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Pathways towards embodied technique: disrupting representationalism in South African contemporary dance praxis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis and cartography form part of an artistic research project that seeks to disrupt representationalism in South African contemporary dance praxis. The study argues that discursive methodologies risk recrafting colonial scripts and tether contemporary dance practices within a framework that perceives such practices as responses to the aesthetics and practices of Western theatre dance. To open up the possibility for an alternative logic, the study proposes a shift from representation and spectatorial methodologies to the embodied practices that circulate across the bodies of practitioners (Spatz, 2020:98-99) in experimentation, performances and workshops. By tracing the pathways toward embodied technique in my own artistic work, which includes a series of contemporary dance works and performance projects created in 2017 and 2018, the study positions contemporary dance practices as epistemic. The writing and assemblages of research documents that form the thesis and the cartography search for ways in which the dances propose repeatable and transmissible instances of embodied technique that contribute towards decolonising notions of embodiment, dance technique, choreography and training. The study troubles representationalism as a framework that upholds hegemonic structures of knowledge and offers the notion that when contemporary dance practice is conceptualised as embodied research, it may become part of a decolonial praxis. By turning towards practices as knowledge-generating and ways of knowing, the study proposes that a decolonial choreographic praxis is structured by technique that is aesthetic and ethico-political, traces and questions orientations towards whiteness, humanism and universalism, and offers a logic outside of representation. Chapters One and Two contextualise the main research questions and the theoretical framework of the study. Chapters Three and Four re-visit and re-iterate the creation of three dance works: *Monsters and Fossils* (2017), *Extreme Subjectivities* (2018) and *Before Naming* (2018). Chapter Five concludes the study.

The cartography (*See Appendix for access details*) is an integral component of the study that draws attention to its non-linearity and exposes the deep structure of embodied research.

The cartography and thesis are intended to be read through one another. Hyperlinks are provided throughout the thesis, and the full thesis can be accessed through the cartography[1].

[1] The boundaries between the thesis and cartography are porous. This means that some of the writing is shared across these two research documents. I also draw from my own previously published articles and conference papers that form part of this research process. All such sources have been acknowledged.