folk dance, *The Beriozka ensemble* was established in 1948 where the dancers appear to be floating (Vocativ, 2017). In contrast to the Russian folk dance, this section of *Tundra* feels eerie and slightly unsettling with the dark setting and the changes of speed in the movements as the music gets louder. This gives the impression of scary and uncertain times which would have

been the case for many during the Russian Revolution in 1917 which was a great political event of the 20th century marking the end of the Romanov dynasty and centuries of Russian Imperial rule (History.com editors, 2020).

Tundra then takes a different feel, after the darkness comes light and unity expressed by the eight dancers in a long line, side by side showing solidarity.

Their costume is now an all in one beautifully patterned trouser ensemble, each dancer the same. The costumes were made by Angharad Matthews from many different fabrics including cotton, lycra and canvas. Various patchworks signifying multiple cultures and eras were used to reflect the theme. Great detail of the placement of the lines in connection with the dancers differing heights was taken to ensure the flow visually (Company Wales, 2020). There is no reference to gender signifying everyone getting treated the same which is what they were fighting for in the Russian Revolution and the rise of communism. The dancer's are captivating with their intertwining, small, flowy connecting movements. Even as they lose physical contact they still follow on from each other conveying unity. Their long lines, curves, circular and facial expressionless movements are mostly carried out in small spaces feeling quite trance like and spellbinding at times. The clever use of lighting creates interesting moving patterns on the floor through shadows. The use of the space is taken up with the dancers in a line either beside one another or behind each other, taking that line from the centre and to the right, to the left

and back to centre. On two separate occasions one of the dancers steps out of line which causes the others to pause and look at him until he rejoins the line. This gives the impression of everybody needing to work together for the correct outcome which is another link and reference to the revolution.

The end section of the piece involves the line used at the beginning, with each character side by side, this time stamping whilst marching forward and back, only their silhouettes visible. This section is very reminiscent of soldiers marching. The clever use of arm movements creating a wave effect portraying the ups and downs of a political movement such as this in addition to connection and togetherness is quite powerful.

Being his first work produced in Wales, Marcos Morau has succeeded in his task in creating a piece “more human in terms of community and connection” and “showing everything has sense if we are together” (Company Wales, 2017). It is understandable that he is a highly sought after choreographer and regarded as ‘the next big thing in dance’. More interesting is the realisation that he is not from a dance background so his visual ideas and the possible physical movement of the dancers sometimes differ which becomes challenging but interesting (NDCWales1,2017). Studying just one year of dance classes, to secure his admission for his university choreography course, which then resulted in the highest marks in his year (Winship, 2015), demonstrates the talent Marcos Morau has. The continued success and popularity of *Tundra* pays

homage to all aspects of work put into this piece and a true understanding of the choreographer's idea and theme throughout.

The Statement is choreographed by Crystal Pite to a recorded script by frequent collaborator Jonathon Young, a canadian writer and actor, and performed by Nederlands Dans Theater. According to The Kennedy centre, the piece was created to accompany a piece called *Parade* which Crystal Pite created in 2013 for the same company. *The Statement* is a contrast to *Parade* with its current realism. The performance premiered in 2016 and has been described as theatrical and compelling.

The company is based in the Hague but performs internationally and are known as one of the world's leading contemporary companies (Discover NDT,2020). The scene is set with a dimly lit space filled only with a large table with two characters leaning over it. The two characters are dressed in modern day suits clearly playing a female and a male part. The scene is simple but effective enough to understand this is a boardroom. Straight away the impression is worry, dread, despair. They begin their movement to the sound of recorded voice overs, with each character dancing at a time to their own character's voice. The dancers use the words as their beat and move to that rhythm in addition to the spoken word influencing the dancers gestures. Exaggerated movement and facial expressions captivate the audience and draw them into the story. The story unfolds with the presence of four dancers in all, three of whom work together in an office, the other has been sent there by head office, or people higher

up, to get a statement of events. The statement however, he explains, is to be misleading as it should state the people higher up had no knowledge of what has recently taken place. In actual fact, the people in this office acted according to orders and not independently as they are being asked to state. It comes to light that the orders were to use an existing conflict in another place as an opportunity to attack and informed it was a "necessary evil". The piece has a modern feel and can be taken to mean war between countries from a political perspective or between companies for profit and gain but, which every way it is perceived by the audience the underlying theme is always power and deceit. With the expression of movement, the audience are entangled in the emotion of the piece. The use of different levels, using the table as a prop to work around on top of and underneath creating tension, feelings of woe, anger, panic is extremely clever. The audience forgets that this is a stage performance and feels transported into that boardroom themselves. The contemporary and ballet technique is clear with use of curves, twirls, opening and closing of the body, lifts, use of different levels, contact and changes in speed which intensifies with the speech and in sections containing music. The changing emotions and mood can be felt also with the light changes. The scene is continuously dimly lit changing from blues to yellows with the light descending at one point as the dancers begin to dance in small rapid movements. This gives the impression of their panic and everything getting on top of them. The people in higher power, "upstairs" stepping on them to gain further power through economics, without giving them a

second thought, giving reference to social orders and hierarchies. As the piece intensifies there are moments of repetition, mirroring, and unison included within duets, trios and quartet sections, making use of the whole space, adding a varied content.

Canadian choreographer Crystal Pite has been associate choreographer at Nederlands Dans Theatre since 2008 alongside her own company which she created in 2002 *Kidd Pivot*. She has created many popular works after her professional choreographic debut in 1990 (Crystal Pite, 2020).

Coming from a ballet background, joining her first company Ballet BC age seventeen, and moving on to various other ballet companies (Albertini, 2018) , it is clear to see ballet forms taking shape in this piece. The piece also reflects her fascination with themes of conflict and how she likes to express those in performance using a narrative context. She uses social and political themes throughout her choreography often as she uses it to cope with her thoughts and emotions about the terrible state of our world (Albertini, 2018). This politically themed creation is no different in addition to its comprehensible, compelling and mesmerizing viewing.

Every audience member can relate to the characters emotions and really feel what they represent. Crystal Pite has been successful in her approach to deliver her vision. The narrative is clear and powerful, the use of voiceover as an alternative to music along with the use of a single table as the set, by set designer Jay Gower, and changes of lighting along with costume, by Tom and Joke Visser, all work together perfectly to build the picture and deliver the story. A story about power, destruction and deceit.

Although there are many differences between these two pieces, the one common ground that links them both is politics. Each choreographer created their piece to accompany another bigger piece called *P.A.R.A.D.E./Parade*. Both pieces created feelings of suspense, nervousness, worry, in different ways with the assistance of lighting and sound to generate the mood. Each dance accompanied the sound effectively in whichever form it was presented, whether music or speech. The sets were similar in lighting as they were equally dark on a similarly sized stage with a good range of open space. This is where the similarities end. These two pieces contain complete opposites. Although they both contain political themes, they are on opposite sides. One examples a left-wing view with the other describing a right-wing political view. A left-wing view is a belief in society gaining more rights, equality and having greater control, working together with the minimisation of the government (Diffen, 2020). This view is extremely evident in *Tundra* with the reference to the Russian Revolution including the sense of unity and change. *The Statement* screams right-wing political views with its examples of hierarchies and social orders, economics, and power. There is no message of unity in this piece, rather an 'every man for himself' theme. Gender recognition was important in one piece and not the other as well as facial expression. One was set in modern day, while the other was historical as were the costumes. The dancers in *Tundra* used small slow movements as opposed to the large exaggerated movements in *The*

Statement. The narrative style of the second piece with the use of recorded speech helped the audience to understand the intentions effortlessly, whereas with *Tundra*, it was beneficial to the viewer to either do some research before or after watching the piece. Although this piece is open to the audience's own interpretation also. Could this be another choreographic tool to lure the audience in even more? The more interested the audience gets, the more intrigued they get, and repeatedly view the work.

Although these pieces differed in their approaches and their contexts, they were both equally effective in expressing their message and delivering what they set out to.

Through this analysis it has been discovered that choreographers differing choices and approaches have the possibility to create the correct atmosphere and deliver underlying messages to the audience in their own unique ways through the medium of dance. Dance can be used as a tool to rediscover history and take the audience back in time to have a feel of what emotions were like as well as an insight into actual events. Dance can also be used to reveal and highlight real current problems that exist in the world. Simple set design is extremely effective in order for the focus to be on the dancers themselves to tell the story. Lighting and sound can play a substantial part in creating the atmosphere as a whole in addition to assisting with telling the story along with costume design. Everything must work together to make the vision come alive and be

successful. The two pieces studied demonstrate different political, historical, cultural and social contexts in which they were created but both delivered their vision and successfully and creatively, captivating their audience and bringing them along on their journey with them.

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