



BEYOND THE MYSTIQUE: THE EFFECT OF THE #METOO  
MOVEMENT IN DANCE

*MÁS ALLÁ DE LAS MÍSTICAS: EL EFECTO DEL MOVIMIENTO  
#METOO EN LA DANZA*

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the effect of the #MeToo movement in dance and, more specifically, how the re-emergence of female choreography in ballet can attribute certain consequences in changes of aesthetics in the art form and the normalisation of women's repertoire in major ballet companies to the movement. The paper takes a chronological look at the last three decades, focusing geographically in the United States and the United Kingdom in order to provide a framework that may explain the changes that have taken place in the sector in the last few years. Feminist and gender studies will provide the academic framework to analyse the press and media articles that seem to have played a major role in this resurgence of female choreography and leadership in the sector. Academic studies regarding the lack of parity in the sector at the upper tier of major companies and the historical neglect of women's contributions to the development of the art form will also be considered in the analysis of recent changes in the sector. Miranda Fricker's theory

on epistemic injustice will also provide valuable help in establishing the possible factors that may have contributed to this historical neglect and its present consequences. The analysis will be mainly qualitative through the internal and external analysis of the collected sources.

**Key Words:** #MeToo, Gender Studies, Ballet, Dance Studies, Female Choreography, Dance and Gender, Feminism, Epistemic Injustice.

**Resumen:** Este artículo presenta el efecto del movimiento #MeToo en la danza y, de forma más específica, en qué medida se puede atribuir a este movimiento el resurgir de la coreografía femenina en el ballet, así como las posibles consecuencias en los cambios estéticos de esta forma artística y en la normalización del repertorio creado por mujeres en las grandes compañías de ballet. El artículo se centra cronológicamente en las últimas tres décadas y geográficamente en los Estados Unidos y el Reino Unido para establecer un marco que permita explicar los cambios ocurridos en el sector en los últimos años. Los estudios feministas y de género servirán de encuadre académico en el análisis de artículos de prensa y medios que parecen haber jugado un papel determinante en este resurgir de la coreografía y liderazgo femeninos en este arte. Los estudios académicos sobre la falta de paridad en el sector en los puestos de creación y gestión, así como aquellos dedicados a al olvido histórico de las contribuciones de las mujeres al desarrollo de este arte también serán utilizados en el análisis de los cambios recientes en el sector. Las teorías elaboradas por Miranda Fricker en torno a la injusticia epistémica serán de gran ayuda a la hora de establecer los posibles factores que han contribuido a este abandono históricos y sus consecuencias posteriores. El análisis será principalmente cualitativo a través del análisis interno y externo de todas las fuentes utilizadas.

**Palabras Clave:** #MeToo. Estudios de género, Ballet, Estudios de Danza, Coreografía femenina, Danza y Género, Feminismo, Injusticia Epistémica.

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## I. INTRODUCTION: «WE THE DANCERS»

In September 2018, at New York City Ballet's Fall Fashion Gala, Teresa Reichlen, a company dancer, delivered an unprecedented speech to the audience on the stage of The Lincoln Center, surrounded by all the members of the company. It started with «We the dancers» and it led Alastair Macaulay, chief critic at «The New York Times» at the time, to describe it as «the most important moral statement about this company (and perhaps any ballet troupe) since Lincoln Kirstein's 1983 superb essay «Beliefs of a Ballet Master» (Macaulay, 2018). Reichlen stated the company's belief in «a culture of equal respect for all» and announced that the New York City Ballet would «not put art before common decency or allow talent to sway our moral compass» (ibid.).

This speech originated in a lawsuit filed by former School of American Ballet student Alexandra Waterbury against the New York City Ballet and a former male principal dancer in the company for «condoning a «fraternity-like atmosphere» that «permeates the Ballet and its dancers and emboldens them to disregard the law and violate the basic rights of women» (Cooper & Pogrebin, 2018). The company subsequently dismissed two other male dancers involved in the case<sup>1</sup>.

Prior to this case, the company had already made the headlines in the papers when its former director, Peter Martins, was accused of sexual misconduct by several dancers. Even though Martins retired without charges, several papers and magazines started publishing articles on the effect of the #MeToo movement in the dance world (Kourlas & Burke 2018; Mackrell 2018; Scher 2018; Scherr 2018; Wingenroth 2018). Though the articles focused on the cases of sexual abuse and harassment suffered by women in the sector, they also broadened their case and seemed to highlight the fact that «women are disproportionately affected by ballet's cultural failures, because most ballet company directors are men, and because the art form's archaic aesthetic demands extreme female thinness» (Scher, 2018). In another article, dance critic Judith Mackrell named other companies around the world where there had been complaints of abuse from dancers, citing the Paris Opera Ballet, Finnish Ballet and English National Ballet (2018). Both Paris Opera Ballet and English National Ballet were directed by women, Aurélie Dupont and Tamara Rojo respectively. However, their managerial style had been inherited from their own experiences as dancers and, as

acknowledged in the article: «listening to dancers and encouraging more confident participation are key managerial skills, but they require training. Too many artistic directors come into the job straight from a stage career» (Mackrell, 2018). Mackrell's observation was corroborated by a dancer from the French company, who complained about Dupont's lack of «management skills or any desire to acquire such skills» (Samuel, 2018).

Earlier this year, in February 2019, Joan Acocella, well-respected critic and dance historian, wrote a feature article for «The New Yorker»: «What Went Wrong At New York City Ballet». Acocella exposed the scandals of sexual abuse that the company had recently undergone and offered an insight into the company's history since the death of its founder choreographer and ballet master, George Balanchine (1904 - 1983). One of the interesting aspects in her article was that Acocella went beyond the events surrounding the departure of Peter Martins, and offered a comment on the damage his aesthetics as choreographer had done to the company's repertoire: «When Martins had a success, it was usually with something fast and furious [...] where the steps were so hard that no one expected the dancers to do more than get through them» (2019). Acocella would also quote a conversation about Martins in the late eighties with a female star in the company, who admitted to her: «He hates ballerinas. He hates beauty. He hates Balanchine» (ibid.). As it will be seen in the next sections of the article, Acocella was not the first person to equate the change of aesthetics in dance with a sign of creative misogyny (Abad Carlés, 2013; Burke 2017; Jennings, 2017; Crow, 2019), but, because of her authority on the subject she was tackling, her comments resonated powerfully.

The #MeToo<sup>2</sup> movement started in 2017, once «the conversation about sexual violence changed when millions of women worldwide raised their voices to say, 'Me Too'» (Gilmore, 2017, p.1). However, what started as a conversation about sexual violence against women soon gave way to other areas of life, work and popular culture (ibid., pág. 3). The #MeToo movement can be inscribed into the Fourth Wave of Feminism (Andersen, 2018), because it has gained momentum and critical mass «drawing a number of subjects together through shared investment within a specific historical moment» (Chamberlain, 2016, pág. 4). In dance, as it will be seen, the number of subjects drawn together grew steadily in the last decade or so, when different voices in the press and media started

questioning the lack of women in creative and leadership roles in a sector where, according to dance historian Lynn Garafola: «the more professional a company becomes, in my observation, the more likely women are going to disappear from the leadership positions, and they're going to be replaced by men» (Basco, 2015).

The #MeToo movement has not only forced direct action in resolving issues of sexual harassment and abuse that have affected the dance world for years, but it has also opened doors for female choreography to blossom in major ballet companies which traditionally suffer from a dearth of women in creative posts. As many observers point out: «to have women demeaned behind the scenes and absent in front of them is enough to drive any enlightened fan away» (Sherr, 2018). However, as more programmes are dedicated to female choreography in major ballet companies, it remains to be seen whether the effect of this will be long-lasting, as history tells us that the works of women tend to disappear more rapidly than those created by men (Abad Carlés, 2004, 2013 & 2015; Garafola 2005 & personal communication, 27 July, 2019; Harris 2012, Meglin & Matluck Brooks, 2012).

This article will explore the effect of the #MeToo movement in the resurgence of female choreography in dance, focusing more specifically on ballet, and it will consider the consequences this resurgence may have in the sector in terms of aesthetics and in ensuring the normalisation of women's works in the repertoire of ballet companies. To do this, the article will focus on the changes that have taken place in the last few years and will take into account the voices of those involved in these changes, the academic articles written on the subject and the debates that have been taking place in the press and media. The main focus will be the change of situation in the United States and the United Kingdom, because it is in these two countries where the issue was first debated and researched.

The article will also follow previous research carried out before the recent re-emergence of female agency and will offer positive contrast to its original findings (Abad Carlés, 2013 & 2015). In particular, I will be taking up the thread of the appearance of certain «mystiques» that permeated the dance world at the turn of the millennium and that became somehow normalised when trying to explain the absence of women from posts of power and creation in the sector. According to Betty Friedan in her seminal book «The Feminine Mystique»: «when a mystique is strong

it makes its own fiction of facts» (1963, pág.43). These fictions reappeared at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Wolf, 1990; Faludi, 1991; Levy, 2005 & Walter, 2010) as a backlash to feminism. As Faludi explained: «The backlash remarkets old myths about women as new facts and ignores all appeals to reason» (1991, pág. 17). In the world of dance, this backlash translated into the appearance of certain discourses that, ignoring dance history and taking into advantage the gradual disappearance of women's work from the stages, tried to explain this absence through what I identified as Biological Determinism, Spatial Determinism and Emotional Determinism (Abad Carlés, 2013 & 2015). Biological Determinism tried to explain women's abandonment of the sector in order to start a family. Spatial Determinism sought to locate women's creativity outside the big institutions due to a personal choice that would allow them to have a freer and more subversive voice. Emotional Determinism tried to create a new form of feminine aesthetics that did not find echo in the choreographic past.

Feminist and gender studies will provide the academic framework for the analysis of press and media articles. In addition, Miranda Fricker's theory on Epistemic Injustice has proved to be of enormous help in framing the different issues that conform the narrative of this article. Fricker's distinction between testimonial injustice, hermeneutic injustice and her theories on power and identity power have been of great value when trying to understand many of the changes of discourse taking place in dance since the beginning of the new millennium.

In order to get more in-depth commentaries, and following social sciences methodologies, semi-structured interviews were sent out to several choreographers, critics and scholars. The interviews consisted of three questions. Two questions were common to all respondents, while the third was more specific to their area of research or work. All interviewees were asked to add any further comments they considered relevant to the topic.

The returned interviews, the consultation of critical, scenic and documental sources have been the starting points for quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis will be present thanks to the data collected, especially in the United States of America, in specialised books, academic articles and the «Dance Data Project». Qualitative analysis will be achieved through internal and external criticism. External criticism will compare the different sources of information available,

while internal criticism will evaluate the value and veracity of these sources.

## 2. SETTING THE SCENE: «INVISIBLE WOMEN»

In 1998, American choreographer JoAnna Mendl started «The Gender Report». She got together with other female choreographers in New York «to look at both New York and national statistics and compare male and female representation» (New York Public Library, 2019). The result of her research became a series of choreographed performances in which a narrator read the data obtained from their research that showed the inequalities in the sector.

In London, the Ballet Independents' Group, founded by Susie Crow and Jennifer Jackson in 1996, held a forum in 2002 where they pondered «the visibility and role of women in ballet in the twenty first century both on the stage and off it» (Crow, 2002). They called the event «Invisible Women», which, in a way, emphasised the invisibility of women in the sector at that moment in time.

It was obvious that, by the turn of the century, the lack of gender parity in the dance sector was becoming too evident to ignore. There were few women in creative and management posts in all the major companies around the world. In countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, where choreographic achievement was the basis for the development of the art form and where companies were mainly founded by women, the situation was even more apparent. This gave way to the first academic research on the topic and, soon, it was proven that female agency in dance had all but been erased from the stages and history books (Abad Carlés, 2004, 2013 & 2015; Basco, 2015; Garafola 2005 & personal communication, 27 July, 2019; Higgins 2009; Mackrell 2009; Dance Umbrella, 2009; Jennings 2013). The longevity of the issue was corroborated by both Crow and Marston when asked about the return of female choreographers onto the main stages: «This has happened over a long time (my choreographic teachers - Norman Morrice and David Drew - spoke often about this issue back in 1992!)» (C. Marston, personal communication, 19 June, 2019).

The question of women's invisibility in the sector reached forums and debates, and yet, in 2017 the statistics compiled in the book «Dance And

Gender: An Evidence-Based Approach» concluded that: «The number of men who hold jobs as performers and choreographers is disproportionate to their representation as dance students; they also more readily achieve acclaim and financial security» (Van Dyke, 2017, pág. 20).

The gender analysis exposed in the article shows that there is still a lot to be done to reverse this current situation, which is not unlike that of other countries where dance is an important part of the arts and entertainment sector. Even in a country like Spain, where dance is not a major force in the cultural sector, the main dance companies have traditionally and continue to be directed by men. The recently appointed directors for both the Compañía Nacional de Danza and the Ballet Nacional de España were Joaquín de Luz and Rubén Olmo respectively and they replaced José Carlos Martínez and Antonio Najarro (Marinero, 2019).

Eliza Larson, when exploring gender equity in creative and management posts in dance, also pointed out the financial differences between leadership in a sector where companies may «vary immensely», and yet «the data are clear: men are more likely to lead larger companies with larger budgets» (Larson, 2017, págs. 42-43). This finding echoes Garafola's words (2015) cited previously and it evidences that financial reward is an important element in choosing and maintaining a creative career and the statistics prove that there is inequality in the sector between men and women. More than a choice for freedom and self-expression, it seems the Spatial Determinism is due to a lack of opportunities for women in the sector.

Elizabeth Yntema founded the Dance Data Project (DDP) in 2015 in order to research «the lack of new female choreographic works» (DDP, 2019a). One of her latest reports shows that during the 2018/2019 season, ballet companies in the United States presented 645 works, out of which, 520 (81%) had been choreographed by men and 109 (17%) by women (DDP, 2019b). The situation does not seem to improve for the 2019/2020 season, where the «First Look Report» maintains the same statistics as in the previous season (DDP, 2019c).

The disproportionate gender representation still exists, and a lot needs to be done in the sector for real change to take place. However, the situation has been improving in recent years (R. Brill, S. Crow, L. Garafola, A. López Ochoa & C. Marston, personal communication, June & July, 2019) and it is worth examining the elements that have

prompted the changes and see how they relate with the new wave of feminism that has been intensifying recently.

The debates that started appearing in the specialised and national press and media, as well as in forums, have been echoed by social media networks like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. When asked about the factors that have prompted the increase of work by female choreographers in major dance companies, Annabelle López Ochoa, Susie Crow and Cathy Marston (personal communication, 22 June, 24 June & 19 June, 2019) stated that the coverage of this issue by the press and media had been important elements, and both Crow and Marston mentioned critics, such as Luke Jennings, who «have played a large role, but eventually a critical mass accumulates» (C. Marston, personal communication, 19 June, 2019).

Luke Jennings started writing about gender inequalities in the dance sector in 2013, when he wrote the article «Sexism in Dance: Where are all the female choreographers?» In his article, Jennings bridged the gap between contemporary and classical dance and exposed the lack of female choreographers at large in the United Kingdom. He interviewed Vanessa Fenton, Cathy Marston and Susie Crow. Both Crow and Fenton were former Royal Ballet dancers, they all won praise for their choreographic talent, and yet it was their male colleagues who were offered the choreographic work. As Fenton acknowledged in the article: «I was devastated, seeing everyone else get a shot. I didn't get one chance. And it broke my heart» (2013). The experiences from the three choreographers were similar in many ways, though they belonged to three different generations, thus stressing the obstacles and lack of opportunities that had framed their respective careers. The narrative of the article somehow followed Chamberlain's views on contemporary feminism: «the present of feminism is irrevocably tied to the past that constitutes it, the future that sustains it, and this sense of hopefulness for its own demise» (2016, pág. 3).

Jennings continued to broach this subject throughout the years, but it was perhaps his activity on Twitter that led to interesting debates on the issue, leading other critics, scholars and members of the general public to express their opinions on the topic. Perhaps one of his most celebrated articles was his response to three major male choreographers –Justin Peck, Christopher Wheeldon and Alexei Ratmansky– who, in an interview with «The New York Times», could not succinctly respond

to a direct and simple question: «Most of the major choreographers in ballet are men. Why is that?» (Sulcas, 2017). The lack of self-awareness and indeed contempt from the choreographers prompted Jennings to write them a letter via Twitter:

This lordly disdain for perhaps the most serious issue facing classical ballet is astonishing. The under-representation of women in creative power roles seriously discredits the art form. It makes it all too often look dated and irrelevant, and this should be of pressing concern to those, like Peck, Wheeldon and Ratmansky, whose reputations are inextricably linked to ballet's forward momentum. (Escoyne, 2017)

The debate that followed on his Twitter account has unfortunately been deleted, but it was illuminating to read the voices that supported Jennings and those that decided to maintain the «lordly disdain» for the issue. It was evident that social media played a role in raising awareness with the general audience and inviting discourse. As Chamberlain has identified, the use of technology seems to play an important role in the fourth wave of feminism, as it allows speed and it gives «momentum and scope» (2016, pág. 5). In turn, however, it also allows «for simultaneity of activism and backlash» (ibid.).

Not only has the internet facilitated debates, but it has also allowed visibility to women who are creating choreographic work. Their comments on their new choreographies and leadership activities across the sector are getting more attention than ever, as these are «retweeted» or «shared» by their followers, that include many well-known critics, dancers and companies. The invisibility that many female choreographers and directors had in the past is giving way to new forms of exposure online and, unsurprisingly, this technological change is acknowledged as the stepping-stone for the «shift from 'third-wave' to 'fourth-wave' feminism. What is certain is that the internet has created a 'call-out' culture, in which sexism or misogyny can be 'called out' and challenged» (Munro, 2013). By simply giving voice and presence to these women, the internet has started challenging the invisibility that they suffered for decades, though it remains to be seen the scope and long-term effects that this slow process may bring along. The work and dedication of many men, and especially women, who have advocated for gender parity in

the dance sector in academia, journalism and the dance profession as a whole must not be forgotten. As Crow points out:

I don't know how much any change might be attributed to the #MeToo movement though; as [...] this issue keeps recurring and has been a gripe for years, and dance rarely attracts informed media debate. Huge admiration recently for Crystal Pite's wonderful work I think may have perhaps helped to push directors to be a bit more adventurous. (Personal communication, 24 June, 2019).

The momentum female choreography is indeed gaining has taken years to consolidate and, as López Ochoa acknowledges, «the general rise of the feminism movement around the world» (2019) has been an important instrument in reinforcing its energy.

In 2016, Tamara Rojo, English National Ballet's Artistic Director, presented «She Said», a programme devoted to female choreographers. Rojo explained: «as an artistic director, all I can do is commission the works of these women. I simply have to give the platform to those who have the talent, who want to create, and share the experience with as many people as possible» (English National Ballet, 2016). The programme consisted of three new works by Annabelle López Ochoa («Broken Wings»), Yabin Wang («M-Dao») and Aszure Barton («Fantastic Beings») and it won critical praise while being acknowledged as «a campaigning first for an industry in which most of the repertory is created by men» (Mackrell, 2016).

In 2017, the Royal Ballet commissioned Crystal Pite her award-winning «Flight Pattern» and the reviews were rapturous. The piece, like Ochoa's «Broken Wings», has been revived during the 2018/2019 season, which means it has entered the repertoire of the company, making Pite «the first woman to choreograph for Covent Garden's main stage this century» (Jennings, 2017a).

The exposure and success of female works commissioned for major companies has opened the door to new opportunities. Ruth Brill, who got her first commission («Arcadia») for Birmingham Royal Ballet's main stage also in 2017, reflects on the effect of visibility of women choreographers lately: «I think the fact that female choreographers are pushing forward and therefore inspiring others, means that there has been

and continues to be a gradual shift» (personal communication, 19 July, 2019).

In America, things have also started changing and, in 2018, American Ballet Theatre (ABT) announced the creation of a long-term initiative called «ABT Women's Movement». The idea was to commission a female choreographer for the main company, another for the Studio Company and a third one for workshops that do not require the need for a complete or finished work (Stahl, 2018). The initiative was celebrated during ABT's Fall Gala, where the company dedicated an evening to works created by women: «a premiere by Michelle Dorrance, Lauren Lovette's «Le Jeune» for the ABT Studio Company and Twyla Tharp's iconic «In The Upper Room», which has been in ABT's rep since 1988» (ibid.). During the 2018/2019 Season, the company also mounted Cathy Marston's «Jane Eyre», a ballet commissioned by Northern Ballet Theatre in 2016.

New York City Ballet has also started commissioning works by women after years of neglect. In 2018, the company commissioned Gianna Reisen's first piece, making her the youngest choreographer ever to have created a new work for the company (King, 2018). The departure of Martins as director, also led to the appointment of Wendy Whelan as Associate Director for the company who intends to give «female choreographers who've been working on a smaller scale a bigger venue» (Ramzi, 2019).

The implications this resurface of female choreography and leadership may have in the future remain to be seen, but it is obvious that it has come to disrupt the discourses that became normalised only ten years ago and that situated women at the outskirts of the art form (Abad Carlés, 2013 & 2015). These discourses were openly articulated at a Forum held in 2009 by «Dance Umbrella»<sup>3</sup> on the disappearance of female choreographers in the United Kingdom. During the debate, there was a tense moment when a young female student addressed the audience thus: «Things that are not ballet and that are not spectacular are not on the big stages and that's where women are: on the small stages» (Dance Umbrella, 2009). A similar idea had been worded a few minutes earlier by choreographer Charlotte Vincent, who claimed that perhaps women's absence from the main stages paralleled women's «different ways of being in society» (Ibid.). This Spatial Determinism seemed to ignore the history of dance at large and seemed to position women as

outsiders in a world where they were most of its inhabitants (Abad Carlés, 2013 & 2015). The lack of female choreography and leadership in major companies in the past left what Miranda Fricker calls «hermeneutical lacunas», that is, voids of knowledge that make «some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to persistent and wide-ranging hermeneutical marginalization» (2007, pág. 154). Erasing the works and agency of women in dance created such lacunas, as new generations of women had no past knowledge from which to draw for their own aspirations. As Fricker explains, the effects of these «lacunas» are «like holes in the ozone - it's the people who live under them that get burnt» (2007, pág. 161).

The recent re-emergence of female creativity and leadership is linked to many factors, but the challenge feminism gives by questioning women's roles in society has been a welcome change, that shows that «feminism is caught in temporal tension, in which the past dictates and future aspirations orientate» (Chamberlain, 2016, pág. 4).

### 3. HE SAID/SHE SAID<sup>4</sup>... AND SHE PERSISTED<sup>5</sup>

In February 2018, the series «Works and Process» held at the Guggenheim featured Washington Ballet. The panel was moderated by New York critic Marina Harss and it included Julie Kent, Washington Ballet's Artistic Director and Gemma Bond, choreographer. At certain moment, Harss asks Kent what she feels when she sees Bond in the process of creating work for the company. Kent replies:

I think it's all very timely... that Gemma, who is an emerging female choreographer is making a piece that is focused on female roles and female identities and, you know, the female is such a strong part of ballet [...]. It's a wonderful thing to see her, at this time of her life, so pregnant, so beautiful, and taking this leap forward in her career and creating a ballet celebrating all those roles that women play. (Works and Process at the Guggenheim, 2018)

It should not come as a surprise to see three women occupying the highest levels in the profession conversing on ballet and its primal force: women. However, for years this image had all but vanished, unless the

topic of the debate was the lack of women in creative and leadership posts. More strikingly, Bond was pregnant during the event, and not only did she talk of her work and career, but also directed the rehearsals of her new piece. The scene acted as a reminder to all the people who claimed for years that becoming pregnant was the main reason for the lack of female choreographers in the sector. The normalisation of this biological reality during the conversation and the rehearsal of Bond's piece came as a relief in a sector that, far from accommodating women during this stage of their lives and careers, had seemed to oust them (Abad Carlés, 2004, 2013 & 2015; Dance Umbrella, 2009; Mackrell, 2009). The Biological Determinism was being challenged and contested by the simple exposure of a pregnant woman who seemed capable of raising a family and maintaining her creative career. This streamed debate momentarily also allowed viewers to relinquish the idea of women in dance as muted beings.

During the last decades, the «hermeneutical lacunas» surrounding ballet's history and the role women had played in its development had given way, following Fricker's argument, to «testimonial injustice». Fricker situates testimonial injustice «when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word» (2007, pág. 1). According to Fricker, testimonial injustice occurs when somebody is not able to make sense of his or her own social experiences due to «hermeneutical injustice». Women, absent from the creative and leadership posts in the profession, became invisible and mute. Their discourses marginalised in an art form that gave pre-eminence to its male participants. Reclaiming women's roles in dance became of the utmost importance in order to challenge «the dominance of one method in gathering and making sense of knowledge» (Kiguwa, 2019, pág. 225). In order to articulate one's own voice, one needs to draw upon past knowledge and make sense of it. As Fricker points out, if the knowledge is not available, those who try to articulate a discourse (in this case, also an artistic discourse) will find themselves devoid of the arguments and tools to sustain it. As a result, their voices lose authority and «credibility deficit» emerges: «the primary characterization of testimonial injustice, then, remains such that it is a matter of credibility deficit» (2007, pág. 21). This credibility deficit may, once again, lead to the creation of stereotypes, what Fricker describes as negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes that associate a social group and one or more attributes that lead to the creation of

generalizations that display «resistance to counter-evidence owing to an ethically bad affective investment» (2007, pág. 35). As an example, some of the replies the three male choreographers made to the question about the lack of female choreographers were made out of these stereotypes and some credibility deficit towards women's aptitudes with regards to choreography (Escoyne, 2017).

Moreover, and as it has already been argued, the lack of women in posts of creation and leadership within the major ballet companies had coexisted with new choreographic aesthetics that demeaned women in many ways (Abad Carlés, 2013; Burke, 2017; Jennings, 2017; Acocella, 2019; S. Crow, personal communication, 24 June, 2019). As Jennings complained: «There is an increasingly acute issue surrounding women's roles in ballet. In the last few seasons the Royal Ballet stage has seen record numbers of female characters brutalised and killed» (2017). Not only were women brutalised in narrative pieces, but there was also an explicit violence against women in plotless works where «women are split, splayed and otherwise manhandled, and certain embedded attitudes reveal themselves» (ibid).

As already mentioned, there was another discourse that permeated the dance world at the turn of the millennium, which I called the Emotional Determinism, that is, differentiating and positing certain characteristics to female choreography that did not reflect women's choreographic past. When analysing female choreography throughout history, what seemed evident is that women had always had a different point of view on the topics they chose, but this did not mean there was unity in the forms they chose to depict them. Thus, it seemed impossible to establish formal connections between the choreography of Bronislava Nijinska, Ninette de Valois, Agnes de Mille, Janine Charrat or Twyla Tharp (Abad Carlés, 2013 & 2015).

However, it is also true that during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, choreography had developed new forms of aesthetics that showed unprecedented violence against women. At the same time women's works disappeared from the stages, those created by men started focusing on technical aspects that showcased athleticism and virtuosic displays. This shift in choreographic creation also brought along new works where women suffered not only in the partnering of such athletic displays, but in the depiction of abuse onto the stages, as Acocella's words on Peter Martins's choreography revealed (2019). At the time,

some of these new works were misunderstood and, therefore, welcomed by the critics, but in hindsight they became a dangerous point of departure for new choreographic trends. At a time when eating disorders were spreading in the dance world, the extreme thinness these athletic displays demanded from women in order to be partnered by men, did not help (Abad Carlés, 2013; Scherr 2018). At a time when women's works were disappearing from the stages and there seemed to be no new generation of female choreographers creating works for the major companies, the new aesthetics centred on violence and abuse against women probably did not help either in promoting choreography as a career choice amongst female dance students (Abad Carlés, 2013).

However, as historian Mary Beard acknowledges: «Power means many things in the world of Me Too. It certainly means empowering women to tell their stories fearlessly» (2018, pág. 108). As Bond and Kent showed in their panel discussion, women's experiences are being told and in a variety of forms. López Ochoa's «Broken Wings» (2016) told the story of Frida Kahlo; Marston has recently choreographed «Jane Eyre» (2018) and «Queen Victoria» (2019); Stina Quagebeur chose the main character in Ibsen's «Dolls House» for her ballet «Nora» (2019). Not only are female choreographers creating new works based on women's experiences, but they are also choosing strong women who seem to speak to themselves and to their audiences. As Marston explains: «I feel that it's a positive thing to create new ballets in which women have agency, strength, leadership, their own journeys, failings, successes....that there are different sorts of women expressed in choreography, at different stages in their lives» (personal communication, 19 June, 2019). López Ochoa also comments on her interest in «more realistic and contemporary characters» (personal communication, 22 June, 2019), while Crow seems to go deeper into the subject, when she admits that strong female characters are being given centre stage by both men and women at present, so: «perhaps not differing so much in terms of choice of themes, but very much in treatment», and it is this treatment by women that set the works apart «because they do have a different perspective and interests and are able to convey different aspects of women's experience (including way of moving), beyond the shallow stereotypes that seem to persist both in the narrative works [...] as well as the recent «Medusa»» (personal communication, 24 June, 2019).

Crow is not alone when speaking of the shallow stereotypes that seem to inhabit the narrative and plotless works created by men. Jennings also commented on this when reviewing Pite's «Flight Pattern»:

Classical choreography, in its current and overwhelmingly male iteration, has painted itself into a very tight corner indeed. [...] Where «Flight Pattern» throws open vast enfilades of inquiry and feeling, Dawson's and Wheeldon's works offer crystalline, but merely reflective, surfaces. There's no resonance, no existential echo. (2017).

As already explained, this debate is not new. Back in 2010 Laura Jacobs questioned this very issue when she started a long article devoted to Balanchine's influence thus:

How did we get here? How did we get to the point where just about every new classical dance is meaningless? [...] If these dances were houses, no one would be able to live in them. And no one does. They have no ceilings, no windows, no doors. Another way of putting it is that choreographers no longer seem to know what their ballets are about. Then again, I'm not sure ballets are trying to be «about» anything anymore. (Jacobs, 2010)

The He Said/She Said argument has been disrupted since the appearance of the #MeToo movement (Gilmore, 2017). As more female works get commissioned, female perspective becomes normalised and accepted by audiences and dance professionals. Three generations of women choreographers confirmed the relevance of this fact in the interviews carried out for this article. Brill, the youngest one, believes it is important to commission female choreographers because: «women often have different perspectives on life and events, and it is important that our voices are heard. It is important in the evolution of our art form that women have the opportunities to prove themselves» (personal communication, 19 July, 2019). Likewise, Marston emphasises this need for more diversity in dance by posing relevant questions: «Who am I represented by? Who are my people? Who am I?» (personal communication, 19 June, 2019). López Ochoa also claims the change of women's roles in society: «Women have gained a stronger and more visible position in industries like business, politics and education. I remember my mother

telling me that not all universities were open to women at the beginning of the last century. [...] This should also be reflected in the ballet works made today» (personal communication, 22 June, 2019). Crow also acknowledges the need to get a different point of view, as she reflects «I often get a sense that a lot of today's male choreographers just aren't interested in women» (personal communication, 24 June, 2019).

The question is whether the change in topics and their treatment on the stages will also lead to a reversal of aesthetics in dance. I am not arguing for uniformity in women's works, but for the questioning and challenge of the aesthetics that have dominated the repertoire of companies for the last decades and that seemed to exclude and demean women.

Mary Beard has called upon subverting «those foundational stories of power that serve to keep women out of it, and turning them to our advantage» (2018, pág. 89). Though she is referring to a deeper change in the power structures that constrain women's activities, she also gives some more mundane examples of how change can start operating at a more basic level. In an interview to three female choreographers carried out by the «Financial Times», there were important aspects of how that subversion may begin. The importance of the «pas de deux», «long cherished as the jewel in the idiom's crown» (Scherr, 2018), was challenged by the three choreographers. This is not new, as Bronislava Nijinska, in her work «Les Noces» (1923) had already challenged its supremacy in defining a ballet. As Scherr points out, it remains to be seen if «without the pas de deux's primacy, choreography would appeal to more female ballet natives, who spend their early career, if not its entirety, as sylphs and swans, waves and wind, all without male accompaniment» (2018).

It is also true, and it has often been used as an argument to explain the lack of female choreographers, that the work women do in the «corps de ballet» demands uniformity and lack of individuality. Crow already pointed to this issue back in 2003, when she explained «there's a kind of oppression that the «corps de ballet» requires and that there is a tremendous amount of pressure on women in ballet to conform to certain mould, because of the competition» (Abad Carlés, 2004 & 2013). Brill also commented on the difficulty of «juggling still trying to perform as a member of the female «corps de ballet» and soloist roles in a touring company, whilst also building my choreographic portfolio» (personal communication, 19 July, 2019). In a repertoire company, women spend most of their time rehearsing in the «corps de ballet». The big classical

ballets that make up the core of the repertoire include long scenes for the female «corps», which keeps female dancers in the rehearsal studios most of the time. This issue had been highlighted back in 2003 by both Crow and Marston (Abad Carlés, 2004 & 2013).

However, Scherr and Kent see the work in the «corps de ballet» in a different light. When Kent wanted to emphasise the importance of women in ballet, she did so by using the example of the «corps de ballet», which she described as «the female unity, [...] the mutual support for each other» (Works & Process at the Guggenheim, 2018). Perhaps, the best way to start subverting the power structures that constrain women in dance may be by challenging the location where female agency is at its most visible and strongest. It has been done by other female choreographers in the past and perhaps, that is why «it is important as well to reclaim the history of women ballet choreographers, whose works disappear from the historical record far more generally and far more rapidly than works by men» (L. Garafola, personal communication, 27 July, 2019).

#### 4. #MeToo: TOKENISM OR CHANGE IN THE STRUCTURES OF POWER?

#MeToo has made a gratifyingly loud noise that, for once, has been transmitted over most of the planet, but it still falls into that general category. Even more to the point, the root cause of the harassment that women have suffered (and the root cause of the earlier silence of so many) surely lies in the structures of power. If so, then the only effective remedy lies in a change to those power structures. (Beard, 2018, págs. 99-100)

When asked about the difficulties she had encountered as a female choreographer, Ruth Brill admitted having had all the support from David Bintley, Birmingham Royal Ballet's former Artistic Director: «I am lucky to have had a director who believed in me and took a risk on programming my work» (personal communication, 19 July, 2019). Brill also emphasised the importance of having the drive and gaining respect from her colleagues in the company when developing her choreographic career (ibid.). However, she mentioned a fact that remains at the core of ballet companies, that is, «the majority of work that I have performed in

the past year as a dancer, has been work of male choreographers. This includes heritage works» (ibid.). Gemma Bond also commented on this when talking of her career as a dancer at American Ballet Theater (Guggenheim Works & Process, 2018). This reality in the sector also made renowned choreographer Twyla Tharp comment ironically, when asked about the lack of female choreographers: «Really? Have you noticed?» (Basco, 2018). In academic research, when browsing «The New York Times» historical database «using the terms ‘women choreographers’ and ‘ballet’» the results were «a mere twenty-three articles—and a concise history of women’s lack of presence» (Meglin & Matluck Brooks, 2012, pág. 3).

While it is true that major companies have been commissioning new works from female choreographers in the last few years, there is a danger that this may result in tokenism, as the same institutions that are now programming women’s works perpetuate structures of power that have continuously excluded women from leadership and creation at their upper tier positions (Crow, 2002; Garafola, 2005 & personal communication, 27 July, 2019; Meglin & Matluck Brooks, 2012; Abad Carlés, 2013 & 2015; Jennings, 2013; Basco 2015).

It is at this deeper level of structural bias that real change should operate, for, unless these power structures change, history may repeat itself. When Fricker describes social structures where power operates, she mentions «identity power» as a key element in any «operation of power that depends in some significant degree upon such shared imaginative conceptions of social identity» (2007, pág. 14). Dance institutions create «imaginative social co-ordination» (ibid.) when they produce conceptions that operate and live within them and that perpetuate what it means to be a woman or a man in dance. Thus, when Jennings referred to the «lordly disdain» the three ballet choreographers were showing towards women choreographers (Escoyne, 2017), he was alluding to this identity power that pervades at the core of ballet institutions. Fricker concludes that «the primary «modus operandi» of identity power is at the level of the collective social imagination» (2007, pág. 15). The author’s argument would suggest that the identity power at work in ballet institutions prevents women from considering choreography as a career and that this lack of ambition may be due to a collective social imagination that «controls our actions despite our beliefs» (ibid.). As this identity power may work structurally, that is, with no identifiable

agent exercising it, it is difficult to act against it. That would explain the marginalisation women suffer in the upper tiers of companies.

When applying Christine Williams's theories on the «glass escalator» to dance, Collette LaMonica Kelly compared the careers of male and female choreographers and concluded that «the glass escalator creates female tokens in the upper echelons of ballet choreography by preferentially promoting men so much that the proportions of men and women in the respective fields become flipped» (2017, pág. 38). It seems the identity power at work at institutions confirms Williams's theory and propels men to the creative posts in a company, while women, because of the lack of opportunities that men do get, become tokens, «a minority in this smaller field, women choreographers get assigned a symbolic position» (ibid.).

When asked about the re-emergence of female choreography, Garafola also warns about the dangers of tokenism, as this, «however well intentioned, is seldom the path to normalization» (personal communication, 27 July, 2019). Garafola believes that «the crucial thing is keep works in repertory» and «reclaim the history of women ballet choreographers» (Ibid.).

Thus, according to the author it would not be enough from major ballet companies to commission new works from women, but to maintain them in their repertoires and to accompany these actions with the re-tagging of major heritage works created by women in the past and that, in the last decades, were ousted from the stages. As Brill and Marston suggested, it is not plausible that there has been an increase of female choreographers in the last few years, though more promotion of their work may be inspiring and giving more «credibility» to other women (personal communication, R. Brill, 19 July, 2019; C. Marston, 19 June, 2019).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The #MeToo movement has undeniably begun to scratch the surface of dance institutions by the mere return of women's voices and perspectives onto the stages. The role models they may provide for future generations is paramount for the survival of the art form. It remains to be seen if the «epistemic lacunas» will be filled again with the heritage works created

by women throughout history, but at least, the «testimonial injustice» women suffered for decades in the sector may come to an end if dance institutions normalise the presence of women in their upper tiers of power and creation. In a way, the emergence of the #MeToo movement and feminism's Fourth Wave, in which it has been inscribed, has come to disrupt and question the mystiques and determinisms that permeated the dance world during the last decades and that disrupted women's agency in dance both as directors and choreographers. The Biological Determinism has been challenged by giving visibility and normalising the presence of pregnant choreographers, the Spatial Determinism has been contested by women's commissions by major dance companies, and the Emotional Determinism has pointed out that certain aesthetics were in need of replacement and that women's choreographic choices were perhaps the way to achieve this by simply giving new perspectives and modes of representation that seem to be welcomed by the audiences and critics after years of uniformed athletic displays.

The #MeToo may also lead to the transformation of the structures of dance, as those who remain in power at present may start feeling that they are accountable for their actions. The #MeToo movement provides a «vivid example of the power of testimony to conjure a scene of witness» (Gilmore, 2017, pág. 1) and it is through this power of testimony that change may finally occur.

In the broader context of feminism, it is important to remember that feminist theory and research has acted as a constant voice to prompt the changes that are now taking place. The resonance that the press and social media outlets have given to the issues that affected women for decades seems to confirm the task of much feminist research «with the view to intervening and bringing about social and interpersonal action that addresses social inequality» (Kiguwa, 2019, pág. 232).

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## 7. NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The termination of contracts was challenged by the American Guild of American Artists and a union arbitrator ruled against the firing and ordered the dancers to be reinstated in the company. Only one returned (Stahl, 2019).
- <sup>2</sup> The #MeToo movement started in October 2017. The movement took its name from a grassroots organisation supporting women and girls of colour who were victims of sexual abuse and it was set up by African American activist Tarana Burke (Gilmore, 2017).
- <sup>3</sup> Dance Umbrella has been, since 1978, the most important contemporary dance festival in the United Kingdom.
- <sup>4</sup> He Said/She Said has been used as a colloquial expression to explain the different accounts men and women may provide of a given fact without any proven evidence.
- <sup>5</sup> «She Persisted» was English National Ballet's second programme dedicated to female choreographers, after the success of «She Said» in 2016. The programme consisted of Anabelle López Ochoa's «Broken Wings», Stina Quagebeur's «Nora» and Pina Bausch's «Rite of Spring» (1978). It was presented at Sadler's Wells Theatre in April 2019.

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