Screening the Skin: Issues of Race and Nation in Screendance

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Editorial: Screening the Skin: Issues of Race and Nation in Screendance

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Keywords: race, whiteness, screendance, curation, film analysis

Sweat glistens, and drips from her long, sinewy, brown limbs. She quivers, vibrates, and shakes. The camera cuts from a close up of her trembling body to audience members searching for their seats. They sit and gaze at the dancer upstage right. Her staggered breath fills the quaint performance space. Dancer and choreographer Okwui Okpokwasili states that she convulses in this manner for thirty minutes to transition the audience into the intimate space of a brown girl trying to make sense of her adolescent sexuality in a world that attempts to deny her humanity. The documentary film *Bronx Gothic* not only archives this Bessie Award winning solo performance of the same name, but also provides audiences access to Okpokwasili's reflection on the work, audience reactions, and Okpokwasili's intimate relationships with her family. Okpokwasili created *Bronx Gothic* as a live performance to capture the intimate lives of Black and Brown girls which are so often absent from popular media. Okpokwasili "want[ed] to make a space where there's a complicated and vulnerable experience around being in a Brown or Black girl's body, so why not put this in a film where it can live?"[1] The documentary emerged from her desire and filmmaker Andrew Rossi's simple request to document the tour of the piece. Okpokwasili use of the screen as a space to hold and document the particularities of Black and Brown girlhood signifies a shift in the relationship between artists of color and the assumed heteronormative, white space of the screen. This assumption of whiteness and the screen is what our special issue interrogates.

Artists of color have a paradoxical relationship to the screen. From the dancing blackface minstrels of the nineteenth century to the contemporary insidious depiction of Muslim terrorists, white supremacist ideologies have deployed the screen as a weapon to maintain the oppressive order of enslavement and colonization endured by people of color. Unfortunately, the images of dancing people of color circulated by the film and television industries often portray us as promiscuous simpletons with an uncanny ability to move our bodies-as-commodities, but unable to intellectually engage with the world around us, care for ourselves or maintain functional, flourishing communities. While black and brown bodies dancing on screen are ubiquitous, their elegant vitality cannot be fully contained by it. As a result, when a black or brown

subject controls their power of representation different images and imaginaries emerge. Okpokwasili's *Bronx Gothic* attests to how artists of color continue to find ways to strategically employ dance on the screen as a mechanism to engage broader audiences in discussions about racialized identity, pleasure, politics, and aesthetics. That *Bronx Gothic* traverses across the specifics of screendance festivals into independent film houses, black, and documentary film festivals illuminates the desire for films by and about people of color.[2] Further, Okpokwasili's ethereal duet with dancer Storyboard Pete in rapper Jay-Z's acclaimed music video "4:44" exemplifies how artists of color blur the lines between the popular and the experimental to influence the socio-political discourses affecting their communities.

As we write these opening remarks to our guest edited issue on screendance and race, Janelle Monae has recently released *Dirty Computer – An Emotion Picture*. Its tagline states it is a narrative film with an accompanying music album. But Monae's persistent jabs at the vectors of oppression she navigates as black, femme, and pansexual successfully come together in this Afrofuturist utopian screen fantasy she helms. *Dirty Computer* celebrates love, black excellence, sex-positivity, otherness and queerness. While couched within the neoliberal discourses of empowerment and celebrations of selfhood, that Monae wields creative control attests to the extensive contributions black women make to global popular culture.

Another recent contribution to screendance is the video for Childish Gambino's (Donald Glover) "This is America." Rwandan choreographer, Sherri Silver, helped contribute to the stylistic novelty of the video by fusing a variety of African diaspora social dances. The almost incongruous pairing of these lively dances with the graphic gun violence depicted in the video aids to its popularity (as of this writing it has had over 234 million views on YouTube). A shirtless Gambino sings and dances, accompanied by Black children in school uniforms who shake, shimmy and jump behind him. Gambino bugs his eyes from time to time, dances the American Nae Nae, the South African Gwara Gwara, isolates his bare chest, before pulling out a gun to execute a hooded black man playing guitar, and later massacres a black Baptist Gospel choir. Gambino's performance interpellates America's history of racialized violence, minstrelsy, and religious hypocrisy. He makes it satirically uncomfortable; painfully so. While violence and destruction continually happen in the background, we are "entertained" by black performance. Yet this entertainment is anything but. It confronts us with our own sinister complacency and varying levels of complicitness in the systemic racist violence, it asks for an accountability for the violence of the gaze, the one couched in white supremacist logics, that has historically cemented how we look, and more importantly, how we care or dismiss those we look at.

Both videos were released weeks after the live stream of Beyoncé's performance at the Coachella Music Festival in April 2018. Accompanied by a New Orleans style big brass band, step teams, and dancers, Queen Bey's performance harkened the music and

dance traditions of America's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which led pop culture bloggers and journalists to proclaim her performance as not only the "blackest performance" ever, but also the best performance of 2018 thus far. All three of these black popular screendance contributions demonstrate how YouTube and Vevo emerge as the dominant platforms for the circulation of dancing black and brown bodies on screen. We have yet to see such a consistent circulation outside of the popular screen platforms that social media, live streaming and viral videos offer. In contrast to the popular screen, the popularity of Rossi's documentary of Okpokwasili's *Bronx Gothic* evidences the paucity of bodies of color in screendance festivals, thus the need to increase efforts to diversify the field of screendance at both the critical and creative levels.

The essays, provocations, and reviews in this volume document the efforts and artistry of people of color making dances for the screen in all of its manifestations. We have tried to look at global circulations of screendance and intersections among race, class, nation, gender and sexuality. We turn to a wide assortment of scholars, scholar-practitioners, and curator-practitioners to help us assess a screendance field of color.

Stephanie Batiste begins our collection with an evocative, critically engaged rendering of Kyle Abraham and Carrie Schneider's screen collaborations *I am Sold* and *Blood on the Leaves*. Not only do these films function as testaments to queer black love and care, but as Batiste argues, they complicate the ways racialised/racist history coupled with possibilities of intimacy offer new ways for black social transformation.

Elena Benthaus invites us to experience a different kind of hearing and witnessing through her analysis of black girlhood in the film *The Fits*. Benthaus' eloquent argument details how the film *as a dance film* affectively enfolds its spectator in a variety of orienting or disorienting ways depending on one's familiarity with the aesthetic, corporeal, rhythmic and aural registers it uses. Ultimately, Benthaus demonstrates the interconnectedness between movement and music in black aesthetics.

Alexandra Harlig adroitly takes on the racialized economy of popular dance and addresses how "the possibility of self-controlled outlets changes the reception for commercial mediation of popular dance by communities of practice." She examines the different ways advertisers, amateurs, entrepreneurs, music industry performers, and other professionals use, innovate, circulate, appropriate, and monetize dance on and through social media platforms. Harlig navigates through this complex web of popular screendance identifying and articulating points of critical entry for further engagement with this rich field.

Laura Robinson steers us towards screendance competitions in British television where the virtuosic feats of black male dance crews reify constructions of hyper-blackness and reduce the dancers' performances to mere spectacle. Robinson's insightful analysis

challenges the tendency to devalue spectacle because of its intrinsic relationship to commodity culture. Instead, she skillfully theorizes that the spectacular performances by the black male dancers invoke "themes of aspiration and transformation that enable a re-valuing of televised spectacle."

Addie Tsai's rich foray into a genealogy of the trope of the white man who can't dance moves us through Patrick Swayze, the NFL, *Magic Mike*, and Eddie Murphy to elucidate how a simple choreographed sequence in *Dirty Dancing* and its subsequent iterations facilitate inquiries into (white) hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, spectacle and black masculinity.

Jingqiu Guan's discerning read of how the dance film *An African Walks in the Land of China* depicts the relationship between immigrant Africans and working class Chinese. Her article moves us from the popular screen to international screendance. Guan engages performance analysis with theories of transnationalism to offer an illuminating critique of how the film successfully explores the economic development of "ChinAfrica," yet fails to subvert the colonial gaze from African and Chinese bodies.

Cara Hagan carefully tracks the historical development of screendance to elucidate how its roots in concert dance, film festivals and museum culture situate it within the whiteness of these genres. Hagan's refreshing analysis provides insight into the efforts made by curators of screendance festivals to diversify their offerings. Still, she challenges the industry to investigate funding sources and production requirements that inhibit diversity.

In his provocation, Marcus White responds to Hagan's request for the screendance industry to reflect the diversity of dance and dancemakers. He articulates how his and Carlos Funn's creation of Moving 24fps provides a platform for artist of color to collaborate and create screendances within a 24 hour time period. White notes however, that while Moving 24fps succeeds at producing films by and about people of color, the primary consumers of screendance remain white. He leaves us to ponder, how do we cultivate diverse audiences for screendance?

Mark Broomfield strategically confronts the stranglehold cis-gendered heterosexual men have on masculinity, in his documentary film *Danced Out*. Broomfield contends that the film centers the experience of queer dancers of color systematically excluded from the discourse on masculinity. Broomfield looks to gay male dancers of color who are intimately familiar with performances of masculinity on and off the stage.

Michael Sakamoto's critical interview with dancer Angella Betina Carlos reflects on their collaborative film *Abbey*. The film evidences the isolation immigrants of color experience in predominantly white U.S university dance programs. The interview grapples with the dynamic relationship between Sakamoto as filmmaker and Carlos as dancer/ choreographer. Ultimately, the interview reveals how their collective but

different experiences as "gendered subalterns" creates a space for Carlos to explore her transnational Asian identity through her dancing body.

We close our issue with Adriadne Mikou's review of the Italian film *Il Mio Grido*. Mikou celebrates the extent to which the choreography and film editing humanizes the racially and ethnically diverse men incarcerated in the Rovigo Penitentiary.

The contributions in this volume provide a glimpse into the possibilities of what a more inclusive screendance field might look like. We are hopeful that creative and critical engagements by and about communities/artists of color (and all of their intersectional alliances) will continue to facilitate more nuanced discussions about identity, citizenship, affect and community particularly at such a vulnerable moment in our history. Diversity, while necessary, is often co-opted by neoliberal ideologies of a neat multiculturalism where differences are underplayed in service to greater discourses of productivity and monetization. We urge scholars, curators, and scholar-artist-practitioners of screendance to engage with diversity, not as another *zeitgeist* term, but as an invitation to broaden the field of artistic production. A new visual terrain can surely emerge, one that expands our ethical consideration of (un)familiar others and will help shift our fields of vision beyond what is readily comfortable and recognizable.

Biographies

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Notes

[1] Color Lines. "Four Questions" https://www.colorlines.com/articles/4-questions-bronx-gothic-creator-and-star-okwui-okpokwasili accessed 31 May 2018.

[2] *Bronx Gothic* has been screened at:
Miami Light Project, http://www.miamilightproject.com/screendance_miami;
Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art,
https://mcachicago.org/Calendar/2018/04/Screening-Andrew-Rossi-And-Okwui-Okpokwasili-Bronx-Gothic;
Barnard College, https://barnard.edu/events/bronx-gothic;
Project Row Houses, https://projectrowhouses.org/calendar/bronx-gothic-screening-performing-the-neighborhood;
Film Forum, http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/2304540/bronx-gothic-at-film-forum-new-york

ARTICLES

Intimate Visualities: Intimacy as Social Critique and Radical Possibility in Kyle Abraham and Carrie Schneider's Dance Response Project's *I am Sold* and *Blood on the Leaves*

Stephanie Leigh Batiste, University of California, Santa Barbara

Abstract

Choreographer and dancer Kyle Abraham and photographer and filmmaker Carrie Schneider position intimacy in screen dance as an affective hailing to viewers. The intimate visualities they achieve serve as an opportunity to critically hypothesize ways of being in community and understanding black visual relationships to subjectivity. In both explorations of meaning a production of close relationships to others, to notions of selfhood, and to blackness animate a radical love of others and of self. Their collaborations, the *Dance Response Project*, subtly, but powerfully tap persistent modes of black being and of theorizing the social new to creative discourse.

Keywords: Black performance, racial gaze, subjectivity, community, selfhood, race, African American

Kyle Abraham in profile, *I am Sold*, 00:00-00:19, Kyle Abraham and Carrie Schneider, *Dance Response Video*, 2014. https://vimeo.com/84924942

Kyle Abraham's and Carrie Schneider's *I am Sold* and *Blood on The Leaves* turn an intimacy of feeling in cultural production towards a reconsideration of social history and possibility. Dancer and Choreographer Abraham's performance in collaboration with photographer and filmmaker Carrie Schneider' film art create intimacy between the figures and figments in the dance pieces as well as between the filmed piece and the viewer. *I am Sold* plays lightly on the language of race-based human trade while ironically tapping into the magnetism of giving oneself over to complex love. The play on the word "sold" complicates the capital contract as a history between black and white men that accrues revision. *Blood on The Leaves* uses complex visual layering that connects and disarticulates lynching, urban violence, and patriarchal misogyny.[1] The singular form of this piece further connects dance and live performance to mediated consumption. In a manner consistent within Abraham's concert choreography, *Blood on The Leaves* carries its concern with violence across eras, forms, and media. Kyle Abraham (K/A) and Carrie Schneider's *Dance Response Videos* film movement and dance as visual art in intimate and intense engagements with race, racial history, racial discourse, and the possibility of transformation. The suggestion of personal and social transformation coalesces in Abraham's multiplying and unifying kinetic address. These screen performances do not romantically, unequivocally take-up a protest agenda. They complicate Black resistance discourses with ideas these are still challenged to incorporate–queer multiplicity, complex physical and discursive legacies of violence, and Black patriarchal misogyny. In this way the work critiques easily identifiable binaries of Black resistance. Abraham and Schneider's work opens discourses of binary oppression to criticism and reorientation via notions of Black community and selfhood.

Likewise, Abraham and Schneider's collaboration challenges binary, staid racist notions regarding a reductive whiteness of the gaze. In my own work on the gaze and otherness in black cultural production, I assert the ways the lookers and subjects can share the gaze, circulating around the camera towards prismatic looking. Collaboration, consent and mutual recognition authorize a prismatic looking that troubles and subverts objectification.[2] The "darkening mirror" of deep looking at constructed selves also insists on a black gaze that fundamentally refuses the primacy of a hierarchical racialized gaze that prioritizes whiteness as the first and only subject, the first and only consciousness that requires blackness to be its object as if black people are unable to visualize our own subjectivity.[3] Intersectionally identified, Abraham and Schneider share the gaze in their collaborative film shorts, and as such jettison calcified structures that require and delight in black objecthood. The impetus for the project, the choreography, and the camera's relationship to it are self-conscious and intentional, demonstrating a creative critical relationship of "recognition [that] is actuated and made visible through and across the camera apparatus and in the projected images on the screen."[4] Schneider and K/A determined aesthetic and lighting choices together as visual context for Abraham's performances. The immediacy of the work derives from Abraham's desire to have "as little premeditation as possible, even refraining from

listening to some favorite songs for the months leading up to the shoot, so that they could be fresh in the moments in front of the camera."[5] Schneider found this immediacy to be a key aspect of the collaboration. That is, she valued being unaware of what Abraham would bring and though behind the camera experienced the live improvisation fresh and unplanned. Thus the visual structuring of improvisation and the unexpected secures a measure of liveness to the screen. It, further, upends the primacy of the camera rendering it audience and recipient in its capture.

Haptic Visuality and Intimate Viewing

These two films in their collaboration of seven were created at an artist residency that did not permit the fellows to tour.[6] Abraham and Schneider's Dance Response Project was inspired in part by music. The duo "[released] several dance shorts over the course of a year, using [James] Blake's album, Kanye West's recent Yeezus LP, and others."[7] Unable not to share new work due to the conditions of the 2014 Creative Capital grant they held at the time, Abraham and Schneider designed pieces only for online distribution. Since the pieces were not intended to tour live, the work exploits the possibilities of film and internet viewing to actuate choreography that would be impossible to perform and perceive live on stage.[8] They deploy the small screen as an intimate, likely, individual encounter that opens minute feeling to broader engagement with complex social concerns. The social experiences of homoerotic, interracial love and inter and intra-racial violence are not only complex, but nearly intractable as taboo, structural violence, and other dividing forces perpetuate paucity of discourse and stymie revolutionary change towards acceptance and peace. Both videos orient themselves to the viewer through a haptic visuality that invites a close sensual interaction with their performances and their significance.[9] In both pieces, the intimate encounters grow in social significance through Abraham and Schneider's choreography and framing. This collaboration is fairly distinct in Schneider's oeuvre that is more fractal and spare, in a sense, more visually distant and less concerned with the viewer's affective capture. Thus her visual collaboration with Abraham and also with issues of race forged an idiosyncratic visual style imbricated in Abraham's choreography.

The pieces structure a relationship of looking that seduces the viewer into an intimate affective environment created by the dance and the visual engagement it demands. The scopophilic draw envelops the viewer in a tactile sensuality of inter- and intraracial visual and affective touch.[10] The film's body, the screen, and the viewer's body form a haptic environment where "the particular structures of human touch correspond to particular structures of the cinematic experience." Jennifer M. Barker delineates a "cinematic tactility" that moves beyond the surfaces of both the screen and the skin to activate "fleshy, muscular, and visceral engagement."[11] More than touch, tactility is a multisensory phenomenological relationship between the environment and the body. Such a tactile relationship in Abraham and Schneider's work compounds the visual

tactility embedded in the impact of watching with kinetic magnetism between bodies as physical contact and its suggestion in the film. The spare and withheld physical touch creates an unfulfilled magnetism between bodies and, also, between the viewer and the screen. The draw and desire creates an erotic gap where the viewer hovers between desire and autoerotic satiety sharing the camera's unmoving gaze on undulant bodies. Physical touch, its possibility and provocation, becomes a metaphor for affective entwinement that moves ever closer like approaching numbers that endlessly converge. It is a visual attraction subtended by physical and affective desire. The space of desire contains and suggests multiple registers of collective love. Abraham disrupts a controlling relationship between a solitarized viewer and the play on the screen by structuring a diffident multiplicity in the dances. That is, the structuring of company is close and distant allowing the viewer to be drawn in and included in the group. The viewer is one of many participants in the interplay of kinetic and visual attraction.

Through their sensual visual address Abraham and Schneider's internet films manifest the haptic thickness of multisensory engagement with media suggested by Laura U. Marks. The haptic suggests touch and multisensory orientation towards and inspired by media where one "presses up to the object and takes its shape" through "tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive" sensibility both on the surface of and inside our bodies.[12] Marks extends her phenomenological reasoning to the digital despite its apparent immateriality.[13] Even as the work may be experienced alone in relationship to a device, Abraham and Schneider access an expanded sociality of an, albeit, dynamic and unstable online audience. It is perhaps this solo reception amplified by the "mirror of the screen" through digital visuality that permits a subject's identification with new terms of social understanding that Abraham suggests.[14]

Through their engagement with race, Abraham's performances gently confront history as a screen dance activation queer heterosocial, interracial gaze turned towards an undoing of power. Kaja Silverman explores how "the look" might circulate "independently of the usual sexual boundaries, and without any power to subordinate."[15] Schneider and Abraham destabilize the look and the gaze by absenting or multiplying it such that the subjectivities on screen resist subordination or otherness towards a shifting active looking within and towards community. Here the undoing of a conditioning primacy of the cinematic gaze develops an orientation away from hierarchical power by emphasizing interiority and with the seduction or drawing in of the viewer as haptic co-participant in the performance.

Dancers Kyle Abraham, Maleek Washington, Jeremy "Jae" Neal, Chalvar Monteiro, and Jordan Morley in *I am Sold* choreographed by Kyle Abraham, produced and directed by Carrie Schneider.

I am Sold – **Queer Intimacy as Community**

In *I am Sold*, Abraham performs with Schneider's camera in black and white in extreme close-up. Interracial queer lovers lay beside each other at ground level against a white background.[16] In the narrow frame, the viewer sits inches from the skin. In this four minute short performed to James Blake's moody, otherworldly, eponymous song *I am Sold*, we see men's pores, beauty marks, scars, and pimples on skin and biceps, elbows, shoulders, arms, armpit hair, bare chests, and hips lifting and lying, seeming to hover over and near each other and roll away, replacing each other in the foreground of the frame. The tight steady frame captures the body from the top of the shoulders to the upper hip. There are no heads or faces except in the very opening of the piece when the back of a shoulder and neck of a black man appear in repose against the floor down stage of an ear and lashes in profile, forehead to the floor. His dark face is silhouetted against a white cloth or sheet on the hard floor. This is Abraham. Nude chests, shoulders, and arms move behind and past each other in ocean waves of differently raced dark and light torsos. In the camera's frame the touching and passing of intimate choreography captures a tapestry of closeness and love. Here the gentle proximity suggests intimacy and love in an interplay of safe, vulnerable, confident bodies. The exchange of positions is sexual in that we rarely lay bare-chested next to a partner who is not a family member except in sexual closeness. Blake's opening lyrics, "Link my door tonight, I am Sold" and "You said it was a flash of Green, but you hadn't known" indicate an unexpected lovers tryst, the temporality of the song post-coital during a long night of wakefulness. Yet the

slow careful exchange of embodied entanglement is neither so private as to expel nor so explicitly suggestive as to titillate. The movement itself is not necessarily sexual. The movement is also not neutral, but more like a sensually charged neutrality of consensual closeness. They trade positions so that one is always lying directly before the camera and behind one's partners, lifting and rolling in and out of the way is romantic in its steady intimacy of non-kin. When one dancer's back faces the camera to fill the frame the suggestion of face-to-face rather than side to side attention amplifies the feeling of intimacy making clear that this gentle moving is about contact and the potential for contact, as well as an enactment of entanglement. The sensuous visual erotic moves under, over, and with the bodies. The performance film's erotic aesthetic emphasizes desire by intimating touch rather than enacting it. The constant smooth interplay of controlled proximity is deeply loving. The nearness and undulating exchange is a willing trade of heart space inhabiting the same consensual sphere with persistence through change. Layers of kinds of love shift and play like the perspectivally layered bodies. Platonic or friendly, *and* Philio or romantic, and eros or sexual entangle to develop a community-oriented collective agape or unconditional and divine love. Abraham's filmed choreography constructs a queer erotic envisioning that does love work.[17] This envisioning is queer and black in its involvement of Black creator and subject matter, in its cooperative and collective nature, its centering of erotics, its destabilization of power, and focus on race. In the tradition of the great James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, Abraham offers a pathway to social healing in a vision of queer love, self-love, and loving of blackness and otherness.[18]

I am Sold creates a Black queer vision of deep love through an intense proximity in which the viewer takes part through deep visual contact with homoerotic tenderness. Because of the perspectival layering of bodies the viewer is pulled visually deep into the film's horizon to capture the queer presence of multiple bodies, not a singular or even dual embodiment. With both deep and shallow looking the viewer keeps company in a sensual drawing in. Barker describes a reaching of feeling in which the body gropes toward the screen in an attempt to match the pace of motion displayed and get touched back. The viewer's kinesthetic empathy with the body of the film encourages the viewer not only to mimic the feeling, but further to reach towards it in its impact on the muscles.[19] Since the bodies touch only hands only lightly and otherwise rarely and barely while in eminently close proximity, the viewer is invited in, to touch skin as barely as the dancers touch, reaching towards and taking part in the potential to connect, to join the dynamic expanding community.

Initially seeming like two people, Black and white skin tones are in fact visible on three bodies, two Black and one white who roll and shift in a tangle. One has to shift one's attention from the foreground to look deep into the horizon of the film to apprehend a third dancer. The population in the scene expands mysteriously with the distant interplay of a third pair of Black hands that appear and lift like an illusion. The presence

of this third who appears like a narrative twist constructs a polyamorous scene as a conceptual ground for the film's work. Even in its more platonic form the viewer must incorporate an intimate third as already belonging in the sensual community. Even with sound removed contact remains steady and smooth without the thump and thud that might emerge from imperfect balance in reaching bodily across another body in an acrobatic game of twister. Only a muscular strength and quiet precision supports such silent control across tumbling bodies. The interplay is hypnotic. At the end, however, in another twist of plot, the hands of four people layer gently upon each other to interlace and intermingle fingers near the end of the piece, not two and not three. One racially white hand, palm up, on the bottom, is grasped from above by three racially black hands each thumb resting softly parallel upon the preceding hand. The geography of the layering of thumbs and laying on of hands is not possible from fewer than four people. And still the film credits' attribution of five performers further grows the community to yet another active imperceptible participant. The fourth visible hand, another clarifying narrative surprise, perhaps a new participant, offers a placeholder for the viewer's own hand previously unentangled, reaching into and with the performers in the film. Our reaching touch invites us to concur in the film's loving kindness. The fingers tighten slightly and caress almost imperceptibly in front of a prone dark chest that forms the background of the tight focus where the nails and knuckles of the four hands stand out. The fingers release and recede blurring into a fade to black.

The white background of the majority of the performance takes on meaning it would not necessarily have carried prior to these kinetic and visual choices. If the bodies in visual tandem were about the possibility of intimate connection and touch, the accumulation of black hands and medium fade to black extend and emphasize the piece's racial work. While "I am Sold" as a phrase communicates a character of being convinced and of giving over oneself to a person or idea, it also calls up a more violent potential of race-based human sale that is at once healed in a display of interracial interplay and love also substantiated in the cooperation of the film's production. The repeated chorus, "And we late nocturnal, speculate what we feel," invites rumination over the unsettling pressures and insomniac pleasures of sleeplessness. The rest of Blake's lyrics operate like narratives in disjunctive phrases communicating swift emotional shifts much more jarring than the dancers' controlled exchanges. The twisting and turning of thought, danced "late nocturnal," in a waking dream exploring shifting and layered feeling and becoming convinced of a new normal as a satisfying reward.

Nicole Fleetwood describes how performative visions, at times queer, and the visuality of performative blackness trouble dominant visual and power structures. She argues "for the productive possibilities of black subjects to trouble the field of vision precisely by presenting the black body as a troubling figuration to visual discourse."[20] While manifesting a Black visual structure, Kyle Abraham accomplishes his daring affective

explorations from the perspective of a Black subject irrespective of a Black or white gaze. The visual discourses he troubles are not always dominant white structures but sometimes dominant Black structures as well. The sexual vulnerability of the interracial male players renders them both open and closed to each other in homo-social and homosexual giving and self-protection. Whiteness appears behind and between an interplay of black bodies that dominate in the visual field. Together the sexual and racial narratives disrupt visual and hetero-normative schemes of racial power. Abraham's fades to Black always seem to suggest a Black normal and blackness as possibility especially in *I am Sold*'s conditions of a dominant Black sociality.

The shift in the color of the background from and immaculate white to a pure black offers a shift in terms of the grounds of love and community. After more Black hands embrace the white hand the background shift hypothesizes, likewise, a shift in the social and emotional ground against which interracial love is considered. The accumulating Black hands grow the presence of blackness black love and black acceptance. The white prone hand, palm up at the bottom of the grasp accepts the terms of this caress in an equally gentle grasp. His participation in a loving sociality where he is in the minority serves as an antiracist gesture that relinquishes white privilege. The directionality of interraciality set by the terms of desegregationist integration is discursively shifted and settled within a black spatial reality always already there. A community is formed where a prone and disempowered white hand is in the minority and accepted as lover and as a member of a tight enfolded and multiplying community. The homoeroticism of the piece subtends a community oriented layering of homosocial platonic love with erotic love and social love. *I am Sold* extends affection as and through gay love towards a broad model of social possibility. Given the persistence of homophobia and racism, *I am Sold* renders a brave and bold love also a gentle love; its radical nature not so, but rather a whisper of easy possibility. It is a whisper with earthshaking consequences in its imposition of ease. *I am Sold* offers a heuristic for *Blood on The Leaves'* queer envisioning of Abraham multiplying in community with himself in contemplation of legacies of violence against Black people.

Blood on the Leaves – Intimacy of Expanding Selfhood and Redress of Violence

The intimacy and love in *I am Sold* also appears in *Blood on The Leaves* as an interplay of self that Abraham and Schneider achieve in positioning Abraham dancing over and with other dancing versions of himself. Abraham dances four improvised takes to the song in *Blood on The Leaves'* filming. With four independent performances Schneider reports being unable to excise any of Abraham's dancing in the construction of the film, and so layered these four takes in triplicate connected at "moments when there were striking overlaps, where variations on theme emerged and complicated the story." The multiple performance responses and their layering, in turn, multiply the body in a

critical troubling of historical triplication in the music that drives the work. That Abraham performs four non-characteralogical engagements with the song and its three sonic elements allows any and all of the dance response renditions to represent and respond to the elements and to the whole. The "fourth" improvisatory response always gives K/A an active overarching critical say. His engagement is responsive and assertive, direct and encompassing.

The intimacy of Abraham's multiplied dancing and self-looking are particularly powerful in its irony as *Blood on The Leaves* treats disturbing violence. Through this complex formal layering *Blood on The Leaves'* concern with black loss, mourning, and the possibility of peace are also multiplied from the site of the body across forms of dance, film, and digital media and as material and intangible spaces. Abraham dances alone in his signature black t-shirt and pants. First appearing alone we soon see Abraham dancing similar, but never simultaneous, choreography layered atop his already kinetic body. He appears once more until he dances with and upon himself in triplicate. The tripling corresponds to three songs mashed together in Kanye West's eponymous composition and rap song *Blood on The Leaves.*[21]

Always aware of the sonic, historical, and social complexities of music, Abraham works with carefully curated, impactful sound. Kanye West's *Blood on The Leaves* composition includes two songs iconic of particular eras of violence and emotions surrounding them. *Strange Fruit* was sung by Billie Holiday penned by Jewish writer Abel Meerpol in the late 1930s and first performed at the leftist Café Society. C-Murder featuring Snoop Dogg and Magic, *Down 4 My Niggas* cuts into the narrative as West hollers, "We coulda been somebody." West's himself cites C-Murder and raps about interpersonal violence across the historical samples to offer a narrative arc that connects and juxtaposes eras and feelings of violence and loss. By focusing on multiply violated murder victims, Holiday excoriates southerners' depraved white-supremacist lynching practices that were condoned by the U.S. government and society. Holiday's haunting wail protests racist torture and its physical and symbolic oppression. As an interracial protest song, it revised the terms of social optics on violated black bodies and our orientations towards domestic terror in the interest of social change. In a radically contrasting orientation, C-Murder's *Down 4 My Niggas* is a rousing call to neighborhood allegiance and profane destruction of "other niggas" affiliated with another gang or set.[22] Listeners familiar with the song will conjure the barreling, gravely voice of the speaker who declares, "fuck them other niggas…/I ride for my niggas…/I die for my niggas/" in a repeating chorus couched by aggressive verses outlining masculinist loyalty and murderous gunplay. The song's energetic pleasures are sustained in repeated imagining of drive-bys, gunshots, bleeding heads, and other forms of injury, death, and misogynist insult. West's own lyrical overlay speaks of urban economic struggle and heterosexual relationship woes to a forceful bass. West's narrative decries the impacts that women's claims to men's finances and emotions exacted through pregnancy and lawsuits. The song reduces

Holiday's "Leaves" the word "please" as if begging for *West's speaker's* life. West's masculinist misogynist self-pity adds a discursive violence to his appropriations of Holiday and C-Murder. West links lynching and gang violence as related murderous, anti-black practices, while ultimately positioning them as background to black men's treatment by black women in the club and the courts. West's gang sets from "Down 4 my Niggas" become Black men and women. That is, West places Holiday and C-Murder in service of a "lynching" of Black men by Black women in custody courts. West's work offers disjunctive parallels between unequal things rendering a musical discursive violence not only to Black pasts, but also to women. The movement and visual structure of Abraham's piece addresses and troubles the orientation of violence in each element of the song and across the composition. Abraham offers the lie to West's composition complicating the sonic relationship to history and re-cutting a contemplation of violence through visual narrative and dance. Abraham's address of the song is layered in its attention to the parts and problematizing of their relationship to each other. K/A brings a critical affective engagement to both by kinetically splitting its layers apart. His multiplying self animates the shattering of violence and also the disturbing split and multiplying of discourses towards greater violence.

West's track mixes and cut sounds and rhythms to achieve a groove that is echoed and revised visually in Abraham's coordinated and contrapuntal dancing. Abraham inhabits *Blood on The Leaves* to depart from and reinterpret its self-serving misogyny using its own troubling connections. Alongside West's juxtapositions Abraham queries the status and generational transfer of violence. He enacts a historic disjuncture and, in his multiplying self, also questions the shifting role of black people as victim and perpetrator, as creator and critic of violence. Both sound and motion participate in Gaye Johnson's characterization of history as a hip hop technology of beat juggling. She explains,

> Beat juggling isolates drum and snare hits, vocal phrases, or sound effects by the recording artist and "flips" or combines the sound with a cross fader; turntablists take what is already contained in a record to create new rhythmic patterns…One sound alone, or the work of one DJ or sound in the form of his beat juggling, means very little until it is joined with other sounds and results in a collective sonic production…DJs must be masters of both mixing and memory.[23]

Abraham joins West in a sonic historical and kinetic juggling of narrative, sound, and motion to bring disparate moments and feelings together into new composition. Yet, the fundamental drive towards collectivity in Johnson's notion of historical re-mixing fails to appear in West's *Blood on The Leaves*. K/A's composition moves at odds with and in contradistinction to West's uses of sonic history. West and Abraham's layered temporalities emerge from manipulated rhythms to radically different ends. With the introduction of each voicing and sample, a new dancing Abraham appears in the frame.

Through these appearances Abraham embodies the shattering impact of violence. He calls out and confronts the crises articulated in the song in redress of West. As such, K/A draws our attention to the disparate ends of creative expression in relation to histories and legacies of violence.

The consistency in Abraham's choreography between selves places the phases of the song in problematic conversation with each other. Each song element is scored with similar movement, not different or differently paced choreography, yet not looped. Abraham does not craft kinetic characters that correspond to the samples. Thus the *Dance Response* asks the samples to remain in conversation, to reflect and respond to each other through a consistency in motion. That Abraham rhythmically connects such disparate musical samples in a consistent and fluid choreography is remarkable. It means that as the three apparitions of K/A dance, the viewer is unable to attach a particular layer to a specific aspect of the song. We must accept a totality. Further, the dancer's kinetic presence amidst the dark narrative of the merging of three songs both embodies each story while also inhabiting the dark spaces between them. In part the consistency in the nature and, at times, repetition of movement facilitate the sense of Abraham slipping between the elements of the song.

Abraham appears out of the black the layering of his black clothing upon a black background causes the chestnut tone of his skin to shine out of the darkness. In each of never more than three layers that fade and return in random relief, Abraham dances before Schneider's still camera. The perspective in each frame is perhaps closer and more magnified as a layer cuts in and out with Schneider's editing. The frame is controlled by Abraham's choreography as it shrinks and stretches with his moves towards and away from the camera in the dark space; his re/appearances as overlay or backdrop in the film's layers. Abraham stages an intimate consideration of himself and of the black selves articulated in the song/s. Schneider layers visual intensity in the kinetic engagement with the problematic terms of history, identity, and creativity. An interplay of tense, fast, and casual movements shift from brief frenetic tension to lithe, effortless sway in the pace of the everyday. A tight core, lifted chest, and shoulders permit the signature blend of strength and rest. Abraham's gaze is down or outward his eyes not focusing on any particular thing, not meeting the camera and not calling to his own gaze in his accruing apparitions. His expression consistently bears a not-quite-neutral concern, not quite judging but clearly engaging the subjects of the song that draw his kinesthetic attention. Abraham repeats a signature gesture where his arms lift his elbows to parallel with his shoulders, hands relaxed, propelled from his back like wings lifting, unable to take flight. The movements of his other selves layer in rhythmic coordination. His eyes and faces never meet. His dispersed attention addresses Black history, Black suffering, and Black selfhood in a troubling of West's toxic Black masculinity and patriarchy. Even when his lifted chin intimates awareness, his consciousness of his other selves is affective and choreographic. His triplication and

simultaneity connect and multiply his being and his attention. He moves and looks in several directions at once. He is searching and knowing, calling the viewer's attention without confrontation. Schneider and Abraham unite the subject of abjection with the self-active agent in critical conversation with history. As such, Abraham takes on and channels the body of community in his multiplying critical self, confronting for all of us the damages of history and hate.

In some ways the splitting and dispersal, approach and retreat are disturbing as the dancing accompanies the foregone and impending racist death and urban belligerence narrated in Holiday and C-Murder. The feelings evoked in these mini-scenes shift swiftly matching in pace both the faster movements and their smooth transition to the slower ones. The spaces between his appearing and disappearing animate anxiety and anticipation. As a viewer navigating the emotional shifts, we await and anticipate his reappearances, miss him when he goes, hope he will return, feel relieved when he does. Schneider replicates for us a visual desire not to miss a movement, to capture and imbibe more. Thus even in a consideration of violence the visual relationship structures drawing in rather than alienation. The repeated absences and returns open and close a melancholic fear of loss and longing for the dead. Abraham's layers shift towards and away from the viewer at different magnifications as different distances. His appearances offer both closeness and retreat in unexpected overlay. We witness a moving through a sounding of violence without witnessing violence. The impact of the violence is precipitous, though unseen instituting a new visual relationship to spectacular Black associations with violence. The viewer engages visually with a multiplied engaged critical subjecthood cut, mixed and re-constituted.

Marks notes that "what digital video loses in indexicality, it gains in flexibility."[24] In this digital envisioning Abraham takes advantage of the ability to detach from and multiply his relationship to himself. Abraham is himself and not himself; is himself and greater than himself; is the moment he embodies and hovers between and beyond the phases the music suggests. He hovers in the spaces between the projections of himself. The three Abraham's maintain the simultaneity of the three songs, three eras, and three affects that synchronize and split, separate and realign stretching his and the viewer's affective and temporal relationship to shifts in violence against and by Black people. Abraham's embodied manifestations on screen and ghostly ethereal hovering through his disappearances and reappearances visualize Jennifer Deger's "shimmering" embodiment that refers to the relationship between the viewer and the screen as a "dynamic and transformative space of betweenness."[25] Abraham suggests and inhabits that between space both on and beyond the screen. Like the seductive visual relationship in *I am Sold*, Abraham's kinetic visual calling up and habitation of the between space redoubles the film's pull on the viewer towards its historical affective intervention. Deger's notion that this is a "mimetically charged space between the subject and the Ancestral" accrues a slight revision as Abraham's shimmering

suggestion is not one of mimesis, but itself one of revision and transformation. The haunting affective environment calls us to reconsider and remake conditions of violence confronted by earlier generations with love and to question its complex inheritances. As an historical echo and ancestral project, divisive and annihilating early 20th century and millennial articulations of murder and misogyny come in for eradication and change through K/A's response.

Abraham's movements are quick, yet the overall effect is calm. The dance resonates like multiple chords played on three identical instruments differently at the same time. Thus other seeming impossibilities beyond Abraham dancing with himself emerge out of the darkness in being. The choreography, music and visualization achieve a mashing and simultaneity of time and history; the crisis of mourning and resolution; a contrapuntal interplay of frenzy and calm. There is preparedness and intrepid address in Abraham's lifted chest and chin. The up-pace of the swift movements heighten concern, fear, and despair about death and its misapprehension. The immediate decelerations to tentative stillness suggest falling disorientation and simultaneously a refusal to submit to the terms of any of these articulations of violence. The slower pacings suggest affective transition and contradiction: like shock towards intention, and confusion towards clarity. What also seems to emerge is the possibility of change in and out of layers of violent histories. The body of the dancer animates the creative potential of address and thus the creative possibility of change in a rejection of violence and its circumstances. Possibility is sounded and purveyed in the stillness that exudes this unsettling and complex piece.

The layered composition allows each movement to interact like notes in a melody, each gesture a chord. The contrapuntal play of gazes and gestures composes a song of visual kinetics. The film editing allows Abraham to fade in and to recede, leaving him in kinetic conversation with himself only to strike up a new movement from another part of the screen. The viewer's gaze expands and narrows, shifts, broadens, focuses in again to encompass and embrace collectively the individual dances. Abraham himself looks down and looks out. His gaze never lands. His outward look is universal, rendering his introspection universal as well. The tension between universality and concentrated introspection structures an invitation to share that intimate interiority with him. The viewer hovers with him in his tempestuous multiplicity. We reach towards and between his selves. His proximity to himself animates the potential for touch much like *I am Sold*'s alternating waves of flesh. If as Laura Marks reveals, erotic "yielding and being touched are the route not to shattering, but to transformation," Abraham's yielding to his own and the viewer's contemplative company opens a conduit between shattering violence and healing or change.[26]

An auto-eroticism and self-love of scopophilia becomes enfolded as Abraham dances with his visual self and the viewer dances and desires towards him.[27] Abraham mourns and loves with his danced selves and the viewer, who slips with the ghosted selves into

the between spaces of love, loss, and violence. The suggestion of a personal self-love is racialized in the gentle, haunted treatment of violence against Blacks by white and Black perpetrators; the provocation is to love Blackness instead of killing it. The viewer's participation in the between spaces inducted by the layered dance draws them into the autoerotic possibility of loving Blackness.

Blood on The Leaves both ghosts and multiplies the self. In this sense its motion implies proprioceptive amplification and proprioceptive loss. The tactile relationship and orientation of the body in space obtains, accrues and loses its connections. The result is both and amplification and alienation of the relationship between the body and the histories of violence enfleshed by the performance. If, as Avery Gordon suggests, ghosting ushers forth edicts of history to attend to the damage to which they attest, Abraham becomes and transforms the ghosts of these violent experiences through a kinetic confrontation.[28] Abraham's repeated and eradicated ghosting enacts a tragic return of a violent past that also faces reckoning. The tragic echoes of lynching in gang violence, repurposed as misogyny is addressed and mourned despite their controversial linking. Abraham's occasional low swift swiping of his hands like an inverted windshield wiper accompanied by an intentional focus or turn of focus from his head subtly swipes away a returning paradigm of violence only for it to capture his attention elsewhere. At the end of the film reduced, returned back to one, a unitary Abraham slows to a tense calm, a deceleration to an energetic stillness before a fade to black. The visual calming does not resolve the fragmentation of Abraham's querying and responsive body. He constitutes in himself a loving bridge toward further engagement via a reunified selfhood.

Frantz Fanon's third person consciousness is choreographed here in a new configuration of emerging selfhood. Fanon observes that a fixed epidermal schema, a complex social assignment of the meaning of blackness, alienates a subject from himself such that he becomes both unknown and observer to himself in a triplicate that removes "I," from "You," from an embattled, racialized "S/he." The subject looks at "himself" as if from afar served up strange to one's own gaze through the estranged, racist gaze of another.[29] In this mix of this alienated self-perception, the subject is bequeathed the task of searching for an authentic self. In the *Dance Response Project*'s *Blood on The Leaves* Abraham's embodiment of three selves at once dramatizes the play of alienation within a Black reality in the context of violence. The nausea of estrangement results not only racism, but also from legacies of racialized violence including that which is perpetrated within Black communities. Yet the looking is both inward and outward, and in the film the looking is his own within the context of persistent violence through history. The mourning of early 20th century lynching sounded in Holiday's activist dirge hears a fractured, disjunctive millennial echo in C-Murder's rousing war-cry of casual belligerent animosity. The musical scoring forges and critiques this internal, social, and transtemporal contemplation and self-

construction. In his triplicate apparition Abraham incorporates the darkness of annihilation while also acting out an emergence of self as a critical interlocutor to the historical and musical narrative. Such an emergence is not always romantic or utopic – "fuck them other niggas" as gang violence against a rival testifies to a rowdy persistence of the perpetration of murder. Violence is never over. In dancing at the temporal intersection of violence, Abraham turns the gaze of violence upon violence. In the space of destruction and intimate annihilations, he suggests love of self as his repeated inward gaze conjures more self-attending selves. Drawing on the interpersonal trans-historical magnetism and redress of *I am Sold*, the triplicate selves in *Blood on The Leaves* address and take on violence in order to redress it with a possibility of kinder proximity. The third person consciousness becomes then not alienated from the self but engaged in a scopophilic calling of the self to the self through, despite, and instead of conditions racism, self-alienation, and annihilation. The provocation is towards an eradication of violence replaced with the thickness of a multiplying self, characterized by introspection, thick being-ness, and self-love. He expands, multiplies, and returns to himself.

Abraham and Schneider's *Blood on The Leaves* layers pain, conflict, sadness, and love within the self that resonates towards the viewer across the flat boundary of the screen from a-temporal digital spacelessness to socio-historically situated viewer. Even as film is understood to enact an affective response upon the viewer, Abraham's resonant feeling is also shared with himself. Though he dances alone he becomes a built in audience to his own multiple and complex displays. The tripling of music and choreography plays with and upon the gestures of Abraham's own body constructing new kinetic chords, new danced melodies, even as he acknowledges, repeats and revises violences through the musical narrative.

Kyle Abraham and Carrie Schneider collaboratively reconstruct the gaze towards loving blackness in their kinetic and visual performance of sensuous blackness seeing and seen to envision human love and loving liberation. Perhaps like Abel Meerpol and Billie Holiday in collaboration on the iconic radical 1939 protest song *Strange Fruit*, Abraham and Schneider strive towards a radical revisioning of blackness and discourses on race. If we emphasize the interraciality of their collaborative "looking," the resonance then with Fanon's 1967 racial structure of abjection becomes further revised. They revise white supremacist orientations of envisioning blackness by incorporating a white gaze in Schneider's camera work. Fanon's "Look a Negro!" interpellation that asserts a third person racial bodily schema becomes revised and not at all a gesture of abjection echoed strangely in Meerpol and Holiday's *Strange Fruit*, but a collaborative magnetic looking that casts a loving optic in and towards interracial connection against racism and racial hierarchy. Their looking in their kinetic visual play animates a theater of closeness and trust in a restructure of racialized lookings, identifications, and interactions. Thus when Schneider edits K/A's gaze to look with and upon himself at his

own multiple engagements with (or "lookings" at) black histories and histories of black discourse, she witnesses, participates in, and accompanies his self-reflection in a collective looking and concomitant reflection of history. In an extension of racialized looking beyond binary concerns, together they also approach intimacy, alienation, and desire on various terms including race, gender, sexuality, sociality, and history.

Both *Dance Response* pieces offer contemporary contemplations of racial histories towards love and self-love. *I am Sold* supersedes historical taboos surrounding interracial and homosexual love and desire in its tender contemplation of intimacy. Intimacy is multiplied beyond dualities towards poly-amorous sociality and loving communion with four entangled hands. The kind entanglements grow. The fingers substantiate love beyond any mode of individual desire. Through a likewise multiplication of subjects, Abraham confronts the unspeakable connection between anti-black terrorism in American lynching, the celebration of murder of blacks in urban gang violence, and the disjunctive appropriation of these towards toxic Black masculinity. He entangles his own body in the interplay of histories and discourses. Abraham and Schneider's risky multiplicities in both pieces never remain discrete but meet in gestures of unity-a holding of hands and return to an engaged, unified self, Abraham broaches distances of racial antipathy and difference through increasing intimacy between multiplied bodies and offering a visual, haptic seduction of the viewer.

Abraham is an open interlocutor about his work except, typically, regarding the nature of its politics. Instead he allows the work to offer trenchant social critique and transformative provocation to the audience without rendering his own political voice towards interpretation or exegesis. The political content of the work speaks for itself in complex layers of kinetic communication and kinesthetic exhortation. And it does, but not in a way that might be familiar to followers of dance who expect protest and instruction from Black artists. Abraham's kinetic engagements with injustice spin trajectories that complicate race, racism, gender, sexuality, desire and love. The intimacy of the affective environments created in Abraham and Schneider's *Dance Response Project* promote a reconsideration of subjective inter-relationality towards personal and social transformation. The multiplicities and repetitions of the body, as many or one, address love and community. Community expands and comes together in *I am Sold*. Embodied in a multiplicity of one, community splits off and reunites to confront multiple histories and embodiments of violence sounded in Black music in *Blood on The Leaves*. As an instantiation of different overlapping discursive intraracial, and production's interracial, communities in content and context, *Blood on The Leaves* also expands community and intersectional interrelationality. Choreography and visual technique take up how can one be, be with, can carry all of these loving selves in transformative unity. Through tension and crisis the love of and loving self, the love of

and loving others establish the possibility of reimagined and reformed ways of being and relationships to violent histories.

Biography

Stephanie Leigh Batiste is Associate Professor of Black Studies and English at The University of California at Santa Barbara. Her specialty areas include Black Performance Studies, African American Literature and Culture, American Studies, Race and Racism, and Cultural Studies. Batiste's research examines the operation of blackness and post-coloniality as subject positions in scholarship on race challenging the notion of the abject and the operation of subalterity. Her first book, *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression Era African American Performance* (Duke University Press, 2011) focuses on the relationship between power and identity in black performance cultures to reimagine black subjectivity and citizenship as an engagement with dominant historical systems of thought and critical streams in American Studies.

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Notes

[1] Accessed on Vimeo.com between 2014 and 2017. The Dance Response Project has six videos available on Vimeo and carrieschneider.net. *Blood on The Leaves*, making seven, has since been removed from Vimeo. See also www.abrahaminmotion.org and http://carrieschneider.net/projects/danceresponse.html#.

[2] Batiste, *Darkening Mirrors*, 176-182.

[3] Ibid., xi-xx.

[4] Ibid., 181.

[5] Email exchange between author and Carrie Schneider 4/11/2018.

[6] Conversation with Kyle Abraham, March 2016.

[7] This description appears on the *Dance Response Project* videos on Vimeo.com https://vimeo.com/84924942.

[8] Ultimately the collaborations appeared art museums in Nashville and Chicago allowing the pieces' performance lives to grow as visual art. The two shared residencies at Jacob's Pillow (Becket, MA) in 2010 and On the Boards (Seattle, WA) in 2011. http://www.carrieschneider.net/biography.html

[9] Marks, *Touch*, xvii.

[10] Laura Mulvey articulates a scopophilic gaze that manifests, a pleasure in looking at another body as an erotic object, and an auto-eroticism, a feeling of sensuality and sex in the viewer, inspired in its original articulation by the female form. See Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Here the visual attraction and imbrication results from an intense erotic gaze upon the male form.

[11] Barker, 12-13.

[12] Marks, xiii, 2.

[13] Ibid., 159.

[14] Kaciano Barbosa Gadelha attempts to provide a foundation for queer visuality online through a distant assessment of gay online dating behavior. He finds that engagements around gay desire online promote social interactivity both in online and physical space. See Gadelha, "The Persistence of Desire."

[15] Kaja Silverman, "Fassbinder and Lacan," 278. See also Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*.

[16] Kyle Abraham and Carrie Schneider *Dance Response* Video: *I am Sold*, https://vimeo.com/84924942. Accessed July 2017; March 2018.

[17] Audre Lorde's canonical essay "Uses of the Erotic" offers a feminist reading of the power of the erotic as a force to transform society.

[18] James Baldwin offers a model of radical love as the only pathway away form violence, racism and imperialism towards social transformation in *The Fire Next Time*, 8, 43, 95-99.

[19] Barker, *The Tactile Eye*, 119.

[20] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 18, 136-8.

[21] West, *Blood on the Leaves*.

[22] It is very difficult to understand C-Murder's song as ironic and critical or just about verbal play, as is often accomplished in a purportedly resistant practice of claiming

aggressive black music as also resistant to forces of black annihilation. The characteristics of the song preclude recuperation. The simultaneous violence as social glue and the insistence on the deaths of enemies constructs this social content.

[23] Johnson, *Sounds of Solidarity, Spaces of Conflict*, xiv.

[24] Marks, 152.

[25] Deger, *Shimmering Screens*, 89-90.

[26] Marks, xviii.

[27] Mulvey argues that the scopophilic relationship between the viewer and the screen is auto erotic per the viewer's solitary haptic relationship to the screen. Dynamic sensation occurs in her own body. See Mulvey, 46-57.

[28] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.

[29] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90-92.

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Dis/Orientation: Rhythmic Bodies and Corporeal Orature in *The Fits*

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Abstract

In Anna Rose Holmer's 2015 film *The Fits*, 11-year old protagonist Toni is depicted as moving between the steady rhythms of the local boys' boxing club and the highly syncopated, vertiginous, call-and-response rhythms of the local girls' drill dance team, all of which culminates into a polyrhythmic, contagious, and seemingly uncontrollable, uncontainable, and indescribable form of fitful corporeal fainting spell. Since the film does not overly depend on dialogue, the film's affective-ness relies on the protagonists' expressive and active corporeality, as that which moves in between different spaces and rhythms. Often described as a coming-of-age story, in this article, I will be looking at The Fits as a dance film in order to examine the film through its beats and rhythms by drawing specifically on Thomas DeFrantz' concept of corporeal orature, Julian Henriques' notion of affective vibration, Imani Perry's notion of the cypher, and Brenda Dixon Gottschild's concept of polycentrism/polyrhythmicality. In relation to this I propose that spectators are drawn into this movie by a constant negotiation of movement as that which sits at the border of consciousness, giving access to a spectatorial experience, in which the moving, rhythmic bodies-on-screen serve simultaneously as points of orientation and disorientation.

Keywords: *The Fits*, corporeal orature, rhythmic corporeality, cypher, dis/orientation

In Anna Rose Holmer's 2015 film *The Fits*,[1] set at the Lincoln Community Recreational Center in Cincinnati's West End neighborhood, 11-year old protagonist Toni (Royalty Hightower) is depicted as moving between the steady rhythms of the local boys' boxing club[2] and the highly syncopated, vertiginous, call-and-response rhythms of the local girls' drill dance team, The Lionesses,[3] all of which culminates into a polyrhythmic, contagious, and seemingly uncontrollable, uncontainable, and indescribable form of fitful corporeal fainting spell. As Manohla Dargis has described it in her *New York Times* review, the girls "move — fluidly, ferociously and with escalating mystery — to their own transporting beat."[4] Since the film does not overly depend on dialogue and spoken word, the film's affective-ness relies on the protagonists' expressive and active corporeality, as that which moves in-between different spaces and rhythms, in order to draw the spectator into the film's fold. My use of fold here is indebted to Giuliana Bruno's notion

of the screen surface as an "enveloping fabric"[5] and what she refers to as the "haptic sense"[6] which reaches into this cinematic fabric and is touched by its "folds of experience."[7] It's something that resonates across different reviews of the film, for example when Tasha Robinson from The Verge responds to the film's touching fabric with "But The Fits is all about the experience of the moment and it winds up as feeling remarkably immersive and lyrical,"[8] an experience she locates in the way that *The Fits* feels like a dance film, though it is mostly described as a coming-of-age story.[9]

Taking this observation as my cue, in this article, I will analyze *The Fits* as a dance film to account for and examine the film's enveloping fabric through its beats and rhythms by drawing specifically on Thomas DeFrantz's concept of corporeal orature, Julian Henriques' notion of affective vibration, Imani Perry's notion of the cypher, and Brenda Dixon Gottschild's concept of polycentrism/polyrhythmicality. In relation to this I propose that spectators are drawn into this movie by a constant negotiation of movement as that which sits at the border of consciousness, giving access to a lived spectatorial experience, in which the moving, rhythmic bodies-on-screen serve simultaneously as points of orientation and disorientation.

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed points out that orientation and disorientation as modalities of perception are inherently linked, because moments of disorientation are needed in order to become aware of "what it means to be orientated in the first place."[10] As a way of inhabiting space, the space of one's body as well as the spaces and places surrounding the body, the joint encounters of dis/orientation locate the body in space and time, in the here and the now. Whereas Ahmed locates orientation in the feeling of being at home, or feeling the familiar, and finding one's way,[11] disorientation dislocates the sense of home as unfamiliar, "as the 'out of place' or 'out of line.'"[12] In relation to *The Fits* rhythmic textures, rhythmicality functions to both orientate screen and spectating bodies in the familiar and the regular beat of finding/knowing one's way, while simultaneously dislocating them to feel out of place and out of line. Spectators thus move in-between a visibly/seen perception of the film to a rhythmically/felt perception, which is centered and focused through the eyes of protagonist Toni and the point of view of black girlhood. The movement in-between the visible/seen and the rhythmic/felt is important here as it decenters and de-focuses the orientating eye in favor of a disorientating haptic-rhythmic sense-perception that destabilizes what it means to "see" and hence "know" through the way the film invokes how to "sense" and "feel" its vibrations.

This decentering, defocusing, and disorientating of both the eye of the spectator and the ear of the listener in favor of a haptic-rhythmic sense-perception that involves and envelops the whole spectatorial body can be tied to the notion of sonic blackness, an "afro-sonic-philo-sophy"[13] as Tavia Nyong'o has called it in his reflection on Alexander Weheliye's book *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*[14] and Julian

Henriques' book *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing*[15] in relation to black sound studies.[16] Looking at how orality and music as "two main techniques of cultural communication in African America"[17] have been altered by the invention of sound recording technologies at the end of the 19th century, Weheliye establishes the concept of sonic Afro-modernity as a mode of existence for black subjectivity in/against Western modernity.[18] As he argues,

> locating the subject in the sonic grants a quite different notion of this concept – which does not mean that the subject as a linguistic category is rendered null and void; it just relocates to a new analytic neighborhood without losing its ties to old friends – one that does not posit meaning and/or intelligibility as its teleological end point...[19]

Sonic specificity and sound become important here as it establishes the subject not purely in linguistic and visual terms, but through hearing and sensing as a way to dislocate a monocausal narrative for the black subject. Paying attention to the sonic-haptic then tilts perception of its axis through dis/location as a modality of dis/orientation.

It is similar to what Julian Henriques describes as "thinking through sound"[20] in *Sonic Bodies*, in which thinking through sound and its auditory vibrations is established as a "way of thinking, a process of knowledge, and a gnosis,"[21] a technique that he is sounding out in his investigation of the auditory culture of Jamaican reggae dancehall sessions. Thinking through sound here is intimately tied to the experience of the body and its embodiment of being in the world of sound, surrounded by its textures, playing through the senses, with but also against the eye. As he argues,

> sound is always a dynamic event, forever incomplete and continually in a state of change. Thus, thinking through sound offers a way to voice criticisms of the status quo and raise questions, in the way that images are often used to settle them. In the mechanics of auditory propagation, noise is necessarily a disturbance...[22]

Again, the sonic is established as a mode of dis/orientation in the way it skewers visual perception as finding one's way by way of sound that seeks to disturb, or dislocate and disorientate through an immersion in the complexity of sound textures. To return to the *The Fits*, both the idea of the sonic subject as well as the notion of the sonic body, are an important aspect of the film's immersive and dis/orientating quality, which, as I said before, seeks to de-center and de-focus the orientating eye in order to envelop spectators in its rhythmic-haptic patterning of cinematic space and time. In order to account for the dis/orientation of the visual through the sonic as understood in black sound studies, the following analysis seeks to be thinking *The Fits* and its affective corporeal orature through rhythm.

Getting in to and out of Rhythm

When Julian Henriques talks about affect in his article, "The Vibrations of Affect and Their Propagation on a Night Out on Kingston's Dancehall Scene," he suggests that "affect is expressed rhythmically – through relationships, reciprocations, resonances, syncopations and harmonies,"[23] or what he calls "rhythmic patterns of frequencies."[24] Rhythm in this case is particularly used to describe the possibility of affect to transfer across the surfaces of multiple media and pass through bodies by way of movement and sound. As such, it is related to a visceral experience of multiple bodies, who experience the rhythm and vibration of movement and sound, individually and together, as instances of "transsensorial perception."[25] In this sense, rhythm can be seen as what Henrique calls "a dynamic connective tissue,"[26] which circulates as a form of collective sensation or to quote Sara Ahmed, "as impressions left by others."[27] Rhythm as such is in excess and beyond conscious thought, a vibration that ebbs and flows between multiple modes of perception and being.[28] Rhythm as vibration, connection, and movement is thus linked to the concept of kinesthesia . Particularly from a dancer's perspective, kinesthesia is the awareness of the position and movement of parts of the body by means of its sensory organs, or proprioceptors, in the muscles and joints. Thus, kinesthesia means being orientated towards movement and sense perception, both of which pick up on rhythm. In that way, kinesthesia can be understood as a 'sixth sense,' the very particular sense of movement perception through a corporeal rhythmicality. As Naomi Bragin argues, kinesthesia "produces visceral knowledge" that "does not begin as an object outside the body but develops through a co-constitutive process of moving and meaning making."[29] Through kinesthesia , this visceral knowledge passes rhythmically between bodies through dance and movement.

Which brings me to Thomas DeFrantz's notion of corporeal orature. In his chapter "The Black Beat Made Visible: Hip Hop Dance and Body Power," DeFrantz states, "All African diaspora dance, including black social dance, may be likened to verbal language most in the dance's conspicuous employment of "call and response" with the body responding to and provoking the voice of the drum."[30] He goes on to state that

> If we can accept that the dance responds to the drum, not solely in a reflective manner, but within a configuration of communicative collaboration, we can understand how dance is performative, mirroring the way in which speech may be equated with action.[31]

Corporeal orature as a form of communicative collaboration aligns movement with speech in relation to the beat or rhythm of the drum. Moreover, through a call and response structure, movements might cite or signify contexts beyond the dance, or beyond the timeframe in which the dance happens. These corporeal citations are rhythmic "calls" in themselves, and are read and acknowledged by other dancers, who respond to them in kind with dance-speech-rhythm actions of their own, all of which

produces a form of kinetic orality and affective physicality. It also produces and transmits the knowledge inherent in the dance movement/dance style/dance community.

In *The Fits*, the girls of The Lionesses drill dance team communicate and relate to each other through the movement of their bodies, both in sync as part of the group's formation and more individually in call-response battle-communication structures. As one of the two spaces that Toni is navigating rhythmically throughout the movie, the drill dance team as a site for communicative relations is significant for the overall framing of black girlhood within the cinematic space. As Patricia White has pointed out in her article "Bodies That Matter: Black Girlhood in *The Fits*," drill "has an extensive history in black communities,"[32] alongside other dance team cultures like majorette and step. Marquicia Jones-Wood, the founder of Q-Kidz, the actual drill team behind all the roles and appearances of *The Fits*' Lionesses, has started the drill dance community program in the Cincinnati West End's predominantly black working-class neighborhood almost 30 years ago to provide girls with a place to go to and feel a sense of belonging through the discipline and community of engaging with drill.[33] *The Fits* focus on black girlhood points to the complexity of erasure and reproduction of black female adolescence in American life and American cinema,[34] as Rizvana Bradley has noted in her article "Black Cinematic Gesture and the Aesthetics of Contagion," and as I would add popular screendance narratives that center girlhood.[35] Belonging to a community of black girls extends beyond merely dancing together in the film as Toni, through bonding with the other girls, also starts to participate in, experiment with, and thus navigate rituals of girlhood: applying her first nail polish, getting her ears pierced in the bathroom of the community center, and overhearing the drill team captains talking about boys in the girls' bathroom. It is the specific rhythmicality of the drill, however, that calls to her at first.

Toni's first visual encounter with the girls as a group occurs at the start of the movie when she is getting water for the boys' boxing gym upstairs, dressed in a light grey sleeveless shirt, light grey tracksuit pants, black sneakers, her black hair styled in Dutch braids falling past her lower back. While she is rolling the water container up the slope in the community center in a steady 1-2, 1-2 rhythm, the camera firmly fixed on her back bend over the container she is rolling, the first point of contact with the girls is aural. Rather than seeing them, Toni, and by extension the spectator, hear the girls, talking, giggling, chanting, in a mix of overlapping sounds and voices. When the camera cuts from the medium shot of Toni to a full shot of the scene, four of the Lionesses are standing in the hallway in front of the room they are rehearsing in, bouncing, hair-flipping, moving, communicating through voice and body. The moment they sense and then see Toni all movement ceases and there is a moment of stillness where Toni and three of the girls form a loose circle around one of the girls sitting on the floor. In contrast to Toni, all of the girls are barefoot, wearing leggings with sleeveless, formfitting crop tops or singlets, and their black straightened hair is either worn open or in a ponytail. This tableau is broken up by a drumming track that starts playing in the rehearsal room, a call for the

four Lionesses to respond to by moving into the dance rehearsal space, leaving Toni behind in an empty hallway, booming with the syncopated rhythms of the drumming track.

The next edit takes the spectator to a set of closed double doors with inset narrow rectangular windows, framed in a medium shot, from behind which the drumming track can still be heard. A moment later Toni walks into the frame, approaching the windows in the doors, responding to the call of the drums. The next edit frames Toni's face in a close up shot, looking through the window, before cutting to what Toni is looking in on. The scene before her eyes and ears is one of the call-response conversations between the two team captains, Legs (Makyla Burnam) and Karisma (Inayah Rodgers), who, similar to the girls in the hallway before, are barefoot, wearing leggings, formfitting singlets, and their hair past shoulder length; Legs' black hair is completely straight with blue highlights at the ends and Karisma's black hair is slightly wavy with red highlights at the ends. Both team captains are battling-conversing to the syncopated rhythms of the drumming track, surrounded by the rest of the team cheering them on. The resonating syncopations of the music and the syncopated movements of the two dancers speak to her so much that she joins the team to access and learn this form of embodied knowledge and communication, to join the rhythmic encounter, to become part of the fold of the group. Rhythm is the connective tissue here, providing knowledge and community, orientating bodies in space and time.

To become a point of orientation, rhythm as connective tissue and knowledge has to be physically absorbed. The first synchronized section of the drill routine Toni learns when she joins The Lionesses to become part of the family fold, is called "the clap back call," which, within the movie, provides one of the rhythmic-connective hooks, beside the battle-conversations, and later the fitful convulsive episodes. To learn the routine, Legs and Karisma line up the six new members of The Lionesses, or "crabs" as they are called in the movie. Clad for the occasion of joining the older girls in the drill team, all of the crabs are barefoot, wearing leggings and either a formfitting singlet, t-shirt, or long-sleeved shirt. In contrast to the rest of the crabs, Maia (Lauren Gibson), as the tallest girl in line, is also the only one wearing her shoulder-length black hair straightened and open, while the others are wearing either natural hair pulled up in a top bun, braids pulled back in a ponytail, or in Beezy's (Alexis Neblett) case cornrows ending in two bun puffs on top of her head.

Framed by a full shot, the crabs remain in their line, while Legs walks out of the frame to demonstrate the choreography. Whereas the crabs see the movements that Legs demonstrates, in the first instance, spectators only hear the articulation of the movements through her voice, calling out, "step-around-step-step-around-out-up-cut-up-back/back/back/back-snatch-punch-punch-around-down-step-step-around-punch." After the initial show/tell, Legs counts in the girls, "5-6-7-go" and the girls start mirroring

"the clap back call" twice, responding to the sound of Legs' voice. As a point of orientation, Legs voice provides the rhythmic frame, calling to spectators to follow along. Within this sonic framing, however, the visual frame slightly disorientates her calls, as each of the six crabs responds in a slightly different rhythm to Legs' voice and also each other. By not yet being fully in sync, the rhythmicality of the routine is layered while crabs and spectators are striving for orientation.

Whereas the syncopated rhythms of the drill dance team, the synchronized routines and the battle-conversations alike, provide moments of orientation, the fitful convulsive episodes disrupt the orientating flow of the group and function as moments of disorientation for Toni, The Lionesses, and the spectators. After both captains have been overcome by the fits, the opacity as to the cause of which has left a disorientating mark on the scene, Toni, her new friends Maia, Beezy, and two of the other crabs, who are a part of the fold of the dance team on the one hand, yet not part of the fold of the experience of those who have made it through the fits on the other hand, are encountering another battle-conversation between two other Lionesses in a corridor. This battle-conversation ends with one of the girls moving from the battle-conversation space into a fitful, convulsive episode, leaving one part of the fold to join another. The camera in full shot opens on the five crabs sitting in a circle on the floor, while four of the older team members stand in a loose circle opposite, all of them chatting and giggling, wearing rehearsal gear consisting of leggings and formfitting shirts and singlets, hair straightened, with one of the girls combing out the hair of another one. It is a self-contained moment in which the sounds of chatting and giggling in conjunction with the underlying melody of the score, played on wind instruments saturates the sonic *mis-en-scene* of the shot, without spectators being able to discern any particular dialogue from the conversations, bar the occasional word that sticks out. This moment is visually disrupted by an edit that shifts the focus on the four older Lionesses in a medium shot. Against the sonic backdrop of the chatting crabs and the score, one of the girls can be heard saying, "oh, I got moves. Let's go," to which the others reply, "I wanna see." With this call for dance-speech-rhythm-action, two girls move into the center of the corridor with the camera following along in a medium shot, focusing on the corpo-reality of the initial caller, first over the shoulder of the respondent, and then through an edit from behind the girl, who initiated the call. She finishes her call-response with "WHAT!", while jumping into the other girl's face with an explosive jump-punch. The responding girl nods in acknowledgment of the call-challenge and begins her dance-speech-rhythm-response.

At this point, the syncopated-corporeal response is further heightened by an increased noise level of the spectating girls commenting on the action with "hit it!" and "uhhhhhhh" as well as the increasing volume of the wind instrument score. Then the camera cuts to the crabs on the floor, watching in awe and excitement, encapsulated by Beezy calling "hot sauce!" and someone from outside the visual frame calling, "come on girl, you can

do better." The camera remains focused on the crabs as the convulsive episode starts, so that spectators get their first indication of the girls' disorientation from a corporeal shift in the spectating girls, huddling together, grabbing each other, confusion showing on their faces. As part of a shot reverse shot sequence, the camera cuts to the convulsing girl framed in a low-angle medium shot, upper body tilted backwards, arms raised, eyes closed, shaking uncontrollably. The moment she sinks down the camera cuts back to Toni, Beezy, and Maia on the floor, who huddle even closer together, while the score intensifies, picking up the trembling corpo-reality of the fits through a sonic corpo-aurality of quivering string instruments, drowning out the eerie melody of the wind instruments. This scene works so seamlessly that the spectatorial experience moves from being orientated towards the kinetic-rhythmic corpo-reality of the battle-conversation, its corporeal orature, to a moment of disorientation when the convulsions begin, made even more disorientating through the score's sonic corpo-aurality. This interplay heightens the tension between orientation and disorientation, between the corporeal rhythmic patterns of frequencies and the irregular sonic and corporeal resonances and syncopations of the convulsions, the tensions between one fold and another. In both folds knowledge as a form of corporeal orature, its corpo-orality, so to speak, is passed on through movement and sound. Similar to learning the drill routine and "the clap back call" for the competition and the parade, the convulsions that contagiously travel from dancing body to dancing body convey knowledge through their affective physicality, too.

Inside and Outside of the Polyrhythmic Circularity of the Cypher

In black social dance corpo-orality happens within the space of the cypher, as an enclosed space in which knowledge, interiority and exteriority, and rhythm is organized. As Imani Perry explains in *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*, the cypher is "a conceptual space in which a heightened consciousness exists."[36] It is also an actual circular space made up of bodies of spectators, who form a circle around performers, in the space of which performers show off their movement skills within a call-response structure. Inside the cypher, performers claim and present an insider's perspective and expertise, meaning an intimate knowledge, experience, and a form of belonging to a movement community. They perform an understanding of the embodied code of movement and its rhythms. Since the form of the cypher organizes interiority and exteriority, for spectators, who are not performing nor are intending to perform, there is always a certain inaccessibility to the experience. However, spectators still phenomenologically or kinesthetically encounter the movement through the mediated rhythmical vibrations across the interface of the vibe of the crowd, or if we are talking about screens, the interface of the screen.

The Fits is made up of multiple cyphers. As I mentioned before, Toni first experiences the kinetic orality and affective physicality of The Lionesses through encountering the battle-conversation between Legs and Karisma, in which the competing girls are surrounded by the rest of the team, all of whom are looking in on the action. As team captains and hence the most experienced dancers on the team, Legs and Karisma perform interiority in the cypher through their expertise and intimate knowledge of the dance movements and the community of girls they belong to. Legs and Karisma are also the first to exhibit *The Fits*' convulsive episodes, and in each case, the other girls form a ring around them to watch. In Karisma's case, part of her fitful episode is additionally shown through the other girls' mobile phone screens as an additional layer of mediated distance for spectators. Karisma's screen dance body is thus twice removed from the spectating eye, blurry in the background of the mobile phone screens that depict her form through a much smaller frame. The surrounding girls while being able to claim a certain amount of interiority through being part of the dance team's community are, at that stage, positioned as not experienced and knowing enough yet to claim the inner space of the cypher, the interiority of the cinematic-mobile frame. At this moment, they experience the fits only through the rhythmicality of the convulsions of Legs and Karisma's bodies and the accompanying sounds.

Before Toni joins The Lionesses, she is even further removed from, or exterior to the movements and rhythms of that space, being not just at the edge of the cypher but completely outside of it, separated by a door, looking in through the surface of the glass window. Toni however, is not unfamiliar with the heightened space of consciousness a cypher provides, since the boxing ring is another example of the cypher that organizes belonging through affective physicality and kinetic orality. The boxing rink provides the other significant communal space within the movie that has an equally extensive history within black communities.[37] As Theresa Runstedtler notes in her book *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line*, since the early 1800s, black pugilists were articulating and engaging with images of an assertive and independent masculinity that "emerged from the subaltern, homosocial spaces of the diaspora" and engaged in "a subversive camaraderie that cut against the normative grain of the white imperial order."[38] In the space of the boxing rink at the community center, the boys perform and practice rituals of boyhood, similar to that of the girls, not just through their boxing training sessions, but bonding over more mundane activities like lifting weights, eating pizza, and talking about girls. Again, it is the rhythmicality of boxing that Toni specifically relates to in this space and particularly the easy camaraderie that boxing as a corporeal communicative practice creates between her and her brother Jermaine (Da'Sean Minor), who is passing on knowledge through movement. This image is established right at the beginning of the movie when Jermaine is working with Toni inside the cypher of the boxing ring. Moreover, Toni's movements through the individual spaces she inhabits can also be described as circular. Moving from the boxing ring for

boxing practice to the gymnasium for dance practice to various outside spaces around the Lincoln Community Recreational Center's Cincinnati West End neighborhood for cardio training, including dancing on an overpass along the way, hanging out with her friends, to going home in the evening with her brother to return to the centercenter the next day, creates its own cypher through a circularity of daily live and temporality within the filmic space. This circularity serves as a point of orientation for the spectator (and Toni) amongst the moments of disorientation that come with each fitful episode.

The circularity of this experience is intensified through the film's use of rhythm, or rather polyrhythm. If we think about rhythm as what the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes as "regularity in the repetition in time or space of an action, process, feature, condition, event, etc." and "continuity of movement or delivery; pace, flow, stride,"[39] polyrhythm is the simultaneous combination of two or more contrasting rhythms, intensifying the overall delivery, pace, flow, and stride. The experience of polyrhythm is linked to what Brenda Dixon-Gottschild refers to as polycentrism in her book *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance*, in which polycentrism is one of the five principles of an African aesthetic visible in American performance. Where polyrhythm is about embracing contrasting rhythms, polycentrism means that movement can originate from any body part and multiple shifting centers operate at the same time, inherently linking polycentrism and polyrhythm.[40] This creates an intensified affective experience through what she calls the principle of "high-affect juxtaposition,"[41] signifying a shift, or re-orientation, in mood, attitude, and movement. For spectators, it results in constantly shifting modes of orientation and disorientation, "an encounter of opposites," as another principle of black performance, in which conflict, difference, and discord is incorporated rather than removed.[42] As such the modality of spectatorial dis/orientation is tied to the praxis of the corporeal orature of black performance aesthetics, its conflicting, yet encompassing polyrhythms, their corpo-aurality, corpo-reality, and the resulting corpo-orality of rhythms within the frame of the cypher.

The corpo-orality of polyrhythm and polycentrism is visualized on multiple levels in *The Fits*' textual spatial fabric, in which cinematography and editing function as the framing exterior to rhythmicality. Through slow pacing camerawork and long duration between edits the camera is lingering and hovering, drawing out each individual moment on screen besides what is happening within the frame of each shot and each scene. Erin Manning refers to this quality of stretching the fabric of temporality, of "languidly holding movement"[43] as the "elasticity of the almost," which is, in her words, "the intensive extension of the movement, a moment when anything can happen, ... No step has been taken, and yet in this elastic the microperception of every possible step can almost be felt."[44] The rhythmicality of the elastic, lingering camerawork is intensified by the unhurried pace of the editing, creating a steady rhythmic pattern of frequency that expresses an affective suspension in the way it stretches the film's temporality to the

maximum by drawing each moment out, by stretching the fabric wide, by extending the visibility of the beat, to refer back to Bruno[45] and DeFrantz.[46]

This exterior rhythmicality is linked to the interior rhythmicality and multiple centers of the film, which is created through the screen bodies and the different spaces they inhabit. We get two types of rhythmic patterns of frequency: the boys boxing club rhythm and the girls drill team rhythm. In the boxing room, as one center, the rhythmicality of the pace and the movements is more regular in its repetition, as when Toni does her sit ups or pull ups, which she counts on the up with an exhale, while going down with an inhale. When she boxes with her brother at the start of the movie, the rhythmic pattern goes "slip slip - roll; 1 2-3 roll; 1-2 step over; 1 2-3 roll; 1-2-3-4 step over," which creates a steady, regular repetition and pattern. This steady rhythm is contrasted with the way that rhythmicality plays out in the gymnasium where the dance team practices, which functions as another center. While the team captains use the usual dance 8 count bracket to count in the movement with "5, 6, 7, 8, 1," or "5, 6, 7, go," with no more counts being used after that, the pattern and frequency of the movement does not fit easily within the 8-count frame, they used to count the girls in, because the unique phrasing and rhythmicality of the moves cannot be contained within regular patterns. Instead the moves are actualized through a loud, high energy, syncopated, staccato, and burst-full dynamic, that is narrated through images and sounds, rather than counts as described in the scene where the girls learn the clap back call routine. Toni, moving from one space-center to the other, provides the link between these contrasting interior rhythms, all of which come to find a place within her body. This is not only visualized in her fit at the end of the film, to which I will come back further down, but also in a scene almost halfway through the movie, where Toni is caught between cardio training on the overpass and practicing the clap back call. The camera is following Toni, dressed in a light grey hoodie and light grey track pants, carrying the bag with her boxing equipment in a medium wide shot as she walks towards the overpass. At the top of the first flight of stairs she stops, drops her bag, turns, and starts running up and down the second flight of stairs. All the while the camera is tracking her in a medium wide shot, without interrupting her progress through editing, all the way up on to the overpass, where Toni starts jumping jacks, before moving into rehearsing the clap back call.

There are multiple layered rhythms at play here, both through soundtrack and movement. At first, Toni slowly walks up the first flight of stairs carrying her boxing equipment bag, which she puts down at the top of that flight, where the movement then pauses for a short amount of time. When she starts running up the second flight of stairs to the overpass, her slow walk speeds up and intensifies to a 1-2, 1-2, 1-2 running rhythm up and down the stairs. When she is on the overpass and starts doing jumping jacks, the regular 1-2, 1-2, 1-2 rhythmic pattern of frequency continues, before she pauses, turns, and starts the clap back call. It is here, where the rhythmicality gets more complicated, both through the way the movement is actualized, organized, and repeated, as well as

through the additional layer of sound. While Toni is doing the jumping jacks with its 1-2 basic rhythmicality, another beat gradually starts filling the sound-scape. This beat is accompanying Toni in the jumping jacks as well as in the clap back call, through its "DA-dadada / DA-dadada / DA-dadada" syncopation. As she repeatedly moves through the clap back call, inhabiting the movements, rhythms, and knowledge more and more with each repetition, all patterns of frequency gradually intensify, building up in momentum through the repetition of the dance routine and the sound. The sonic rhythmic patterns of frequency, which contrast each other and Toni's corpo-reality throughout, are crucial to this intensification, as the syncopated percussive beat (DA-dadada) is joined by a slower, more deeply resonating beat (bum bum bum-bum / bum bum bum-bum), a rhythm section played on string instruments (de-de-de / de-de-de), and the wind instruments playing the eerie melody that accompanies Tony throughout the movie. Momentum and intensification is created through this layering of the corpo-aurality and corpo-reality of poly-rhythm/polycentrism: the exterior frame of the cinematography with its steady lingering hover; the cardio section with its steady, measured rhythmicality; and the dance routine with its high energy, syncopated, staccato, and burst-full dynamic all folding in on each other through Toni's performance. At this point, Toni moves from the very edge of the cypher, closer to its center, although she's not quite there yet.

It is at the very end of the movie, when Toni is finally going through her own convulsive fitful episode, that all of the different spaces, cyphers, and rhythm are eventually joined in her imagination, collapsing the multiple folds and fabrics of Toni's experience of community into each other.[47] The scene starts with a long shot framing Toni looking skywards standing in the middle of the drained pool from behind, to cut to a low-ish angle medium close up shot of her face and part of her upper body, from which the camera then revolves clockwise around Toni's contemplative reflective figure, cutting to a close up shot of her face in profile and ending on zooming in to an extreme close up of Toni's forehead, eyes, and nose to the first line of the lyrics of Kiah Victoria's song Aurora, "Must we choose to be slaves to gravity."[48] As this line is repeated, the camera and the editing take the convulsive episodic imagination through the different spaces of Toni's life, starting with an edit to her walking down the corridor of the community center with the camera focused on her bare feet in a medium shot. To the lyrics of the first verse, "we were born of the sun / out shine the moon / shouldn't we be light / shouldn't we be treasured,"[49] the camera follows Toni's walking feet through the community center as they begin to lift off the floor, walking on air. The presence of the other girls is announced sonically, through chattering voices and pattering feet, underlying the music, as they rush to meet her. The next edit takes the viewer to a medium wide shot of Toni's upper back in front of the drill dance team, who are slightly blurry in the frame, expressing signs of worry and distress through gasps and corporeal gestures signaling distress and recognition.

To the line "we choose to be slaves to gravity" and an accompanying whooshing sound of surprise from the girls, this edit quite literally drops Toni into the midst of the cypher of the fits, surrounded by the rest of the team. Interspersed with her convulsive body in the cypher, rhythmically contrasting the piano melody of the song and Kiah Victoria's mesmerizing voice, are imaginings of her in all the spaces she has gradually come to inhabit throughout the movie. She is simultaneously in all of them: the corridor of the community center connecting inside and outside as well as the boxing club and the dance rehearsal room; the overpass, where she strips off her training hoodie underneath which she wears her dance costume – a high-collard, sleeveless, blue, white, and gold sequined leotard over gold leggings, and gold jazz shoes – and is joined by the rest of the team in full costume for the drill routine; the cypher of the boxing ring, in which Toni is depicted dancing with her fellow crabs in full costume; and the drained pool, where the whole team is shown to move in sync and in formation with Toni in their midst, back to her in the corridor in the final throes of the fits. The film ends on the final repetition of the contrasting lyrics "we choose to be slaves to gravity / must we choose to be slaves to gravity,"[50] to which Toni drops out of her fitful episode into the arms of her fellow drill dance team members, a smile curling her lips before the camera cuts to a black screen and a moment of stillness before the closing credits start to roll.

(Poly)Rhythmic Dis/Orientation: A Dis/Conclusion

What does this mean for the spectator? As I said at the start, the movie reviews all identify specific spectatorship experiences in their descriptions. *The Verge*'s Tasha Robinson called the film immersive and lyrical; *New York Times*' Manohla Dargis describes it as atmospheric "through sumptuously textured visuals"[51]; Peter Travers from *Rolling Stone* remarks on the film's rhythms, comparing it to "a ballad that ranges from lyrical to startling"[52]; and in *Huck Magazine* Marta Bausells states that "The juxtaposition of dance routines and mysterious fits, ..., together with the film's minimalistic style, evocative cinematography, and intimate performances, makes for an uneasy but absorbing viewing experience."[53] In that same article, Bausells quotes director Anna Holmer's thoughts on the intended affective spectatorial experience, "it's a movie about bodies, so we end it with this very out-of-body experience. My hope is that the audience brings themselves to that moment and that it triggers for them that first moment of transcendence, that first moment of feeling like your universe is larger than you,"[54] reflecting on the film's potential lived spectatorship experience that involves a constant negotiation of moments of orientation and disorientation through the movement and fits of the screen dance bodies.

This transcendence, as I mentioned at the start, happens through the point of view of black girlhood, represented through girls whose skin tones range from the light brown skin tone of the initial caller of the hallway battle to the dark brown skin tone of Toni's

complexion and all the different ways in which the girls wear their hair. This transcendence is also located in the particular rhythmicality of the drill dance team and the fits that contagiously travel through the group. Focusing on the fits for a moment, White specifically examines the contagious elements of mass hysteria and the mania of the dancing disease, which Holmer names as the inspiration for the film, in relation to Freud's definition of mass hysteria, gender, race, and the spectacularity usually associated with media coverage of mass psychotic illness (MPI).[55] As she points out, "instead of the spectacle of black girls getting out of line, Holmer's *The Fits* shows staying *in line* – in formation – as an art form, through the discipline and community of drill team dancing."[56] Though the roots of the fits as a form of mass hysteria in the film are never resolved nor explained, the fitful screen dance bodies are also never presented as being completely out of control or in crisis. It is not about overcoming the fits as an obstacle or opponent, but about going through them, crossing the threshold,[57] or, in other words, becoming dis/orientated and re-orientated in the process. The drill dance team functions as an anchor, a home base, a point of orientation for the girls in the movie. In *The Fits*, as a film about fits, about fitting in, the fitful episodes are also fitting in to the overall texture of the movie, as one rhythm in the polyrhythmic formation of the cinematic space.

Rather than spectacularizing, fetishizing, or pathologizing[58] black girlhood through the drill and the fits, the film asks spectators to stay in line with the girls, to look, listen, and feel closely with the multiple rhythmicalities of the corporeal orature at play. As such *The Fits* asks for an empathetic stance that is not located in trying to inhabit the girls' bodies, to become them, to be inside the cypher, to claim absolute interiority over their experiences, to claim to know. Instead spectators, being positioned at the very edge of the cinematic cypher-frame, are asked to experience alongside them through a rhythmic-haptic sense perception that fine tunes perception and modes of empathetic experiences. As Henriques notes about the importance of listening for the notion of thinking through sound, "listening concerns depths rather than surfaces...It is haptic sense and, as touch itself, simultaneously both makes a connection between one and another, and recognises their separation."[59] That is where dis/orientation as a spectatorial mode comes back into focus. Audiences are asked to hear/see alongside and be with all of the girls in *The Fits* through the various rhythmic modalities at play. It involves moving through dis/orientation, being in and out of line, feeling the tension and discrepancies, encountering its sonic vibrations and disturbances, recognising the separation. In all those moments that the sonic-(poly)rhythmic-haptic tilts perception off its axis questions persist: of what it means to see and know; what it means to be a black girl coming-of-age; what it means to be a screen dance black girl coming-of-age; whose coming-of-age screen dance stories are centerd, how, and in what way?

Biography

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Notes

[1] Though Anna Rose Holmer is singled out as the director of the film when it comes to coverage and interviews, she always frames her work on the film as a collaboration. The script was co-written with creative producers Lisa Kjerulff and Saela Davis. The Q-Kidz founder (the actual drill team behind all the girls' roles and appearances in the film) Marquicia Jones-Woods, or Ms. Quicy as she is known, is credited as an associate producer. Her two daughters Mariah and Chariah Jones were responsible for the choreography. Moreover, Holmer has also clearly stated in multiple interviews that they adapted the script in collaboration with the drill dance team girls and aimed for making it a community project as much as possible. See, for reference: Bausells, "Anna Rose Holmer on her daunting film The Fits"; Bugbee, "Q&A: The Fits Director Anna Rose Holmer on Making a Movie about 'The Dancing Disease'"; Felsenthal, "Anna Rose Holmer on Directing The Fits and the Power of Contagion"; Fear, "How 'The Fits' Became the Girls Power Movie of 2016"; Schmidlin, "Meet the Cincinnati Dance Squad Behind 'The Fits': A conversation with director Anna Rose Holmer and Q-Kidz dance squad founder "Ms. Quicy" Jones-Wood."

[2] The boys of the boxing club in the movie are played by the boys of the Queen City Boxing Club, located at the Lincoln Community Recreational Center where the film was set. See: Schmidlin.

[3] All of the girls in the film, including the ones in major and minor speaking roles, are from the actual drill dance team Q-Kidz, located at the Lincoln Community Recreational Center where the film was set. See: Schmidlin.

[4] Dargis, "Review"

[5] Bruno, *Surface*, 13.

[6] Ibid. 19.

[7] Ibid. 20.

[8] Robinson, "The Fits Review."

[9] For examples of that, see Bausells, Bugbee, Felsenthal, and Fear.

[10] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 6.

[11] cf. Ibid. 9

[12] Ibid. 10

[13] Nyong'o, "Afro-philo-sonic Fictions," 173.

[14] See Weheliye, *Phonographies*.

[15] See Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*.

[16] While I will be focusing on Weheliye and Henriques for the purposes of this article, it is important to note that, as Nyong'o has further pointed out, both Weheliye's and Henriques' work is located in a network of black sound studies and the contributions of Paul Gilroy, Fred Moten, Kodwo Eshun, and Samuel Floyd, among others. See: Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Moten, *In the Break*; and Eshun, *More Brilliant Than The Sun*.

[17] Weheliye, "'I Am I Be,'" 102.

[18] cf. Ibid. 103.

[19] Ibid. 104.

[20] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, preamble.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Henriques, "The Vibrations of Affect," 58.

[24] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, preamble.

[25] Henriques, "The Vibrations of Affect," 69.

[26] Henriques, "Rythmic Bodies," 83.

[27] Ahmed, "Collective Feelings," 25.

[28] cf. Henriques, Tianen, and Valiaho, "Rhythm Returns," 3-29.

[29] Bragin, "Techniques of Black Male Re/Dress," 63.

[30] DeFrantz, "The Black Beat Made Visible," 66.

[31] Ibid. 66.

[32] White, "Bodies That Matter," 27.

[33] cf. Schmidlin.

[34] cf. Bradley, "Black Cinematic Gesture and the Aesthetics of Contagion."

[35] It is crucial to note here, that in The Fits, the experience of girlhood is firmly situated in the community center and spectators never see the girls at their respective homes and hardly any adults really enter the cinematic frame. Patricia White locates the reason for this "self-enclosed world" (28) in the fact that *The Fits* is an independent film on a small budget and thus working with restricted means and a more concentrated production time (28).

[36] Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, 107.

[37] cf. Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner*, 25-27.

[38] Ibid., 28.

[39] *Oxford English Dictionary* Online, s.v. "rhythm (n.)," accessed January 24, 2016, http://www.oed.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/view/Entry/165403?rskey=k1ybt0&result= 1&isAdvanced=fals.

[40] cf. Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence*, 14.

[41] Ibid. 15.

[42] cf. Ibid. 13ff.

[43] Manning, *Relationscapes*, 32.

[44] Ibid. 32.

[45] Bruno, *Surface*, 20.

[46] DeFrantz, "The Black Beat Made Visible," 73.

[47] For a look of the final scene, see https://youtu.be/sENdrIPNOjU.

[48] Kiah Victoria, "Aurora," Vimeo, uploaded March 9, 2015, https://vimeo.com/121740441, accessed January 24, 2018.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Dargis, "Review."

[52] Peter Travers, "Review of The Fits."

[53] Bausells, "Anna Rose Holmer on her daunting film The Fits."

[54] Ibid.

[55] cf. White, "Bodies That Matter: Black Girlhood in The Fits," 23-31.

[56] Ibid. 27.

[57] Ibid. 28.

[58] In her book *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*, Aimee Meredith Cox points out that stories about black girls that garner a lot of mainstream attention usually involve painting the lives of those girls as dysfunctional and in need of reform (6). More often than not, however, she points to the lack of stories and the erasure of the voices of those who actually matter in those contexts – black girls.

[59] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, preamble.

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"Fresher Than You": Commercial Use of YouTube-Native Dance and Videographic Techniques

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Abstract

This article focuses on four examples of commercial use of web-native and amateur video and dance aesthetics, including music videos and videos promoting clothing brands, and how corporate logics have adopted these genres and caused them to adapt in turn. Commercial use both subsumes and broadcasts the innovations of dance communities, amateur filmmakers, and subcultural entrepreneurs. At the same time, I argue that the possibility of greater self-control for the making and distributing of filmed popular dance in the social media context renders commercial mediation of popular dance more desirable to many communities of practice. Through looking at generic and technical attributes of the examples, I address the continued rhetorical power of binaries like amateur and professional, commercial and participatory, categories the reality of dance in social media in fact undermine. The commercial use of web-native videographic and dance styles is complicated by new opportunities for representation, remuneration, and creative control that come with the new platforms and modes of production. These music videos and advertisements transmit social media-native movement, videographic, and promotional techniques, but still do so within longstanding infrastructures that primarily benefit those with preexisting economic and cultural capital, and along lines of class and race.

Keywords: YouTube, Popular Dance, Music Video, Advertising, Labor

In November 2014, almost ten years after the founding of the video-sharing platform YouTube, global popstar Beyonce released the music video "7/11." Seemingly shot on a whim with an iPhone at a hotel, the video combines the visual hallmarks of amateur YouTube video with the star power, strategy, and sound of a studio-produced music video. Beyoncé's friends are better looking, her lodgings nicer, and her view count—now over 400 million—higher than what is typically represented in iPhone videos posted online, but the cinematography, choreography, and costuming come directly from aesthetics developed in YouTube and social media-native videos. Reflecting a process commonly observed in other realms of popular culture, popular dance and screen genres begin in specific, usually subcultural communities and economies, but as they circulate, larger brands and media outlets adopt and monetize them. Dance forms with local histories and identities are always cooptable by larger structures of power but

in excess of them, such that new genres, movements, and economies are constantly emerging and circulating online, building on and pushing back against widely circulating images.

Commercial use and collaborations both subsume and broadcast the innovations of dance communities, amateur filmmakers, and subcultural entrepreneurs. These music videos and advertisements transmit social media-native movement, videographic, and promotional techniques, but within longstanding infrastructures that primarily benefit those with preexisting economic and cultural capital, whether brands, celebrities, or along lines of class and race. I argue that the social media context of mediation, and the possibility of self-controlled outlets for the making and distributing of filmed popular dance, changes the reception for commercial mediation of popular dance by communities of practice.

In her foundational text *Dancing on the Canon*, Sherril Dodds asserts the need for scholars to focus on "the contesting of power relations between the commercial industries that seek to produce and disseminate popular dance and the participants in popular dance who create locally articulated practices."[1] In this article, I balance these competing interests through an analysis of the cyclical exchange and intertwining of perpetuation and innovation, subculture and pop culture, amateur and professional, the subversive and the neoliberal, that characterize YouTube, Internet genres, and popular dance. In particular, I investigate the adaptation of Internet dance and video aesthetics by commercial music videos and advertisements as a component of the complex and always racialized economy of popular dance.

The corporate use of online participatory culture has been studied and critiqued as part of recent interests in convergence culture, prosumers, and the intellectual property rights of social media users.[2] I want to particularize these issues by examining a range of screen and Internet genres in which dance occurs, and how they are being interwoven by various actors and to what effect. In the preface to the 2013 volume *Amateur Media*, the editors note "our frameworks for understanding contemporary amateur media and their consequences remain far less well developed than the objects of our interest."[3] Part of the difficulty is the wide range of modes, platforms, and relations to capital within which such media exists. Given the always already commercial nature of these platforms, Burgess and Green propose a shift in "concern away from the false opposition between market and non-market culture, toward a concern with the tensions that arise when corporate logics have to contend with the unruly and emergent characteristics of participatory culture."[4] In order to begin developing frameworks in line with the complex reality of popular dance on the Internet, and how corporate logics have adopted them and caused them to adapt in turn, this article focuses on four examples of commercial use of web-native and amateur video and dance aesthetics. There are a range of web-native video genres, popular dance genres, and funding and production structures among them.

These examples are, briefly: Beyoncé's "7/11,"[5] a 2014 music video that uses amateur elements to create a feeling of proximity and intimacy, but which was backed by a record company and released in promotion of an album as well as merchandise. The "A-Z of Dance,"[6] also from 2014, is a commercial-as-dance-video circulated exclusively online, with web-native dance forms, composition, and premise, promoting new media company i-D, and the Diesel Jeans clothing brand. "#ICAN Kick It"[7] is a 2017 YouTube-native concept dance video released by YouTube presence Ian Eastwood and sponsored by the clothing company American Eagle. Finally, I will discuss the fall 2017 music video for the remix song "Mi Gente ft. Beyoncé,"[8] which uses actual amateur video in a fan-like mashup to promote the star personas, music, and fame of the musicians involved, as well as to raise money for disaster relief in Mexico and the Caribbean.[9] I employ these examples to theorize and illustrate what I consider three crucial areas of investigation for dance on the Internet: 1) the cycle of innovation within the popular domain, and its absorption into large scale systems of capital; 2) how the creation of new genres also creates new statuses for and categorizations of people involved with them; and 3) the continued rhetorical power of categories like amateur and professional, commercial and participatory–binaries that the reality of dance in social media in fact undermine.

Before delving into my analysis of how these videos show the ways advertising has taken up new modes of production and representation, I first lay out my terms of categorization, followed by a description of each video and how it exemplifies aspects of web-native production. Finally, I consider the complexities of the desire for and access to commercial funding, and how this reflects and shifts historical relations between popular dance and capital.

Establishing Terms: Commercial, Professional, Amateur, Web-native

I define these terms here specifically within the social media context, though the terms, as with the content they describe, are always in tension with the larger media landscape and economy.

With the term "commercial," I refer to videos made by legacy media companies and/or videos that promote a good or service. Dance is having a prolonged moment in the public imaginary in legacy media forms like television and movies as well as online. Because of this, it features frequently in advertising, especially for wearable items and products targeted at teens and young adults. However, not all commercial content is identifiable as advertising. Two of the examples I consider, Beyoncé's "7/11" and "Mi Gente ft. Beyoncé," are music videos. While there have been innovations and changes in music video production and content since the advent of YouTube,[10] I consider the music video a legacy media genre. Not only were the content and formal properties established before social media; contemporary production and funding structures

remain tied to record company standards and budgets. Also, while the focus of this article is the use of YouTube-native and amateur elements, not all commercial content found on YouTube and other social video platforms is web-native; advertisements made for broadcast television, or in that style, also circulate online.

The terms "professional" and "amateur" are more complicated; the perceived 'quality' or 'professionalism' of a video is both visual as well as structural. For viewers on the YouTube platform, the professionalism of a video might be communicated through verified accounts, sponsorships, pre-roll advertisements, or the creator being on brands' PR lists for products or travel. Live tours and channel-branded merchandise, high view counts, well-known subscribers, and interaction with the official YouTube Spaces all help to build the appearance of legitimacy. Aesthetically, professionalism also manifests in the 'production values' of newer and constantly improving cameras, lights, sets, costumes, and rigs; the use of drones or helicopters in travel vlogs or concept videos; collaborations with other popular YouTubers, and scripted material. However, these videos and their creators may still not be considered 'professional' in the larger sphere of legacy media and its viewers, and many seek further opportunities there while maintaining their YouTube presence.

By contrast, amateurism within social media distinguishes from those for whom content creation is a career or active pursuit. This distinction moves beyond the description offered by Hunter et. al: "non-salaried, non-specialist and untrained in media production,"[11] as those attributes also hold for many of the top earners of social media video. Rather, it refers to video that might be taken off the cuff, posted outside of a schedule, made as a practice of fandom, or disseminated without remuneration. Media scholar James Meese points to the condition of amateur video circulation as a defining feature, noting that "[i]n contrast to professional content creators, amateurs often have fewer resources on hand to protect their copyrighted work and are also challenged by a pervasive online rhetoric that suggests that popular content essentially 'belongs to the Internet.'"[12] Notably, the division between professional and amateur dovetails with distinctions between dance forms as art forms or as vernacular practices, distinctions that, as Gottschild, Manning, and Kraut,[13] have shown, historically rendered black cultural production as though it belongs to the larger cultural sphere. However, as we will see below, the particularities of funding and content creation online challenges the divisions and implicit hierarchies between amateurism and professionalism.

Because there are stratifications within social media video production that remain opaque to many outside of it, "web-native" or even "YouTube-native" videos and genres may be more useful categories than amateur and professional to understand the complexity of the ways genre and commercial use intersect for popular dance. The term "web-native" encompasses all those "user generated" videos by "content creators," or people who focus on making Internet content, predominately on YouTube—but also on social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook—regardless of

their level of quality or economic support. Creators of web-native content frequently perform many tasks that would be specialized in larger projects: choreographing, directing, and video editing, in addition to dancing, for example. The term also refers to forms of cultural production that simply did not exist prior to the current video hosting platforms.[14] Web-native content can be produced by amateurs, as implied in the designation of "user-generated content" as that which differentiates social media from broadcast media, but established companies also use YouTube and other platforms to market their products to different consumers than legacy media afford.

YouTube thus brings commercially and professionally produced content in direct contact with amateur content, blurring the boundaries between these categories, as well as blurring distinctions between web-native and legacy content. The next section contains a description of each video and how it exemplifies particular aspects of web-native video as they play out in the commercial context.

Web-Native Video Attributes and Aesthetics

"7/11:" Informality and Intimacy as Amateur Characteristics

While the premise of "7/11" is an iPhone recording of the pregame/sleepover festivities of Beyoncé and her girl squad at a hotel or apartment, it is in fact a record-company produced music video for a single in promotion of the Deluxe Box Set for the BEYONCÉ album and a line of merchandise. Musicologist Kai Hansen argues that for Beyoncé, "notions of her private self operate as integral to a representational strategy that crafts her persona through a continuous (re-) negotiation of the supposed synchronization of the artist's private and public lives."[15] The intentionally presented seeming approachability of "7/11" is a site for this renegotiation; what created the much discussed "carefree, casual vibes"[16] of the video was the adoption of elements which characterize amateur video on YouTube, particularly informality, intimacy, and low tech and lighthearted productions. I argue the amateur elements of "7/11" act not only as signifiers to viewers' lives, but are indexed to genres of viewing with which social-media audiences are familiar on the same platforms on which "7/11" circulated.

The locations featured in the video particularly play into the creation of intimacy. The camera finds Beyoncé and her dancers in places—and states of mess—you often are only in with people who are close to you: a clothes-strewn bedroom, a living room full of gifts, a cramped kitchen, a cluttered bathroom. In slightly better condition, they are the places where many vloggers, or 'first person' YouTubers film.[17] The costuming contributes to the informal feel of the video; seemingly pulled from those piles in the bedroom, the wardrobe includes graphic sweatshirts, leggings, sports bras, and matching air-brushed men's briefs with the lyric "Smack It" across their butts, as if the friends took a multipack to the mall to have them done for the school talent show.

This make-do aesthetic is carried out through the apparently low-tech set-up. There's an acknowledgement of the camera, from the very beginning when Beyoncé 'presses record,' through to the use of a selfie stick. A hair dryer is used to create movement for Beyoncé's tresses, a reference to the way devotees approximate the effect of large fans used in Beyoncé's concerts and music videos. The lightheartedness extends to the movement vocabulary, all performed with goofiness: her solo movement includes New Jack Swing moves like the running man and the sprinkler, twerking one butt cheek at a time with a smile, talking on a foot phone, and laughing on the floor after falling while jumping her left leg through a circle made by her right leg and left arm, attempting the tap move Over The Top. The group sections foreshadow the subsequent fan versions of this video, reminiscent of planning a dance with your friends at a sleepover, with moves repeated over several counts of eight, a pyramid, and lyrical echoes.

But this is not your best friend's childhood basement; this is a conglomeration of amateur signifiers elevated to the level of, well, Beyoncé. The locations are in fact fancy living spaces, edited together to seem like one place, without the tracking shots many YouTube dance videos use that show full venues. The homey fashion is for sale[18] but it is paired with a $425 visor, a $1,925 Versace necklace, and a lace dress from Givenchy's 2011 resort collection.[19] From the very first shot the footage is played with—rewound, repeated, sped up. Writing of the use of analogue video in digital culture, Jonathan Rozenkrantz asserts "the commodified moments to which we most eagerly look forward are no longer manifestations of a prospective imaginary, the utopia of all tomorrow's parties, but the retrospective joy of yesterday's parties made to look as if they played out decades ago."[20] While "7/11"'s dancing has a nostalgic feel, I argue the adoption of amateur video aesthetics is a move about this very moment: it replicates the experience social media users have of watching the party they're not at unfold right now. Unlike on Snapchat or InstaStories, in "7/11" there's never an actual amateur moment, but we still desperately want to be at that hangout, and through the amateur signifiers, imagine we could be.

"The A-Z of Dance:" Web-Native Production Strategies

The "A-Z of Dance" is firmly a dance video—a conceptual piece with dance at its center, performed with the desire to entertain. It is secondarily a piece of promotion for the media company i-D and the clothing brand Diesel Jeans; the fact that everyone wears denim is only salient when you've finished processing the content—the alphabetic list of moves and styles and its expertly danced entries, ranging from the fad dance 'Chicken Noodle Soup' to 'Vogue Hands' to 'Indian Bhangra.' The features of the video form a partial but indicative list of web-native video production. The list format, including alphabetic lists, have a long history in magazines, but the listicle and other formats have become characteristic of the internet,[21] a fact the i-D A-Z videos have continued directly while also shaping a new video trend.[22] "In the A-Z of Dance," the entries are

enumerated by stylized onscreen text, possible even within YouTube's own editing program. The videos' main settings; a rooftop in the midst of a city scape, and a parking lot, reflect the web-video strategy of finding the best looking free place to shoot that has light and enough space. In addition, the casting mirrors dancer-run projects and collaborations by including YouTube-famous dancers like the Turf Feinz, Philip Chbeeb, Lil' Buck, and Ryan Heffington, and many dance styles known from social media, including finger tutting and the Harlem Shake meme.[23]

Despite being an ad, these components successfully created a web dance video and allowed it to circulate as such, though they're elevated: there's multiple shots and angles for each entry, and in addition to the outside spaces, there's also footage in a studio and black and white boxes. The extensive credits—another web-specific feature rarely seen on commercial content—reveals a huge cast, crew, and production team most YouTube-based dancers would not be able to afford or manage.

"#ICAN Kick It:" Sponsorship and Creative Control

Ian Eastwood's video is one of twelve dance videos set to A Tribe Called Quest's "Can I Kick It," sponsored by American Eagle as part of their #ICAN campaign highlighting individuality. The videos, each lead by professional strata YouTube dancers, function as celebrity brand endorsement and a call for amateur entry for a competition. Sponsorships have become a major component of YouTube-native video as one important way content creators can make money or obtain resources for a specific project.[24] The generic components or aesthetic of the content creator don't often change in these videos; brands choose specific YouTubers because they like their videos and think the product would fit well with the channel's audience.[25]

Sponsored campaigns place more agency with more and different people than top-down approaches. In this instance, #ICAN is the campaign, but the prompt is specified by Eastwood through the choreography, setting, styling, and videographic style. In his video, the camera follows Eastwood and his Young Lions crew through his house, with different phrases unfolding as they travel through rooms discovering different dancers, finally ending in the garage. In contrast to precision choreography often seen in legacy advertisement, the movement is loose in the way the joints connect and balls move in sockets, and limbs hang and move with weight. There's freestyle and individuality within unison sections, and as is Eastwood's style, the movement is in playful communication with the song's lyrics and instrumentation. Though funded through promoting a large business, each #ICAN video was unique, featured performance and videography styles endemic to YouTube, and was conceived of and carried out by YouTubers and their own teams.

"Mi Gente ft. Beyoncé:" Official Use of Fan Production

Mashups are a type of video response that use collage and remix aesthetics to incorporate different types of content, generally already existing and often copyrighted.[26] In June of 2017 J Balvin, and Willy William released a fairly standard music video for their hit song, "Mi Gente."[27] In a reversal of typical Internet directionality, the official music video for the remix, released in late September, is a mashup comprised entirely of fan production posted to social media throughout the summer. The use of fan video functions promotionally in line with the 'one world' sentiment of "Mi Gente" (my people) and its bilingual, multi-national creators, demonstrating how widely liked and broadly played the song was, with videos taken in classes, with families, in clubs, with famous and everyday people, shot in different geographies and interpreted by various cultures.

In the music video, the visual amateurism of the fan clips is stressed and enhanced through the editing; the clip quality seems degraded through ripping,[28] vertical videos remain unaltered or framed,[29] and a faux-VHS tracking effect[30] is overlaid throughout. Through editing, clips of many different web-native screen genres become an instance of commercial music video, with the wide differences in style, quality, and source obscured,[31] elided into a single 'amateur' aesthetic. While highly successful as a video—just two days after its release it had almost 10 million views[32]—this flattening indicates that some people operationalizing these genres don't actually understand their difference, or find them meaningless in the face of a still persistent, much longer running discourse of professional and amateur, where anyone not working for a major music label is considered amateur.

Dance and Advertising: Adaptations to Web-Native Context

Dance on the popular screen has always had a complicated but close relationship with the market and consumerism, whether in film, television, or music videos. This relation is most obvious when dancers are featured in advertising, where their creative and physical labor directly serves the bottom line. Advertising also provides dancers with large audiences, the largest some of them may ever have, and therefore provides key opportunities for dancers to broadcast their abilities, secure future employment, and spread movement innovations, both on television and online. While the video examples examined in this article replicate the core relation of dance and capital inherent in advertisement, in taking up new styles and platforms for circulation from web-native video, commercial content has also taken up some of the attending modes and tendencies of Internet production. This includes more integrated promotions, increased representation of marginalized communities, and close relationships to fan content.

In her book *Black Social Dance in Television Advertising: An Analytical History*, Carla Stalling Huntington focuses on the use of black social dance in advertising and its

impact on the self-perception and consumption behavior of the viewers. In Huntington's analysis, the purpose of advertising is to get the viewer to engage in economic exchange by creating desire through accessible imagery; in the context of an advertisement featuring dance, this desire is the ability to dance, created through performance. She contends that dance has the power to sell goods and services beyond itself, and that commercials using black social dance implicitly connect consumer desire with a generalized envy of a perceived black mastery of dance. Further, Huntington notes that since the 1940s, dance—including black social dance—in the advertising context was performed primarily by white performers. Because of this she characterizes the use of black social dance in advertisement as an a-historical commercialization of long standing cultural practices, which enables companies to profit from the dance practices' cultural capital while disempowering black dancers and erasing the dances' communities of origin. While dancers featured in advertisements since the late 1990s have been more racially diverse, the critique of the commodification of the dance forms still stands.

In "Performing the Commodity-Sign: Dancing in the Gap" dance scholar Colleen Dunagan analyzes the ways in which Gap advertisements from 1998-2000 drew on signifiers and production aspects from Hollywood musicals to create stylized campaigns centered on 'product personality' at the nexus of clothing and the popular dancing body. The staging of social dance forms through filmic strategies contributed, Dunagan argues, to "framing these commercials as performances even as they work to produce a commodity-sign."[33] Advertisers have long sought ways to make commercials more appealing to viewers, and dance has played a large role in amplifying the dimension of entertainment. Dance is currently in an extended moment of primacy, but it is particularly linked to the media forms being consumed online. This is especially important for online advertisers, since it is increasingly possible to skip, block, or click away from ads, which need to be particularly interesting to circumvent that impulse. Just as the Gap ads would have seemed more like other TV programming than like other commercials, online, advertisers mimic the aesthetics of user-generated content in their ads, blurring the difference between the commercial, the professional, and the amateur so as to fit into existing viewing practices on phones, tablets, or laptops.

To describe the emphasis on the entertainment factor over the hard sell, Dunagan utilizes Robert Goldman's nomenclature of a "not-ad," an advertisement that "has been designed to look as if it is not an ad, as if it has foresworn the agenda of ads."[34] This maps well onto the examples I have presented; music videos are perhaps the pinnacle artform of 'not-ad' promotional material, and the two clothing ads circulate mostly innocuously as dance videos. The style and signs that are adopted are different between the YouTube videos and Dunagan's Gap commercials—forward-looking and 'amateur' rather than nostalgic for large-budget theater and film traditions—but the strategy is

similar: to distract from the fact of the advertising and sell instead the entertainment presented by the video.

Much online commercial content has moved even further towards obscuring their marketing intention while promoting consumption.[35] This often means eschewing advertising norms like framing copy. For example, the "A-Z of Dance" promotes the Jogg Jeans line by Diesel, but the product's features–material so flexible you can dance in jeans–are not mentioned in the three and a half minute video. I had to discover them through Google.[36] This doesn't make the commercial-cum-dance video less effective promotionally; 'viral' campaigns often privilege creativity and viewer follow-up over explanatory messaging. Other legacy media advertising hallmarks, like the white space of an infinity cove—seen in everything from truck to Gap ads—are also absent from 'not-ad' videos meant for Internet platforms.

In 2007, Dunagan argued that the use of the all-white space in the Gap ads of the late 90s subverted advertising structure through its filmic possibilities. In the intervening years, the white space became connected to television advertising, while web-native videos center their subjects in the settings of home, studio, and street. As an example, Eastwood's loose, home-based "ICAN video" is in direct contrast to a GAP ad, "Bounce meet Bounce" which came out only a few weeks before.[37] Made as a 30 second television and reroll ad, it has the same basic purpose as the American Eagle campaign—sell mass produced casual and leisure-wear—but features precisely choreographed unison movement focused on percussion, and was shot from above on a rig in a take on Gap's now iconic white space.

In that filmic space, Dunagan asserts that "the white backdrop becomes a metaphor for the body of the consumer, signifying that the consumer exists as a tabula rasa, an empty space or absence, until the individual/body dons the Gap apparel and assumes an identity."[38] The shift out of the white box parallels a shift I observe in some brand's marketing strategies, which recognize that many people in the social media age have a strong sense of identity and are already performing and affiliating around it. So, in addition to the conventional wisdom that consumers are seeking "to attain the identity offered by purchasing the advertised product,"[39] consumers seek products that reinforce and fit within their identities. This shift is reflected in advertisements, too, as brands include people with whom a wider range of the viewing audience can affiliate.

Increased representation of people of color and other marginalized people is another important attribute of commercial content interfacing with Internet dancers. Though racial and economic factors still restrict a complete meritocracy, because the videos are made in conjunction with content creators, they rely less on casting agents and more on existing communities of practice. The 'cast' for Eastwood's "#ICAN" video is his crew, Young Lions, with whom he has practiced and performed for several years. Among them are Black, Latino, Asian American, and white dancers, reflecting the range of

identities and backgrounds of young men who live in Los Angeles and have pursued dancing. The circumstances of representation vary given the production; in the "A-Z of Dance" some casting choices were made, but the range of dance forms lead naturally to a range of dancers and their identities, while "Mi Gente"'s incorporation of fan videos lead to a representation of those fans who identified with the music. While the aspirational component of advertising is still very much there in terms of product—wouldn't you like to have a Givenchy dress to romp around in, like Beyoncé?—I argue the consumer is no longer a blank space, but rather is looking to see themselves reflected. And somewhere in the A through Z of dances, there's definitely a dance you know, and a dancer who looks or moves like you.

Commercial content using web-native video traits is in a multidirectional relationship with Internet production. While "Mi Gente" is the only video discussed in the article which directly included fan content, the others all invited or provoked fan responses. For example, the generic touchstones derived from home-made videos used in "7/11" were further demonstrated when fans restaged elements of the music video. Similarly, the success of i-D's collaboration with Diesel has manifested in the production of non-commercial A-Z videos. A month after i-D's video, a Senegalese dance studio produced "The A-Z of African Dance," shot in various outdoor locations throughout Dakar. The video has accumulated 2.5 million views, a stark contrast to the channel's average view count of a few thousand per video.[40] The 2017 "A-Z of Beyoncé Dance" video, made by Australian fans, ends with the note "this project is a non-commercial tribute to the goddess that is Beyoncé,"[41] perhaps at once referencing the source material and perhaps simultaneously stating a moral position. It is shot in a white space with colorful animations surrounding the dancers, and each entry has multiple interpretations. While clearly influenced by the i-D video, the collaborators moved back toward the aesthetics of art screendance rather than the approximation of amateurism needed to attain the 'not-ad.' Exemplifying the folding and cyclical nature of Internet creation, these amateur and web-native videos are indebted to the commercial productions inspired by their predecessors, and in turn become part of the bank of innovation, which might be drawn from next.

Selling Out vs. Getting Yours

Despite the development of rich online spaces and communities of expression and innovation by marginalized people, most notably "Black Twitter,"[42] overarching issues of structural discrimination manifesting in the arts through appropriation, unequal remuneration, and lack of credit to individuals or collectives with less visibility still pervade the creation and circulation of content on the Internet.[43] Web and social media video brings to this history its own complications around directionality of influence, traceability, and crediting made possible by the technology and ethics of 'sharing' which can both tether and unmoor data and images from their sources.[44] Appearing in

commercial projects informed by web-native video, which pay and give practitioners credit and creative control is an important counter to invizibilization. However, given the historical trend of commodifying black, latinx, and queer dance forms for the promotion of white-owned corporations, it is understandable that, as Sherril Dodds notes, "within some fields of dance practice," appearing in commercials or other legacy media forms, "can be construed as a form of 'selling out.'"[45] On the other hand, the particularities of online video necessitate a nuanced analysis of the values of participation and mediation of popular dance practitioners in the social media age, which are unique because of the technology, the control of production, and video's ubiquity.

While the performers and creators of the videos discussed in this article are more varied in their racial and economic backgrounds than those still mostly in creative control of legacy media advertising, the bulk of the financial gain from the videos go to majority white owned large corporations—to YouTube, a subsidiary of Google; record companies and their executives;[46] and clothing companies—based on movement derived almost exclusively from the collective and individual innovations of young people of color. The people directly involved in the videos are likely paid for their time, and videos posted on creators' channels may bring in some AdSense revenue but the dancers mostly benefit from the promotional force of the exposure and circulation of their image. The originators of the movements, dance forms, and videographic techniques used within the videos don't benefit directly at all.

In an article on video magazines created by b-boys in the 1990s, Mary Fogarty argues against the villainization of mediation in the Hip-Hop dance narrative, pointing instead to the ways B-boys used media agentively to gain access to the entertainment industry and to paying jobs. Fogarty describes Breaking's relationship with commodification and commercialization as "ambiguous," because while dance is used in advertising in order to sell products, it is itself "considered to be lacking a commodity exchange-value."[47] Dodds echoes this idea in her assertion that popular dance sells—but not itself. In many cases where a critique is leveled against the commercialization or mediatization of popular dance, the dance is working to sell something else, whether a soft drink as in the Pepsi ads analyzed by Huntington, or a dance film or reality television show, as Dodds refers to when she remarks that viewers are hooked with popular dance but actually "'buy' into those visual commodities."[48] In her article "Black Teens Are Breaking The Internet And Seeing None Of The Profits," Doreen St. Felix argues that "intangible things like slang and styles of dance are not considered valuable, except when they're produced by large entities willing and able to invest in trademarking them."[49] Through the use of popular dance and video genre markers in commercial production as shown in the examples here, it is clear that dance does have exchange value, and value recognized by large entities, though for their own financial gain.

Even while profit-minded, this recognition from brands and larger media companies has contributed to an economy where it is increasingly possible for dance practitioners to support themselves. Through ad revenue, exposure to possible sponsors and employers, and as a platform for an increasing volume of dance content, YouTube creates the possibility of remuneration for people who may have had difficulty accessing capital through entertainment pursuits. Rather than foreclosing the possibility of participatory culture, Burgess and Green argue "the commercial drive behind and hype around YouTube may have produced the possibility of participation in online video culture for a much broader range of participants."[50] As with Fogarty's analysis of the video magazines, for many popular dance practitioners today, it is highly esteemed for a dancer to be shown in a widely viewed mediated representation, if not in fact required either generically or economically. It could be argued that the shifts in the judgment of 'making it' versus 'selling out' is due to the fact that, in web-native video, dance is now one of the products being sold. In addition, participating in commercial content makes it more possible to make those videos through which it's more difficult to earn.

Dance videos and dance-centric content creators are in a slightly different situation than those who don't rely on music; it's more difficult for them to earn money from YouTube directly. Videos that contain copyrighted music cannot be monetized by the uploader without express permission from the artist or label,[51] so videos with hit songs—often the most popular–cannot directly benefit from their view counts. Instead, these have to be exchanged; the viewers are simultaneously a sign of the value of the artist and one of the commodities that makes the artist of interest to future sponsors or gigs. Even the most well-known YouTube dance creators put together funding through merch, teaching, and alternate funding structures while waiting to be hired as dancers or choreographers.

Attention to the distinct layers of content within web-video is important, because not all financial opportunities are available to everyone. Amateur creators and pop culture innovators—often youth of color—who do not have the popularity to earn ad money on YouTube videos, who create on less monetized platforms like Instagram, or who come to viral fame through a limited amount of content have little access to remuneration, though they disproportionately contribute to movement and screen genre evolution. St. Felix points to an additional complication for creators, especially of viral content who are less likely to have lawyers and managers; uploaders share the ownership, reproduction, and distribution rights with the hosting platform.[52] Speaking of the dancer who runs the YouTube channel SheLovesMeechie, St. Félix argues "as prolific and internet-known as Meechie and his crew are, they are multiple steps removed from owning, in a tangible sense, their art, leaving them vulnerable to both YouTube's whims and to having their creativity lifted by outsiders."[53] Because of these

terms of use, even amateur content is already commercial; the platforms remediate prior social stratifications while at the same time circulating innovation.

Conclusion

Popular dance displayed on the screen has long been the subject of necessary critiques surrounding the commodification of community-specific knowledges, often governed by structural discrimination. The analysis of commercial use of web-native videographic and dance styles is complicated by new opportunities for representation, remuneration, and creative control that come with the new platforms and modes of production. It is important to attend to the economics and power relations within different screen genres as current systems of funding sought by popular dance practitioners online continue and change long-standing modes of harnessing agency and capital.

While many popular dance content creators happily work within and shape Internet-specific screen dance conventions and communities, for some their output and metrics for success are also defined by desired engagement with brands and larger media companies, which was the predominate model of 'making it 'until very recently. These projects can bring dancers in contact with creatives they admire, and despite the reality of professional YouTubers, can bring social-media creators more closely in line with definitions of professionalism in the cultural imaginary which still sees all web-native production as "amateur." As popular dance practitioners imitate and innovate, Internet-oriented brands and media companies adopt and adapt, leading to multi-directional movement of generic conventions, labor, and capital.

These videos circulating together therefore reflect the constant tension of popular dance and the market, where desires for money and mainstream success balance against those for respect, community, and innovation. This has long been the cycle of popular culture, though specific technologies have changed. Innovations get more pointedly traced and credited now than in the past as meme cataloguing and trend coverage become important facets of Internet journalism and user production, and so many more moments are archived to be discovered. But it remains to be seen if remuneration and structural support will follow, to what extent, and for whom.

Biography

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Notes

[1] Dodds, *Dancing on the Canon*, 64.

[2] See Deuze, "Corporate Appropriation;" Hunter et al., *Amateur Media*; Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*; Meese, "It Belongs to the Internet."

[3] Hunter et. al, xiii.

[4] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 76.

[5] Beyoncé, "Beyoncé - 7/11." Reference format note: Because different versions of these videos exist on YouTube, and because whose channel these videos are published on is an important part of differentiating agency and advertising strategy, the videos are referenced with the channel name as the author.

[6] i-D. "The A-Z of Dance."

[7] Ian Eastwood. "#ICAN Kick It"

[8] jBalvinVEVO. "J Balvin, Willy William-Mi Gente ft. Beyoncé"

[9] Announced on Beyoncé's Instagram account 1.

[10] See Edmond "Here We Go Again: Music Videos after YouTube."

[11] Hunter et. al, i

[12] Meese, "It Belongs to the Internet."

[13] See Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Aesthetic*; Kraut, *Choreographing Copyright*; and Manning, *Modern Dance/Negro Dance*.

[14] Such genres include vlogging, unboxing videos, video game play-throughs, among many others. Dance specific genres include street-based freestyle videos (ex. Yak Films), which feature popular dance practitioners in city scapes; challenges or fad dances (ex. Running Man Challenge, Harlem Shake); concept videos: non-music video

popular dance-centric videos that have a theme, narrative, or strong visual aesthetic. (ex. Willdabeast Adams and Janelle Ginestra); class videos shot at the end of classes and workshops at popular dance studios (ex. Those shot by Tim Milgram); and comedy or sketch dance videos like the 'Now Add a Dancer' series on TheDOMINICShow, where mundane tasks are transformed into dance prompts.

[15] Hansen, "Empowered or Objectified?," 166

[16] White, "Watch Beyoncé Dance"

[17] "First-person" videos refer to those featuring one person in direct address to the camera, including cooking, beauty, and personality-based videos.

[18] Four of the shirts she wears in the video were sold by the extended Beyoncé brand, and lists were made of other purchasable or replicable items as many were affordable—leggings from Forever 21, for example. See Kokshanian.

[19] Wilson, "Wait, Did Beyonce Tease Brand New Merch."

[20] Rozenkrantz, "Analogue Video in the Age of Retrospectacle," 42.

[21] See Edidin, "5 Reasons" and Konnikova, "A List of Reasons"

[22] After the success of this video, i-D produced twelve more between spring 2014 and fall 2017, with various themes (beauty, hair, slang), five in collaboration with other brands. Other creators took up the format as well.

[23] See Bragin, "From Oakland Turfs to Harlem Shakes" for a critique of the Harlem Shake meme as a viral anti-blackness, another web-specific component.

[24] Many unaffiliated videos—makeup tutorials, home improvement, shopping hauls—nonetheless feature branded products, so "#notsponsored," has actually become an inside joke for many content creators both in description boxes and in the flow of onscreen speech.

[25] Sponsored videos also crucially appear on the content creator's own channel, marking the videos as their own work and putting it in the regular flow of YouTube views and the AdSense money that comes with them. See "YouTube Partner Program Overview."

[26] See Simonsen, "The Mashups of YouTube."

[27] jBalvinVEVO. "J Balvin, Willy William - Mi Gente (Official Video)."

[28] The image is further made fuzzy because all copyrighted or trademarked images are blurred, something seen frequently in YouTube videos but done here by the "Mi Gente" editor.

[29] Media Studies scholar Andreas Treske notes "video's verticality refers to the amateurish act and response to the moment of experience, something that is not controlled and presumes to be witnessed." Treske, *Video Theory*, 135.

[30] Rozenkrantz writes of the use of VHS-tracking apps "'VHS style' has become a prominent signifier of an obsessively retrospective media culture in which one is more likely to download an app to produce faux-grainy videos with one's iPhone than to watch a film on actual VHS, or to reflect on the technology that gave rise to those grains in the first place." Rozenkrantz, 41.

[31] Record label produced music videos rarely credit anyone, even the director. To be able to give credit of any kind for the videos included in "Mi Gente Remix" you have to recognize the contributors, or to look to write-ups about the video, where authors tracked down some of the celebrities and videos featured. See Kelly. "The Video for the Beyoncé Remix of 'Mi Gente.'

[32] On YouTube, 69 million views as of 9 Feb 2018.

[33] Dunagan, "Performing the Commodity-Sign," 17.

[34] Goldman, *Reading Ads Socially*, 155-201. Cited in Dunagan, "Performing the Commodity-Sign," 4.

[35] Dunagan, "Performing the Commodity-Sign," 4. There is always some indication that such a video is connected to a brand, whether noted in titles, descriptions, onscreen logos, or off-site paratexts like Instagram and Twitter posts sharing or discussing the video. The FTC and YouTube require disclosure of paid promotion. See YouTube, "Paid Product Placements."

[36] Contrast this with a 30 second Aéropostale web ad that ran as pre-roll on YouTube and was hosted on the brand's channel. It uses popular dance choreography but is more in line with legacy advertising, featuring music-video style quick editing of seven women dancing testing the limits of the jeans' flexibility ends with the framing copy "the only jean you need: Seriously Stretchy Jeans" splashed on the screen. Aéropostale, "Seriously Stretchy Jeans."

[37] Gap. "Bounce Meet Bounce."

[38] Dunagan, "Performing the Commodity-Sign, 18.

[39] Ibid., 7.

[40] The Dance HALL, "A-Z OF AFRICAN DANCE." View count on YouTube as of 8 Feb 2018. In November 2017, they released an additional video, an alphabetic list featuring only Senegalese dance, which has circulated much less without the excitement and context of the much more popular i-D version.

[41] The A-Z of Beyoncé Dance, "The A-Z of Beyoncé Dance."

[42] See Florini, "Tweets, Tweeps, and Signifyin;'" Sharma, "Black Twitter?;" and Prasad "Beyond rights as recognition."

[43] This has been much discussed in the wake of the micro-video site Vine's death. See Daileda, "Let's not forget the black Vine stars;"Gaillot "Life after Vine" Giorgis, "Black Users on Vine."

[44] See Meese; Jenkins, Burgess, and Green, *Spreadable Media*.

[45] Dodds, "Values in Motion," 452.

[46] Beyoncé has her own company, Parkwood Entertainment, but her music is exclusively licensed to the Columbia Records division of Sony Music. It's unlikely that high level music artists are earning money directly from their videos though their success helps promote songs, tours, and future contracts.

[47] Fogarty, "Breaking Expectations," 449.

[48] Dodds, "Values in Motion," 452.

[49] St. Felix, "Black Teens."

[50] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 76.

[51] YouTube, "Video monetization criteria."

[52] YouTube, "Terms of Service," section 6.C; Instagram "Terms of Use," section Rights.1

[53] St. Felix, "Black Teens."

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Scratching the Surface of Spectacle: Black Hypermasculinity and the Television Talent Show

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Abstract

This study explores the construction of black hypermasculinity in television talent show competitions through the re-valuing of spectacle as an aesthetic experience. Drawing on a screendance analysis of eighteen duet, trio and group performances featured in ITV's *Britain's Got Talent* (BGT) and Sky1's *Got To Dance* (GTD) between 2008-2013, this study explores the circulation of black hypermasculinity and the potentiality for an alternate reading of spectacular displays of athleticism. Building upon Kristen Whissel's concept of the emblematic nature of the special effect in cinema, the re-valuing of televised spectacles reveals themes regarding the black male experience in these competitions. Rather than dismissing these performances as commercial spectacles that recirculate notions of black hypermasculinity, these corporeal and televisual special effects instead highlight the thematic narrative of the reality television journey through themes of aspiration and transformation. Crews constructs images of superheroes, cartoons, animals and cyborgs, manipulated by camera angles and editing, that operate as both light entertainment and a reflection of the young black male experience in mediascope of reality television. The creation of spectacular and glossy images on screen therefore reveals the potentiality of a fluid gender and racialized representation.

Keywords: screendance, hip-hop, street dance, spectacle, reality television

Despite Yvonne Rainer's disapproval, spectacle, by its very nature, has always commanded attention.[1] In the context of screendance, the formulaic yet entertaining premise of dance on television talent show competitions has provided a regular digital platform for corporeal spectacles, none more so than the highly combustible, attention-deficit performances of U.K. Street dance crews. Bombarding the viewer with fast-flying images of physical dexterity, crews amalgamate gymnastic vocabulary, martial arts infused tricking and the flair of breakdance power moves with black social dance styles, all contained within a two-and-a-half-minute framework. Coupled with shifting camera angles, sharp editing between frames, and on-stage pyrotechnics, audiences on screen and at home are able to achieve the "Wow-affect."[2]

Tied into this spectacular viewing experience, however, is the re-circulation of blackness in a mediated format. The circulation of televised images of young males performing

seemingly impossible athletic stunts, high impact climatic finishes, performed with a hard-hitting dynamic and framed within a medley of black social dance styles, continues to reaffirm the stereotypical image of the black hypermasculine male. As Thomas DeFrantz observes in his study of hip-hop habitus, "black social dances distributed by the mediaplace veer towards familiar spectacles of excessive activity and hyperkinetic impossibilities."[3] Are these performances anything more than mediated representations of black masculine excess to be consumed by the white gaze?

Yet, the creation of spectacular images by all-male crew performances is a powerful tool for engaging the voting home viewer. The impressive technical precision of highly disciplined bodies, the male dancers' virtuosic aerial stunts that fly across the stage, and the rapidly changing shapes, forms and transitions in the choreography presents an engaging visual display. The layered effects of lighting, camera angles, pyrotechnics and the editing stage in the production process further enhance these performances with continued emphasis on surface, style and presentation. Because of such an emphasis on the glossy image, little critical analysis is given to the aesthetics of the spectacular, and, consequently, the mediatization of popular dance on television due to the dismissal of these performances as mere spectacle.

In the analysis of Hollywood cinema, Erlend Lavik observes that "the use of spectacle…tends to be conceived of as an appeal to the lowest common denominator" and that higher value is placed on the narrative of the film rather than its excessive visual displays.[4] Rosalind Galt mirrors this diminishing of spectacle's value, stating that "the rhetoric of cinema has consistently denigrated surface decoration, finding the attractive skin of the screen to be false, shallow, feminine, or apolitical."[5] Despite this devaluing of spectacle's aesthetic properties and its lack of attention in academic scholarship, spectacle is still favored in mass popular culture, evidenced by capitalist gains: high television viewing figures, sold out concerts, and record breaking box-office hits.

As a consequence of late capitalism, spectacle also refers to an ideological condition of a commodified society whereby social relations are replaced by images.[6] Crews perform in the overall spectacle of a media saturated contemporary society where real experiences are replaced with dazzling images of artifice. The positionality of male dancing bodies of color becomes a complex balance between the necessity to remain visible within the media spectacle of the competition and the loss of their lived experience due to the manipulation of reality and its reduction to spectacle. The value of focusing solely upon these spectacular images of black hypermasculinity is then twofold: the re-valuation of the role of spectacle as an aesthetic experience in television, and the potential for disparate readings of the highly constructed personas of young black men on reality television.

This study thus sets out to explore three key questions: how does black hypermasculinity operate and circulate in the mediascape of television; how do

constructions of hypermasculine blackness performed in a crew intersect with spectacle, and what more can be garnered from performances of a spectacularized black hypermasculinity in a screendance setting? Drawing upon film theory, I argue that while television talent shows reduce crew choreographies to commercially viable images of hyper-blackness, it is the black male experience in these competitions, particularly through such emblematic themes of aspiration and transformation, that enable a re-valuing of televised spectacle. These ideas will be explored through a screendance analysis of eighteen examples, including duet, trio and group performances featured at the audition, semi-final, and final rounds of ITV's *Britain's Got Talent (BGT)* and Sky1's *Got To Dance (GTD)* between 2008-2013.[7]

Black hypermasculinity on television

As explored in DeFrantz's and Gonzalez's timely anthology into black performance theory, "black sensibilities emerge whether there are black bodies present or not."[8] Blackness circulates in a multiplicity of practices and is deeply rooted in history, diaspora and corporeal exchange.[9] This circulation and reaffirmation of an enduring blackness, and, consequently, stereotypical visual representations of otherness, is particularly apparent in televised depictions of young black males. Cultural scholar bell hooks notes that black men have had little say on their representation, and historical depictions include "animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers."[10] These negative stereotypes continue to determine the representation of the black male figure, and, in order to gain visibility in institutional power structures of white discourse, these figures must either conform or attempt to work against such undesirable representations.[11]

In the late twentieth century, television corporations produced the same omnipresent black body in discourses surrounding black heterosexual masculinity. In a U.K. context, black popular cultural expressions historically shaped and influenced depictions of Black Britishness on television.[12] These televised representations aimed to demonstrate a corporations' cultural diversity, and, to some extent, the attractive commodity of difference. Such two-dimensional representations included the heroic status of black rappers, the naturalized ability of athletes, the threatening image of black gang members, and the representations of noble African warriors. In her analysis of the televised objectification of the black British athlete Linford Christie, Sarita Malik argues that "the black body functions as the agent of fascination and desire," suggesting that the allure and envy surrounding black male physicality reinforces the passive objectification of the black male form.[13]

Hip-hop dance practices, and their rebranding in the media sphere as "Street," "Commercial," and "Urban" dance forms, continue to construct tropes of blackness through global circulation, resulting in the commodification of their associated identities, attitudes and aesthetics. B-boys historically constructed the masculinized self

through their virtuosic and athletic performances in the cypher, demonstrating strength, power and aggression through improvised floor work and power moves in a competitive environment.[14] When re-presented from their vernacular context in the commercial market, the hip-hop dancing body becomes a recognisable and easy to read marker of essentialised blackness, signifying coolness, attitude, music, dress and swagger.[15] Such over-representation of certain screened images of blackness in the media, termed "hypervisibility,"[16] or, as Grey defines, "hyperblackness,"[17] speaks to the visual currency of these images and their embodiment and appropriation by new audiences. Dancing bodies who perform such "hypervisibility" hold cross cultural appeal and high currency in the commercial market, as consumers can buy into the imagined reality of black authenticity and the exotic other.[18] These performances screened on music videos, films, advertising, social media, and television appeal to "everyman" and "every-woman" in the construction of self-identity through access to an imagined black attitude and physical expression.[19] Satirically, the term hypervisibility likewise alludes to the invisibility of the black subject in other areas of society, reinforcing ideas of blackness as unfinished and incomplete.

So what might black hypermasculinity look like in the context of the television talent show? In the example of Cerebro: a crew formed of six young black males who competed on *GTD* in 2011,[20] the emphasis is placed on naturalized athleticism and muscular display, with a nod towards phallic hardness. The crew begin their audition with one dancer held upside down and slowly hinging at the waist, with the other dancers fanning out around the stunt. This sustained pose quickly spreads out across the stage, shifting to a unison sequence of mimetic arm gestures and breaking freezes. Dancers create a piston effect in canon by each rapidly stiffening their prone bodies to physically jolt off the floor in a diagonal line to the even drumbeat of the music. Following this impressive display of core strength, the dancers roll over and perform a controlled push off from the floor to standing in unison, gradually lifting their shirts to display their tightly sculpted torsos while smiling and nodding to the audience and then dropping their shirts back into place. As a finale, one dancer performs a series of linear gymnastic hand springs and round-offs over the rest of the crew and seamlessly inserts himself amongst the crew's pyramid formation.

Figure 1 *Cerebro*

This hyperbolic choreographic display is mimicked and amplified in the filming and editing of the crew choreography, as well as in the wider television production. Shifts between choreographic phrases involve split-second transitions between a moving floor camera, an overhead crane shot of the dancers, and a shot of judge Adam Garcia nodding his head at the performance. The impetus of the dance is propelled by the camera movement rather than the stage action itself, with the change in angles and the sweeping action of the floor camera adding further momentum to the unwieldy and fluctuating transition between social dance styles, gymnastic stunts, and narratives. Pre-recorded VT segments of the crew are interspersed with stunts and high color graphics, keeping bodies in action and in flight even during stationary interviews. During the judges' comments following crew performances, judges use metaphors of force, detailing how crews came out with "attack," "hit it hard," or "smashed it out the water."[21]

Pre-recorded VT segments additionally situate street dance crews, such as Cerebro, in false urban environments in order to maintain the illusive stereotypical markers or race and class, with a particular emphasis on the reproduction of blackness. *Flawless* crew are filmed walking around the streets of London without an explanation of their location, *The A Team* are depicted rehearsing their choreography outside a block of flats in a concrete open area, while Ruff Diamond are filmed performing gymnastic stunts in a disused factory car park.[22] Removed from their dance studio environments and placed within a constructed urban aesthetic, the television production continues to associate the black dancing body with "the streets": the mediated representation of the origins of hip-hop cultural styles.[23]

Following these examples, do these highly produced and screened crew performances reveal anything more than a regurgitation of fixed notions of black hypermasculine

excess? Drawing upon ideas derived from film theory, I argue that the possibility for an alternative reading lies in the notion of spectacle as an aesthetic experience.

Spectacular digital cultures

Since the late 1940s, the privatization of the spectacular experience through home television screens both increased the spectator's control of the medium, whilst at the same time reduced the sensual impact of the overall visual digital spectacle. Unlike the blackened theatrical environment of the cinema and the enhanced size of the cinema screen, the location of television in the home environment equated to a distracted gaze due to the temporal and spatial division between the spectacle and the spectator. These distractions are further amplified with the mobility of the twenty-first century television experience. Smaller screens, including smartphones and tablets, allow fingertip interactivity between television show and social media platforms, providing a further fragmented digital viewing experience. Consequently, small screen spectacles do battle to attract the attention of the distracted gaze.

In his study of visual digital cultures, Andrew Darley states that the proliferation of digital imaging technologies has fuelled the recent contemporary resurgence of spectacle in cinema and television.[24] These include the use of wire removal software, green screens, digital rendering, image based rendering, CGI, digital 3D motion capture, and the layering of live action and computer-generated images. Such advanced camera mobility sweeps and zooms the spectator through the filmed action, and rather than merely capturing images in front of the camera lens, these stylistic features become part of the visual experience. Such technologies reveal key similarities with the early emergence of popular entertainment in the nineteenth century due to their heightened use of "form, style, surface, artifice, spectacle and sensation," and a shared emphasis on arresting the senses through a fusion of technique and skill with mediated technologies of representation.[25]

In her study of the decorative image, Rosalind Galt challenges historical logocentric understandings of spectacle and narrative, and argues that the increased emphasis on the surface image of the screen through performances of excess is also emblematic of the narrative and politics of the context of the screened subject.[26] In a film context, Galt describes these heightened aesthetics as including "deep colors [sic], arabesque camera movement, detailed mise-en-scène [the design aspects of the film], and an emphasis on cinematographic surface."[27] Similarly, Kristen Whissel's study into spectacular digital effects in contemporary cinema explores how special effects articulate and expand the possibilities of viewing.[28] In particular, Whissel identifies two key styles of visual effect that are accomplished through cinematic digital technologies relevant to this study: "the illusion of radical, gravity-defying vertical movement" and "the corporeal and spatial 'plasmatics' made possible by the morph effect."[29] Instead of viewers losing

themselves in the empty spectacle of special effects, these digital technologies reveal "complex concepts and themes essential to the film's narrative."[30]

Despite diminished budgets and smaller screens, the application of these ideas to a televised context allows an analysis to move beyond an exploration of vacuous images and regurgitated stereotypes. By placing renewed importance on the aesthetic experience of these screendance performances, (constructed by both choreography and the wider television production), one can instead consider the wider outcomes that arise from both corporeal and digital spectacle within these performances. In the context of the televised street dance crew, I argue that two key themes emerge that bear significance in the televised representation of black masculinity: aspiration and transformation.

Aspiring to the Vertical

In *Ruff Diamond*'s semi-final performance on series four of *GTD*, one dancer stands on the linked hands of two other dancers, vaults backwards performing a double back somersault, and lands on his back.[31] A wide shot taken from stage left captures the sheer height of the feat, with the camera cutting to judge Aston Merryweather who jumps up and screams at the level of danger of the stunt. Following this stunt, viewers witness consecutive gymnastic displays: a back flip and a round-off from a solo dancer, a front flip over another dancer, a back flip performed in unison by three dancers, a back flip propelled from the linked hands of another dancer, and finally a solo back flip on the last explosion of the music.

Crews, such as Ruff Diamond, regularly extend along the vertical plane of the screen through athletic stunts influenced from breaking, gymnastics, cheerleading, martial arts, and tricking. These bodies appear to defy gravitational limitations, executing virtuosic aerial stunts usually only achieved through the intervention of technology upon the body. Dancers perform solo stunts both away from the body of the group and also as a collective in unison, with the risk increased by performing multiple stunts over the top of other dancers and being elevated by crew members to allow more height and multiple rotations in the air. In a duet example, *Urban Jokers*' semi-final performance incorporates one dancer leap frogging over another, with the base dancer suddenly standing up at the moment of the jump, launching the second dancer further into the air.[32] In a group example, *Antics* incite a surprised reaction from the judging panel in their 2012 audition when one dancer is catapulted into the air by the linked arms of two other dancers.[33] He partially disappears off the wide camera shot due to the height of the stunt, increasing the implausibility of the stunt. The camera immediately cuts back to judge Ashley Banjo, who leans forward, slams his hands on the desk, and yells out at the implausibility of the stunt.

Figure 2 *Ruff Diamond*

Figure 3 *Antics*

Within a film context, Whissel observes that blockbuster films create "breathtaking imaginary worlds defined by extreme heights and plunging depths."[34] Since the 1970s, the exploitation of the vertical axis of the screen not only includes human feats of jumping and falling, but utilizes "models, miniatures, blue screens, mattes and motion control" to manipulate characters and scenery along the screen's vertical trajectory.[35] With advancements in wire removal technology, digital animation and stunt doubles,

spectators witness film bodies that can manipulate their surroundings in the elongated stretch of the cinematic screen. In the television talent show context, production budgets do not allow for the same quality of visual experience, and post-production edits cut between camera angles rather than adding additional digital spectacle effects. The positioning of the camera lens, however, continues to heighten this emphasis on verticality. Both *BGT* and *GTD* shoot from the lower edge of the stage space shooting upwards, increasing the longevity of the perspective to give the appearance of a higher stunt. These explosive and cinematic moments include the trio *A3*'s unison performance of a front flip falling into split legs, shot from the foot of the stage and giving the appearance of the dancers falling towards the camera.[36]

Figure 4 *A3*

Similarly, in *Ruff Diamond*'s semi-final performance, a low camera positioned at the foot of the stage creates the impression of a dancer's aerial routine almost flying into the camera lens.[37] This extreme close-up immediately cuts to a long shot of the circular stage capturing the crew judging panel and studio audience, thus contrasting the depth of the perspective with the previous vertical stunt of the solo dancer.

Figure 5 Close up of *Ruff Diamond*

The rise and fall of bodies is also highlighted in the crews' defiance of gravity. In Flawless's audition on BGT, an overhead camera captures the crew in a stationary apex triangle formation and a single lying down dancer upstage center.[38] He pushes his body weight upwards to balance on his head, remaining there for an unnaturally long pause until inevitably falls forward flat on the floor, maintaining his taut torso and leg position.

Figure 6 *Flawless*

In *Ruff Diamond*'s final performance in series four, five dancers stand in a horizontal line and lean back towards stage left in unison.[39] A single dancer mirrors this off-balance lean but in a precarious handstand, pushing the limitations of his own off-balance. While the small screen may not utilize wires, miniatures or blue screens, it is the dancing bodies themselves that create the special effect.

In a cinematic context, such emphasis on the vertical creates breath-taking special effects that, according to Whissel, signify struggles of power and issues of ascent and descent.[40] The vertical thus becomes emblematic of the protagonist's upward mobility or their untimely descent in relation to the "historical, familial, and traditional past."[41] In the context of the crews' competitive performance, crews act in excess of their staged performances by choreographically mimicking the elongated vertical screen through their physical feats, while at the same time inevitably falling back to the ground. I maintain that this continued emphasis on launching upwards into the vertical is indicative of the contestants' physical strive and aspiration in a competition concerned with upward mobility through personal struggle. By filling the vertical length of the screen, and, in some cases, disappearing off the screen, crews mirror the highs and lows of the reality television narrative, whilst ensuring maximum visibility within the context of the techno-spectacle of prime-time reality television.

Importantly, this emphasis on aspiration, as depicted through the aesthetic emphasis on the vertical, also has the potential to develop limiting images of black hypermasculinity. In particular, the continued emphasis on the vertical plane through choreography and screen techniques draws parallels with popular screen images of the male superhero. The athletic feats, the defiance of gravity, and the emphasis on flight, all create images of superhuman beings. In comic books, cartoons, and Hollywood blockbuster cinema, popular culture situates superhero characters, such as Superman or Batman, as the epitome of hypermasculine and hegemonic masculine superiority. Superheroes sit within a moral framework whereby they embody Western liberal ideals of law enforcement and the protection of human citizens. Enabled through superhuman armory, strength, skill and weaponry, the fantasy figure of the superhero amplifies the seemingly naturalized attributes of hypermasculinity.

Such a paradigm between street dancers as superheroes is already established in the U.S. web based television series, *The League of Extraordinary Dancers*.[42] The narrative situates the majority male cast of Street dance performers as having superhuman abilities, with each hip-hop dance technique representing a special power. Dancers transcend the limitations of corporeal skill by presenting athletic prowess usually only achieved through digital editing and in the cinematic depictions of superhero action sequences. In the case of the televised crew performances, it is the bodies of the dancers themselves create this lengthening of the dimensions of the performance space, amplified by the production techniques.

By framing these crews as superheroes who transcend the vertical, these performances hold the representational power and possibility for "fantastic (re) imaginings of black identity."[43] In his study into black American superheroes, Adilifu Nama describes characters such as the Falcon; a black superhero who appeared in Captain America in 1969, as a representation of "our dreams, desires, and idealized projections of our selves."[44] Black superhero comic characters, such as those featured in the recent Marvel installment of *Black Panther*, make a significant departure from limiting stereotypes, and through their circulation problematize negative discourses and assumptions surrounding black identity.[45] By aspiring to aesthetically achieve the superhuman through the vertical plane, these crews aspire to be read as more than a reductive signifier of black hypermasculinity.

Transformation

Antics open their audition on series three of *GTD* in a tight huddle on center stage.[46] Suddenly, ten arms shoot out from the black mass of hoodies and hats, retracting in and out like animal spines and waving side to side like tentacles. In the opening of their final performance in the same year, dancers stand in a vertical line with overlapping arms and open their hands and arms inwards and outwards in a jaw like fashion, complemented by the front dancer's menacing facial expression.[47] The crew play with animalesque images throughout their choreographies, creating the image of a snail sliding along the floor in their semi-final performance in *GTD* series three,[48] and opening their series four final with the crew crawling along the stage floor like oversized insects, captured by the overhead crane shot of the camera.[49]

Transformation plays a key role in competitive street dance crew choreography. While crews create a collage effect through their fusion of NuSkool hip-hop choreography with funk styles, breaking, hip-hop party dances, Krump, house dance, and waacking, these sequences are interspersed with their metamorphosis into animals, machinery, cyborgian robots, and cartoon characters. These anamorphic, mechanized, and digitized images are abandoned as quickly as they are created, as crews rapidly shift to the next stage of their two and half minute choreographies. For example, *Back2Back*'s audition briefly creates the comedic image of one dancer riding a bicycle, using the other four dancers to create the mechanics of the bike itself.[50]

Figure 7 *Antics* Audition

Figure 8 *Back2Back*

Abyss's audition features the formation of a helicopter, with one dancer elevated above the crew and spinning in the air like a propeller.[51]

Figure 9 *Abyss*

In their final in *GTD* series three, *Antics* merge to form a racing car with one dancer upside down on their head with their legs splayed to create the chassis and two dancers supporting him to form the wheels.[52] In terms of the transformation into digitally enhanced beings, *Abyss*'s semi-final performance features the sequential splitting and morphing of the body into a twelve-piece robotic machine, achieved through the choreography and the slow camera zoom out from a darkened close-up shot.[53]

This morphing between styles, objects, and animals is further augmented through the competitions' own camerawork and edit. The mixture of live and pre-recorded material allows additional 'excessive' stylistic features in the editing process, including slow motion sequences and the rapid cutting of takes in montage sequences. Prior to *Flawless*'s semi-final performance, the introductory VT segment features short bursts of the most explosive moments of their audition routine.[54] These include a brief shot of a symmetrical group formation, a dancer running over the backs of the other crew members and an aerial windmill stunt. For *Diversity*, the recap of their audition performance in the VT segment before their semi-final condenses the performance into twelve seconds of footage.[55] Viewers witness sped up athletic stunts, explosive moments of unison, reactions of the judges through medium close-up shots, and freeze frames of the group hugging at their reaction to making it through to the semi-final. Edits also include the insertion of computer graphics, such as phone numbers and names of crews, as well as the frequent use of visible transitions in between frames, including dissolving or fading out the frame into the next image.

Figure 10 *Diversity* VT segment

Figure 11 *Diversity* VT segment

In her work on digital special effects, Whissel focuses on the cinematic convention of the morph: the visual effect of a seamless transition from a source image into a target image.[56] Inspired by the magic lantern shows of the nineteenth century, she describes this seamless metamorphosis as the promise of endless transformation, where the optical result is a "display of instantaneous transformation" that unfolds on screen.[57] This transformation from one figure into another is particularly apparent in crews'

transformations into cartoon characters. In *Twist and Pulse*'s final performance on *BGT*, the duet use vigorous arm gestures as if they are in dialogue, while a squeaky voiceover states "Hey guys it's *Twist and Pulse*, the cartoon."[58] The duet launch into a series of rapid angular arm isolations, body popping and waving to give the appearance of a fast-paced physical conversation between the two dancers, who stretch and bend their bodies at a rapid pace in an elasticated fashion. Executing rapid arm gestures that shoot out across a horizontal plane, *Twist and Pulse* create the illusion of blurred motion in a two-dimensional cartoon animation, where the complexity of the body is flattened to the properties of the television screen.[59] As quickly as these characters are created, crews quickly morph into another section of the choreography.

In a cinematic context, Whissel maintains that morphing effects speak to ideas of freedom, and go further to mobilize "fantasies of transcendence involving any type of rigid categorization – zoological, behavioural, social, spatial and historical."[60] While the spectacular morph effect witnessed in the choreography and the post production edit grabs the attention of the viewer, it also becomes emblematic of the wider themes of the reality television experience. In the context of the television talent show, ordinary people can achieve social mobility through the format of these programs.[61] Personal accounts of their backgrounds in VT segments constructs contestants as ordinary, ready for them to make the transition to the 'better' life of celebrity. Through the choreographic and digital effect of transformation, viewers witness crews change before their eyes, morphing into an improved version of themselves through the neoliberal framework of the competition.

Alongside reflecting themes of personal transformation, the crews' metamorphosis into machines and digital beings, as well as their digital manipulation by the edit, puts into question fixed notions of identity. In her feminist study of the gendered cyborg, Balsamo states that "cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves."[62] The disruptive potential of the cyborg collapses the boundaries between social reality and science fiction and signals the reconsideration of the material body away from the contested binary identity markers of gender, race, creed, biology and class. By morphing into spectacular images of superhuman cyborgs and machinery, crews problematize the notion of the essentialized black entertainer and blur the boundaries between binary discourses that surround the material body.

These transformations also make a subtle nod towards discourses of Afrofuturism: "a way of imagining possible futures through a black cultural lens."[63] Operating as both an artistic expression and a framework for critical theory, Afrofuturism, according to Ytasha Womack, "combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afro-centricity, and magic realism with non-western beliefs."[64] Afrofuturism breaks down racial, ethnic and social limitations in order to empower black individuals and to "create aspirational space that speaks to social ambitions enlivened by artmaking

practice."[65] The transformation of material bodies of crew members into science fiction inspired organisms in the choreography, as well as the digital intervention of the post-production edit that manipulates crew performances, offers a differing representation of black hypermasculinity in the constraints of the television production. Similar to the Afrofuturist possibility explored through the cinematic world of *Black Panther* and its technologically advanced state of Wakanda, crew performances render new futures through the techno-corporeality of their choreography.[66] This transformation from the material to the mechanical, as an aesthetic experience, thus operates as emblematic of the reimagining of an Afrofuture, where black bodies might exist without the threat of physical and discursive death. Through the re-valuing of spectacle as an aesthetic experience, these cyborgian-inspired performances of black hypermasculinity thus begin to reveal spaces of creative possibility and potential.

Conclusion

While televised street dance crew performances may not always provide the vehicle for black transformations within the restrictive neoliberal framework of the talent show competition, the re-valuation of spectacle as an aesthetic experience can offer alternate readings regarding the representation of blackness on screen. Rather than dismissing these performances as commercial spectacles that recirculate limited notions of black hypermasculinity, these corporeal and televisual special effects instead highlight the thematic narratives of the reality television journey. Building upon Whissel's concept of the emblematic nature of the special effect in cinema,[67] I suggest that the creation of spectacular and glossy images on screen enable the potentiality of more expansive gender and racialized representations. Through their physical labor, televised crew performances *aspire* to *transform*, both financially through their exposure in the television programs, and ontologically through their reimagining of fixed notions of hypervisibility. The playful creation of superheroes, cartoons, animals and cyborgs, manipulated by camera angles and editing, operates as both light entertainment and as a reimagining of black visual representation. By valuing screendance spectacles as a form of worldmaking for these dance crews, dancing black bodies can therefore inhabit alternative modes of visuality, and re-choreograph their histories and potential (Afro)futures within the current milieu of televisual spectacle.

Biography

Dr. Laura Robinson is Lecturer in Dance at the University of East London, and teaches on the BA (Hons) Dance: Urban Practice degree. Her PhD research focused on the

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Notes

[1] Rainer, "Some Retrospective Notes," 51. Yvonne Rainer's No Manifesto aimed to revolutionize dance and reduce it to its essential elements.

[2] Benthaus, "Hovering on Screen," 1.

[3] DeFrantz, "Hip-Hop Habitus," 238.

[4] Lavik, "The Battle for the Blockbuster," 176.

[5] Galt, *Pretty*, 2.

[6] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*.

[7] ITV's *Britain's Got Talent* is the U.K. version of the Got Talent franchise. Sky1's *Got To Dance* is a dance talent competition open to all ages, size of groups and dance genres. As a result of these new opportunities for exposure and an increase in prize money, fifty-eight duet, trio and group all male Street dance performances featured at the audition, semi-final and final rounds between 2008-2013.

[8] DeFrantz and Gonzalez, *Black Performance Theory*, 1.

[9] Several scholars situate the trope of blackness in the power structures of institutions that appropriate and reaffirm fixed notions of racial identity. For more details, see: Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*; Hall, *Representation*, Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy, *Between Camps*, Benston, *Performing Blackness*, Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, and Markovitz, *Racial Spectacles*.

[10] hooks, *We real Cool*, xii.

[11] For more details on the stereotypical depiction of the Black male, see: Dent, *Black Popular Culture*, Elam and Jackson, *Black Cultural Traffic*, and Nakamura, *Digitizing Race*.

[12] Malik, *Representing Black Britain*.

[13] Ibid. 130.

[14] For more details on the construction of the masculinized self through breaking, see: Banes, "Physical Graffiti," Banes, "Breaking," Rose, *Black Noise*, Hazzard-Gordon, "Dance in Hip Hop Culture," DeFrantz, *Dancing Many Drums*, DeFrantz, "The Black Beat Made Visible," and DeFrantz, "Hip-hop in Hollywood."

[15] For more details on how the Hip-hop dancing body as commodity has come to represent consumable images of 'blackness', see: Scott, "Dance"; Osumare, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-hop*, Huntingdon, *Hip Hop Dance*, and Arzumanova, "It's sort of 'members only.'"

[16] Fleetwood. *Troubling vision*.

[17] Grey. *Black Masculinity and Visual Culture*.

[18] Fleetwood. *Troubling vision*.

[19] Huntingdon, *Hip Hop Dance*, 116.

[20] "Cerebro Audition- Got to Dance," *YouTube*.

[21] These phrases are more regularly used on *Got To Dance*, where judge feedback is solely focused on choreography.

[22] Interviews feature on "Flawless Britains Got Talent 2009 Semi Final HD Dance Act," "A-Team Got to Dance Semi-Finals- Full Feature + Message," and "Got to Dance 4 Live Final: Ruff Diamond."

[23] Smith. As a result of mass movement to cities and the underdevelopment of urban centers, Valerie Smith states that "the idea of the urban has become virtually synonymous with notions of blackness" 2-3.

[24] Darley, *Visual Digital Culture*.

[25] Ibid. 6.

[26] Galt, *Pretty*.

[27] Ibid. 11. Arabesque camera movement refers to the composed fluid, curving lines of the shot, achieved through the cranes and tracking motions of the camera lens.

[28] Whissel, *Spectacular Digital Effects*.

[29] Ibid. 13.

[30] Ibid. 4.

[31] "Got to Dance 4 Live Final: Ruff Diamond."

[32] "Got To Dance Series 3: Urban Jokers Semi Final."

[33] "Got To Dance Series 3: Antics Audition."

[34] Whissel, *Spectacular Digital Effects*, 21-22.

[35] Ibid. 24.

[36] "A3- Britain's Got Talent 2010- Semi-final 5."

[37] "Got to Dance 4 Live Final: Ruff Diamond."

[38] "Flawless-Britains Got Talent 2009."

[39] "Got to Dance 4 Live Final: Ruff Diamond Final 3."

[40] Whissel, *Spectacular Digital Effects*.

[41] Ibid. 27.

[42] *The League of Extraordinary Dancers* (2010-2011) (known as the LXD) is a web based that follows the story of two rival gangs who have extraordinary powers in the form of hip-hop dance skills.

[43] Nama, *SuperBlack*, 4.

[44] Ibid. 2.

[45] *Black Panther* (2018).

[46] "Got To Dance Series 3: Antics Audition."

[47] "Got To Dance Series 3: Antics Final Performance."

[48] "Got To Dance 4: Antics Performance."

[49] "Got To Dance 4 Live Final: Antics."

[50] "Back2Back | Audition | Got To Dance Series 2."

[51] "Abyss Street Dance Group Britains Got Talent 2011HD."

[52] "Got To Dance Series 3: Antics Final Performance."

53 "Britains got talent- Abyss semi-finals."

54 "Flawless Britains Got Talent 2009 Semi Final HD Dance Act."

55 "Diversity (Winners) (HQ) Semi final BGT 2009."

56 Whissel, *Spectacular Digital Effects*.

57 Ibid. Famous examples of the morph effect include the transformation in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

58 "Twist and Pulse - Britain's Got Talent 2010 - The Final."

59 For more information on animation techniques, see Osborn, Cartoon character animation with maya.

60 Whissel, *Spectacular Digital Effects*, 17.

61 Andrejevic, *Reality TV* and Biressi and Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation*.

62 Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body*, 57. Balsamo's ideas are based on Donna Haraway's seminal essay, "A manifesto for Cyborgs."

63 Ingrid laFleur in Womack, *Afrofuturism*, 9.

64 Ibid.

65 DeFrantz, "Afrofuturist Remains," 220.

66 Staples, "The Afrofuturism Behind 'Black Panther.'"

67 Whissel, *Spectacular Digital Effects*.

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Magic Mike, *Dirty Dancing*, and the (Empty) Promise of Heteromasculinity

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Abstract

In 1987, Eddie Murphy performed a comic sketch about white men dancing that would inform future movers and makers of white male dancing in American popular culture, helping to create a trope mocking white men for their inability to dance, most often referred to as the "white man dance." At that time, *Saturday Night Live*, with the help of its host Patrick Swayze, fresh off the popularity of his work in sleeper hit *Dirty Dancing*, contributed to the trope itself with a sketch comparing the hypermuscular physique of Swayze vs. the flabby physique of comedian Chris Farley. Almost thirty years later, American popular culture would see a return to a renewed interest in the dance film with the stripper film *Magic Mike*. This article argues that although *Magic Mike*, like *Dirty Dancing*, relies on the makeover trope as its narrative and thematic engine, Magic Mike revises the popular dance film format to instead focus on the relationship between two men, Mike and Adam, rather than on a heterosexual partnering. Magic Mike's focus on this male-to-male relationship inevitably comments on the exchange between heteronormative masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality and their assumed whiteness.

Keywords: Patrick Swayze, beefcake, Richard Dyer, White Man Dance, masculinity, AIDS, screendance, film, Saturday Night Live, Chris Farley, Channing Tatum, Magic Mike, Chippendales

In Adrienne Rich's pioneering essay titled "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence," she seeks to explore the ways in which lesbian existence has been marginalized as well as the ways in which heterosexuality operates as an institution that, in many ways, has been forced onto women as a part of a heteronormative conditioning. As Rich states, "the failure to examine heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including both physical violence and false consciousness."[1] Rich's indictment of the strictures of heterosexuality as an institution of cultural conditioning in 1980s America, when the essay was published, becomes particularly cogent when exploring the popularity of dancer and film star Patrick Swayze, who became a heartthrob sensation after the unexpected dance film hit, *Dirty*

Dancing,[2] in 1987. Almost thirty years later, a new dance sensation hit theaters in the stripper film *Magic Mike*.[3] Although *Magic Mike* follows a very similar narrative pattern and relies on a similar makeover trope as *Dirty Dancing*, *Magic Mike* revises the popular dance film format to instead focus on two men, Mike and Adam, rather than on the heterosexual partnering of a man and a woman. Even though *Magic Mike* focuses largely on the relationship between two men, the film's dance finale ends, just like *Dirty Dancing*, on a heterosexual pairing (between Mike and Joanna, Adam's sister), thus reinforcing a compulsory heteronormativity. However, the film's central focus on the relationship between the two men adds a slightly different thrust than that of *Dirty Dancing*—one which aims to speak to the provocative exchange of heteronormative masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality and the assumed whiteness of both. I argue that dancing in these films becomes the way that heteronormative masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality are made legible and understood by its audience.

In order to contextualize my argument between *Dirty Dancing* and *Magic Mike* regarding whiteness and compulsory heterosexuality, especially as intersecting with screendance in contemporary American film, I begin by discussing two contemporary American popular cultural texts that employ the iconic dance lift during *Dirty Dancing*'s finale: an NFL commercial which parodies the lift during the recent Super Bowl LII; and a scene between Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone in the 2012 film *Crazy, Stupid, Love*. I will frame the ways in which both compulsory heterosexuality and whiteness are made central in these sequences, even when the NFL commercial constructs a kind of disguise of cross-racial harmony. For contextualization, I establish Eddie Murphy's "white man dance" sketch from his 1987 film *Eddie Murphy Raw* as the inception of a trope that began to portray (straight) white men as "bad" dancers in order to more clearly affirm these men in a position within hegemonic masculinity. These early discussions in the paper then help to further establish the ways in which I analyze *Magic Mike* in terms of its representations of whiteness and compulsory heterosexuality.

As I argue throughout, dancing itself is offered as the glittery excitement of these respective ideologies, but that promise of excitement and enjoyment, for the most part, is unfulfilled. Further, when compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory masculinity are set side-by-side in contemporary American cinema, it is heterosexuality which wins out, whereas with masculinity the participant seems to come up empty-handed—his investment in 'masculinity' leaves a lack. I conclude the essay with yet another example of a contemporary American popular culture text that references the lift from *Dirty Dancing*. I engage with the film *Silver Linings Playbook*, which I argue re-envisions the lift to complicate the gender and racial significations of the earlier sequences discussed throughout this article.

The Lift Re-Made: Two Different Moments, Two Different (Con)Texts

Moment One, 2018

On the night of *Super Bowl LII*, February 4th, 2018, New York Giants' players Eli Manning and Odell Beckham, Jr., along with the New York Giants offensive line as the supporting dance staff enact a parody of the iconic final dance scene in *Dirty Dancing*. The commercial,[4] a parody of the controversial touchdown dances during National Football League (NFL) games and as such, an advertisement for the NFL itself, ends with the iconic lift—Eli Manning (as Johnny Castle) literally lifts Odell Beckham Jr's (as Baby Houseman) above him.

2018 NFL commercial featuring Eli Manning and Odell Beckham, Jr.

Moment Two, 2011

In the film *Crazy, Stupid, Love*,[5] the character Hannah (played by Emma Stone) decides she's going to finally make it with "the hot guy from the bar," Jacob (played by Ryan Gosling). Much to Jacob's surprise, Hannah subverts his controlled game of picking up

women when she asks Jacob to tell her his "big move," the one that gets women into bed. He refuses at first, but eventually relents and confesses to Hannah that he usually "works *Dirty Dancing* into the conversation." Jacob proceeds to explain that he tells every woman he picks up that he can do the lift that Patrick Swayze does with Jennifer Grey at the end of the movie. He plays the song, he does the lift, and sure enough, every woman always wants to have sex with him. Jacob agrees with Hannah that it is the most ridiculous thing "ever heard," but "it works. Every time." Jacob then proceeds to do the same for Hannah. Once Hannah and Jacob do the lift, she immediately relents and asks him to take her to his bedroom.

There are many audiovisual texts which reference the iconic lift sequence from the end of *Dirty Dancing*.[6] What is it about that *Dirty Dancing* lift that so thoroughly occupies an iconic space within screendance film history? I would argue that the lift is emblematic of the exchange within the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. Somehow it enacts how women identified bodies can give into male identified bodies and be hoisted up and supported assuredly. In the final lift scene of *Dirty Dancing*, Baby gives a slight nod of consent to Johnny after he finishes a short ensemble dance routine on the floor. She stands on stage watching the audience in their seats below while Johnny and the staff at Kellerman's dance in unison. Once Baby has given Johnny her consent to perform the lift, a move she has been unable to perform up to this point in the film due to her lack of trust in her own body and herself, she is supported by two other male members of the dance staff as they delicately lift her from the stage onto the floor. The dance lift is the quintessential image of the heterosexual institution. This is the moment of movement-to-stillness that is legitimized by a heteronormative society—not only are Baby's father and the elitist white audience enraptured by the physical feat and their dance chemistry and execution, but the non-white dance staff has been fully integrated into the production as well. It is a cross-racial integration across class lines. The dance that leads to the lift has also integrated the taboo "dirty" dancing previously not allowed on the stage at Kellerman's. In the lift, Baby gives herself over to Johnny and Johnny delivers—and it is through Baby that Johnny also inherits the privilege and acceptance of her station.

Screenshots of Jennifer Grey (Baby) and Patrick Swayze (Johnny) in *Dirty Dancing* Dir. Jerry Zucker, 1987.

I do not recall when I watched *Dirty Dancing* for the first time, but I do remember that it had a significant impact on me like no other film had. I wanted to fall in love with a man who would teach me how to dance, who would awaken my relationship to my body, sexual and otherwise. It left a deep psychic imprint on how I was to approach romantic relationships with men, and what impression I expected to leave on a significant other. However, it is not the moment of the lift from the finale that I longed to have with a dance partner like Johnny Castle—but instead it is a lift that occurs within the routine that takes place on the stage that I yearned to replicate. Johnny lifts Baby onto one side of his torso, the feminine layers of her dress swishing as he turns her, her legs forming a split in the air. It was this lift that indelibly remains in my memory as it is reflective of a more co-dependent moment, one requiring Baby to stay tethered to his body and one less in celebration of her newfound independence. A few years ago, I uncovered a journal I kept during my adolescence. I was determined to find Patrick Swayze in Hollywood when I grew up, and convince him to become my dance partner. At that point in my life (I would discover my own queerness much later), it was not a question that I would need to seek a heterosexual partnering in order to define myself, nor was it a question what gendered body, exactly, would need to be this partner for me.

I include this anecdote to speak to the power of the heterosexual institution as constructed in this iconic film, and as emblematized by the meaning inscribed in the lift. As Rich states in her essay, "[W]e may faithfully or ambivalently have obeyed the institution but our feelings – and our sensuality – have not been tamed or contained within it."[7] It would be many years before I would understand Rich's poignant point about the ways in which heteronormativity conditions us to fall under the obedience and seduction of the heterosexual institution and many years to investigate the ways in which contemporary film replicates this ideology. As Rich states, and this was even truer for Baby, who meets Johnny in the mid-1960s, "[W]omen have married because it was necessary, in order to survive economically, in order to have children who would not suffer economic deprivation or social ostracism, in order to remain respectable, in order to do what was expected of women, because coming out of 'abnormal' childhoods they wanted to feel 'normal' and because heterosexual romance has been represented as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment."[8] *Dirty Dancing* fulfills this compulsory heteronormativity through its use of dance and the lift sequence. It also asserts dancing as a masculine activity through the technical skill and physicality of Patrick Swayze's character. There is no doubt that Johnny Castle is anything but masculine and heterosexual despite his affinity for dance.

I will briefly address the ways in which dancing ability (or lack thereof) is used for comic effect particularly when paired with (straight)[9] white hypermasculine men beginning in the late 1980s. In order to contextualize this trend, I will take a look at a sketch from Saturday Night Live when Patrick Swayze was the host which parodied the Chippendales male dance troupe. This sketch is also particularly useful in connecting

Swayze's masculinity in *Dirty Dancing* to the masculinity of Channing Tatum in his role as a stripper in the film *Magic Mike* which I will later address.

Saturday Night Live aired the sketch titled "Chippendales Audition" on October 16, 1990. Actor and dancer Patrick Swayze hosted the episode during his peak in popularity in Hollywood, cemented after *Dirty Dancing* became a sensation just three years prior. This sketch parodied the hypermasculine physique Swayze was known for, an archetype that thrived on 1980s Hollywood screens, by casting Swayze as an erotic dancer auditioning for Chippendales, the first all-male stripping dance troupe known for its striptease routines and its signature costume of bow tie and shirt cuffs worn on a bare torso over black pants (coincidentally, *Magic Mike* employed very similar costuming as worn by Channing Tatum and the other strippers). In the sketch, a panel of judges made up of two men and one woman (played by Mike Meyers, Kevin Nealon, and Jan Hooks) are trying to decide whether to cast Patrick Swayze or Chris Farley.

The two men step on stage in identical outfits—sleeveless white tuxedo shirts tucked into black tuxedo pants, white cuffs with black cufflinks, and black bowties. Initially, the comic thrust lies in the visual/physical comparison of these two male figures: Swayze's toned muscular physique next to Farley's soft, overweight form, enhanced by the sloppiness of Farley's off-kilter bowtie. As they begin to hip thrust and fist pump their arms, the 1981 rock anthem "Working for the Weekend" by the Canadian rock band Loverboy, furthers the comic backdrop for the sketch. The two men turn their backs to the judges while they roll their shoulders back and rotate their hips in seductive circles. Swayze's orbit is tight and controlled while Farley's is loose and wide. The two men perform a half turn to face the judges in profile as they flex their biceps in a high lunge. As they turn to face full frontal again, Farley's shirt has humorously popped open. They strut downstage as Swayze strips, revealing his muscular, hairless chest, rubbing his shirt between his legs, tucking his pelvis forward and back, groping his legs, and arching his back. Farley looks over at Swayze, and removes his shirt as well, revealing again the visual comic difference in his own physique, repeating Swayze's moves with an exaggerated concentrated expression, rubbing his hands all over his hairy and flabby chest. They continue to attempt to outdo each other in this vein, gyrating, spinning, and flexing, Swayze offering the audience sex appeal, Farley his comic antithesis.

Screenshots of Patrick Swayze and Chris Farley in *Saturday Night Live*, *Chippendales Audition* sketch. Dir. Lorne Michaels, Oct. 16, 1990.

The sketch ends with the judge, played by Kevin Nealon, explaining that, while the character performed by Chris Farley's dancing was "great" and his presentation "sexy," Swayze's body was "much, much better than yours. You see, it's just that, at Chippendales, our dancers have traditionally had that lean, muscular, healthy physique . . . whereas yours is, well, fat and flabby."[10] As the judge continues to explain that they considered casting Farley to appease the "heavier" female audience members, Swayze's character begins to think to himself, in voiceover, as "I've Had the Time of My Life," the song famous for the *Dirty Dancing* finale number, plays softly in the background: "[E]ven as I stood there listening to them explain why they'd chosen me, I still couldn't believe it. . . . I never saw Barney again but I would never forget how, for one moment, he brought out the best in me. That *was* the time of my life."[11]

The sketch is significant for contributing to the rise of what I call "the white man dance trope," a trope which mocks (straight) white men's ability to dance. The more masculine the man, the worse it seemed he needed to dance in order to confirm his position within hegemonic masculinity. But, this sketch does not just represent the white man dance trope, but the space between the type of dance being seen by men in the late 70s and early 80s, in which masculine dancing men took center stage in dance film (such as that performed by Swayze in the sketch), and the rise of the white man dance trope (represented by Farley's performance as Barney), in which a man's inability to perform dancing became a thing of comedy. What this particular sketch seemed to also predict, however, was the phenomenon that was most concretized by the *Magic Mike* franchise, in which sexualized dancing by men, performing for the arousal of women, would become yet another thread via which an audience would accept a (straight) white man's dancing. This trend furthers my contention of the relationship between compulsory heterosexuality and dancing in contemporary American film. Because this sketch alludes to a connection between homoeroticism and the ability of white men to dance, it sets up the groundwork for my overall argument about *Magic Mike*. It was not only his sexuality that would be questioned in a (straight) white man who could dance, but also his place within traditional strictures of heteronormative masculinity.

The White Man Dance Trope: Eddie Murphy, Racialized Masculinity, and the 1980s

The white man dance trope assumes that (straight) white men do not have the ability to dance well. I am locating the inception of this trope in American popular culture in 1987, when Eddie Murphy in his stand-up comedy film *Eddie Murphy Raw*, performed a sketch most frequently referred to as the "white man dance." It gained traction especially after *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*'s Alfonso Ribeiro labeled it as such when exposing it as one of his influences for the dance he performed repeatedly on the show.[12]

In 1987, *Eddie Murphy Raw* was delivered to public audiences through a wide theatrical release. The film made over 50 million dollars in profit at the box office.[13] The film's wide reach is significant because the film gave the American public access to a joke mocking (straight) white male bodies that would become a popular cultural phenomenon, Interestingly enough, Eddie Murphy does not explicitly call out white men. In the sketch, Murphy opens with the following: "I went to a disco recently and watched white people dance. Ya'll can't dance. I'm not being racist; it's true. Just like when white people say Black people have big lips, it's not racist; it's true. Black people have big lips, white people can't dance."[14] He proceeds to mimic their movements for the audience. It is Murphy's representation of a particular choreography of unskilled danced whiteness that became ubiquitous in American popular culture for directly informing many other parodies of (straight) white men.

Screenshot of Eddie Murphy in *Eddie Murphy Raw*. Dir. Robert Townsend, 1987.

Murphy's sketch, contextualized within a stand-up career concretized and well-versed in homophobic content, hit on an ideology already cemented within the fears of white masculinity—fears of homosexuality and effeminization. These fears were particularly potent given the rise of visible homosexual masculinity in the mainstream, which was exacerbated by the AIDS epidemic in the United States during 1980s.[15] According to David L. Moody in *The Complexity and Progression of Black Representation in Film and Television*, which borrows from E. Patrick Johnson's *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*,

> The Reagan-led conservative administration in the White House during the 1980s paved the way for the reemergence of "family values," while simultaneously marginalizing those outside the heteronormative sphere of family including gays, lesbians, single working women and single parents. … Moreover, the insidious antigay pro-family sentiments promoted by the Reagan administration not only supported [w]hiteness as the master trope, but ironically also stimulated the career of a contentious Black comedian named Eddie Murphy. One could infer that Murphy's stand-up character during the 1980s became another minstrel cast member at center stage for the fulfillment of [w]hite political fantasies. … Murphy had a large [w]hite

> constituency from the very beginning, and by adding homophobic dialogue to his repertoire, his stand-up act ultimately became commodified, and sold as amusement.[16]

In other words, Murphy's homophobia, particularly expressed in his jokes about his fear of gay men and contracting AIDS, became the engine through which his jokes targeting white men could be read. In *Eddie Murphy Raw*, which opens with a sketch discussing his fear of gay men chasing him out of anger at his anti-gay jokes in his previous television special *Eddie Murphy: Delirious* (1983), the white man dance sketch thus becomes burdened with an indictment on white masculinity, as contextualized by a paranoia of homosexuality. As a point of comparison, one can note the difference in his depiction of white men with his sketch featuring Italian American men, who he likens to Black men, even referring to them as N—s, and who Murphy imbues with hypermasculinity in his impersonation, complete with an arched back and crotch grab. It is telling that in Eddie Murphy's view, Italian American men, unlike white men, only visit nightclubs in order to get into physical altercations with other men, their violence and aggression symbols of their affirming masculinity, whereas white men attend nightclubs to fail at dancing, their heads facing the floor, their shoulders rolled forward, their arms swinging back and forth with snapping fingers, a familiar symbol representative of the Black homosexual drag queen.[17] Murphy uses gestures that signify effeminization and homosexuality in order to criticize white men's failure at traditional notions of American masculinity. The relationship Murphy explores between (straight) white masculinity and effeminization/homosexuality become even clearer when set apart by his depiction of Italian American men, for whom he creates a hypermasculinity in stark contrast. By including in the same stand-up special a sketch of Italian men, white American men who stand in as more "ethnic" than the generic white male, the generic white male dancer then becomes further emasculated through this juxtaposition.

For better or for worse, Eddie Murphy pinpointed a very adept ideological relationship between (straight) white men's relationship to dance and their subsequent fear of being marked as homosexual or effeminate, which risked taking white men further away from their investment in masculinity. As can be seen from the plethora of resulting white male dances emerging from contemporary American popular culture after the release of *Eddie Murphy Raw* and his white man dance sketch, such as *Pretty in Pink*'s Duckie, *Friends*' Chandler Bing, and *The Office*'s Michael Scott, the sketch enabled white men to explore the relationship between masculinity and white men's expected inability to dance well. As white men dancing, they did not risk having their heteromasculinity being called into question. However, in turn, Murphy's sketch also cemented a one-dimensional view of the white male dancer, one that assumed white men could not dance, and those who could called into question their ability to perform hegemonic expectations of contemporary American masculinity.

The NFL, *Dirty Dancing*, **and** *Magic Mike*: **The Empty Satisfaction of the Heterosexual Institution and Hegemonic Masculinity**

Masculinities Studies scholar R. W. Connell is most widely credited with popularizing the term hegemonic masculinity in the early 1980s, which refers to "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue."[18] Connell is quick to point out that hegemonic masculinity may not be normative (i.e., performed by most men), but that it is a dominant gendered expectation. Sociology scholars who focus on white masculinity, such as Michael Kimmel, Tim Wise, and James Messerschmidt, mix theoretical concerns with qualitative research methods in order to further Connell's research by addressing how the pressures of hegemonic masculinity affected American men in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, particularly in the expectations around financial support, producing labor, maintaining an athletic and reproductive body, and effecting a stoic (or emotionally undemonstrative) exterior. Gender Studies scholar Judith Butler's contention that gender is not innate but is performed and made through reiterated patterns of gendered behavior offers another way to explore the reiterated patterns of comic dancing by (straight) white men. Finally, film scholar Laura Mulvey argues that classic Hollywood filmmaking creates a male gaze through the depiction of the woman on screen as an object of desire can provide a framework through which to explore the ways in which men on screen become the object of desire for women audiences, especially when considering the athletic physique of (straight) white men moving on screen supposedly for the sexual arousal of heterosexual female viewers, while the dancing itself is constructed in a way to appear athletic (or comical) for the satisfaction of an assumed heterosexual male audience.

The Super Bowl ad featuring the *Dirty Dancing* parody merges images of hegemonic masculinity with clear references to the finale dance sequence in order to fuse gender patterns of masculine behavior with the heterosexual pairing of the original. For example, the commercial begins with the imprecise and informal address of male homosociality: "Wanna work on that thing?" Manning asks while casually nudging Beckham Jr's arm with his elbow. This invitation firmly plants the commercial in the territory of masculinity so as not to portray men who represent the ultimate ideal of American masculinity—American football players in an ad on Super Bowl Sunday—as "too feminine." In this way, when the dance is integrated into the ad and performance, their hegemonic masculinity will stay intact. Their masculine coded body language and rhetoric continues when Beckham Jr. responds: "[L]et's do it," and Manning confirms, "[L]et's get it," as they both drop their face towels on the table at the sidelines of their practice field. After they perform their winning "touchdown," Beckham Jr.'s face appears in medium close up, his face sincere and stoic towards the camera as "(I've Had) The Time Of My Life" begins to play in the background. He abandons the football on the ground beside him as he whips his head (and hair) around in a feminine coded gesture

so that he looks towards the camera (and Manning, not shown in the shot) while his torso still faces away from the camera and Manning. They gradually walk toward one another and they grip each other's hands and embrace. Hands still connected, they open outwards to start the *Dirty Dancing* dance from the finale scene, Beckham Jr.'s leg pointed in a *tendu* to the side. What is important about the way that the two men perform different moments from the dance sequence is that the sequence remains masculine and imprecise and it is this slippage between their performance and the audience's expected memory of the perfected sequence from the film's original that creates the comedic thrust while keeping the masculinity of the two figures intact. The dance finale is gestured at without flawless execution; it is a parody, after all. They don't perform it too well, thus arousing suspicion with regards to the homoerotic nature that could be placed upon the two men. It also does not jeopardize their position within hegemonic masculinity and its association with athletics. The ad itself advertises a new change in touchdown dances this season, in which the NFL allowed choreographed dances after teams successfully made touchdowns. This rehearsed choreography, however, remains tethered to heteronormative masculine movement language, regardless of the ability these men may have to technically execute the choreography.

The racialized pairing in the duet adds further critical fodder. This is not just any Super Bowl. This is 2018 during the Trump Administration, a particularly culturally divided moment in the United States. This is also the Super Bowl post-Kaepernick, in which the NFL was accused of blackballing 49ers quarterback, Colin Kaepernick, for protesting police violence against Black men by taking a knee during the National Anthem.[19] During this Super Bowl, protesters who stood outside the Super Bowl in support of Colin Kaepernick were arrested by law enforcement. Additionally, this is also the Super Bowl in which Justin Timberlake, a (straight) white male pop star/dancer known for being influenced by Black dancers and singers such as Michael Jackson and James Brown was criticized for not doing more to defend Janet Jackson when a wardrobe malfunction during the 2004 Super Bowl Halftime Show, referred to as Nipplegate, caused Janet Jackson to be blacklisted and her career to stall while Justin Timberlake's solo career skyrocketed.[20] This is also the second Super Bowl in which Patriots' quarterback Tom Brady (who helped lead his team to a Super Bowl victory during 2017 and whose team also played in the 2018 Super Bowl) was criticized for his personal friendship with President Donald Trump.

The commercial thus offers a non-threatening view of the inter-racial relationships in the NFL, one in which the white quarterback literally elevates his often Black teammates. Interesting to note in the video is that blackness is conflated with the (feminized) role of following in partner dancing since it is Beckham Jr. who follows Manning's lead and gets lifted up. It is perhaps true that on the football field, quarterback Eli Manning offers a strong "Johnny" to help support Odell Beckham, Jr's "Baby." However, given the controversy between Kaepernick, Trump, and the NFL, the NFL as a corporation and

sponsor of this commercial used the iconic choreographic moment from *Dirty Dancing* to not only draw attention away from the controversy through a popular culture nostalgic moment, but more importantly (and perhaps even deviously) reinforced the trope that white masculinity should lead. By tying Manning to Patrick Swayze's Johnny Castle, the commercial reinforces the hypermasculine trope.

In the film *Magic Mike*, I argue that Mike took Adam aka "The Kid" under his wing and showed him the ropes of the stripping world. However, by the film's end, in a masculinist turnabout, the Kid goes out on his own and gets involved in dealing drugs and Mike loses his entire life savings—the savings that would free him from the confines of the hustling world of being a sexual commodity—by trying to save Adam's life. Adam loses himself to the depraved world of substance abuse. The movie hints at the empty excitement that masculinity attempts to offer to young hypermasculine (straight) white men. Off the field, "Baby" as re-imagined in Odell Beckham, Jr., cannot rely on Eli Manning's "Johnny"; Mike cannot rely on Adam, at least, not in the same way that Baby is able to rely on Johnny Castle and the masculinity he represents in the resolution of *Dirty Dancing*. In order to fit in a hegemonic masculinist (and capitalist) framework, the white quarterback must capitulate to the NFL and become the signifier (via the commercial) for the NFL's white hetero-patriarchal corporate power.

Important to note is that the dancing in *Dirty Dancing*, *Magic Mike*, and even Justin Timberlake's halftime show rely upon Black social and vernacular dance. As Richard Dyer states in his chapter "White Enough" in Yannis Tzioumakis and Siân Lincoln's *The Time of Our Lives:* Dirty Dancing *and Popular Culture*, "*Dirty Dancing* plays fast and loose with the black component of *Dirty Dancing*. It seems simultaneously to acknowledge it and erase it."[21] Dyer further explores the ways in which blackness is acknowledged—through bodies mostly in the background, like well-known tap dancer/Vaudeville performer Honi Coles as the greatly underutilized Tito the bandleader, unnamed nonwhite dance couples in the dancing staff, music from Black artists in the 1960s, and the Jewish setting of Kellerman's indirectly referencing a long history of Jewish and Black vaudeville and blackface. Johnny and Baby, then, as the white couple the film centers on and celebrates in the final scene, are literally and figuratively held up by Black bodies—through the dance moves that they perform, the music they often perform them to, and the Black dancing bodies that surround them in an ultimate moment of integration. As argued in Broderick Chow's article "Every Little Thing He Does: Entrepreneurship and Appropriation in the *Magic Mike* Series," *Magic Mike*'s dance moves performed by Channing Tatum are "based firmly in the idiom of hip hop and street dance . . ."[22] Given that the blackness of Swayze and Tatum's respective dance moves becomes most evident in the movement that is meant to be sexually suggestive, the blackness then stands in as a sexual commodity, an element which lends sexuality to white bodies while commodifying its Black origins. A class dimension emerges in both films as well as both men use their sexual bodies for money: Johnny

sleeps with his dance students at the resort when they give him money and jewels[23] while Mike strips in order to start his own furniture business. One can see how these parallels with the Super Bowl LII and these two films appropriate blackness as a functioning commodity that can be sold to a white mainstream audience through ideas of hegemonic (white) masculinity.

Unlike the hegemonic masculinity embodied in the NFL commercial and *Magic Mike*, the sequence in *Crazy, Stupid, Love* that started this article emblematizes the fantasy-driven compulsory heterosexual enterprise in its remake of the lift scene. This is an important moment in the romantic comedy as "the hot guy from the bar," Jacob, who is a womanizer and disinterested in romantic relationships, falls in love with Hannah. What Hannah and Jacob don't know at this point, however, is that Jacob is responsible for another *Dirty Dancing*-like trope within the film—he has been the player remaking Hannah's father Cal and helping him rediscover his own masculinity in the middle of a separation from his wife after his wife admits to an affair.

Crazy, Stupid, Love remakes key elements with *Dirty Dancing* in a couple of important ways. In *Dirty Dancing*, Baby must rebel against patriarchy, namely her father, in order to find herself—however, she must do this by pairing herself with another male partner, Johnny, who represents her sexual awakening and entrance into womanhood as he educates her on how to dance, and make love, with a man. Homosocially, Jacob teaches Cal how to find his own manhood by teaching him the machinations of masculinity—how to dress "like a man," how to flirt "like a man," and how to pick up women. Meanwhile, Hannah lives a boring life with her lawyer boyfriend while she studies to pass the bar exam. It is Jacob that takes her out of the monotonous and sexless life and brings her into herself while she brings Jacob into a committed meaningful relationship. What is important in this film, however, is that Jacob is not just any man, but is played by the ultimate image of contemporary heterosexual masculinity: Ryan Gosling. Often compared to Gary Cooper and Marlon Brando, Gosling manages to embody masculinity while also parodying it, exposing the holes in this perfectly oiled (or so it seems), machine. As Sean Fennessey states in his article "The Two Goslings: A Movie Star Divided," the classic Gosling role is both "talking in that made-up Brooklyn newsboy accent and scoring the girl while winking at another across the room" and "a meta-commentary on being Ryan Gosling. . . . The duality of the bro."[24] Hannah is legitimized by being able to score "the hot guy from the bar," but further than that, by being able to change Jacob from his player ways, just as Baby brings Johnny into her world of status and privilege as he brings her into her own sexual identity and leaves his hustler status to be with her. In a sense, in this fantasyland of heterosexual promise, everyone wins. Even in *Magic Mike*, the film does not end in a reconciliation of Mike and Adam, but with the consummation of Mike's relationship with Joanna, a stand in for Adam.

In the NFL commercial and *Magic Mike*, it is clear that the risk-reward of masculinist exchanges is spurious. Although it is further bogus when it comes to the fictional

depiction of heterosexual partnerships in *Crazy, Stupid, Love* and *Dirty Dancing*, the dance is still ideologically and contextually employed in order to legitimize compulsory heterosexuality. However, as Rich contends, "in the absence of choice, women will remain dependent upon the chance or luck of particular relationships and will have no collective power to determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives."[25] In a sense, perhaps it is yet another remake of the *Dirty Dancing* lift, in another contemporary re-envisioning of the dance film, which portrays a more accurate example of a heterosexual partnership in which both partners have equal agency and the dance provides an example of what that partnership truly requires.

In *The Silver Linings Playbook* (2012, directed by David O. Russell), misfits Pat (played by Bradley Cooper) and Tiffany (played by Jennifer Lawrence) perform in a dance competition in the climax of the film. Their dance is a metaphor not only of their relationship, but of their personality quirks as sufferers of clinical depression. The random music and quick switch in styles of dance used in their choreography exemplifies their unstable psychological states. Near the end of the dance, Tiffany moves apart from him. She runs and jumps into a lift, although not one as recognizable as that from *Dirty Dancing*. Pat's head gets awkwardly stuck in her crotch, her leg remains in a sloppy *passé*, and the audience watches in horror. It is an uncomfortable moment, but an image that does not shy away from the imperfection of masculinity as merged with heterosexual partnership.

Bradley Cooper (Pat) and Jennifer Lawrence (Tiffany) in *The Silver Linings Playbook*. Dir. David O. Russell, 2012.

As seen throughout the film but thoughtfully rendered in this particular dance scene, these two characters accept one another as they are. The dance is uneven and filled with moments embodying "failures" as well as victories, which more closely resembles the reality for two characters suffering from and experiencing non-normative lives (and relationships) due to their psychological conditions. In this sequence as in their relationship, Pat and Tiffany struggle towards an imperfect union, one in which neither person is clearly the lead or the follower, but each are seen and able to express their own needs and inadequacies. The failure of the lift subverts the compulsive heteronormativity centered in the original lift in *Dirty Dancing* as well as in the NFL commercial and the scene from *Crazy, Stupid, Love*, offering a more complex envisioning of a partnering that also reveals the empty artifice of compulsive heteronormativity.

The (straight) white male dancers who are accepted within the larger American imaginary most often require bargaining with the currency of the hypermasculine. In other words, be it the naïveté of adolescence, the coolness of blackness, or the athletic physiognomy, (straight) mainstream Hollywood films and advertising suggests that white men who dance must be affirmed via the lens of masculinity before they are accepted as happenstance dancers within American popular culture and media. It is therefore the disciplinary framework of dance studies, which can provide a lens through which to continue to critically engage with filmic representations of hegemonic masculinities and their ideological circulations.

Biography

Addie Tsai is a scholar and writer interested in dance studies, psychoanalytic theory, creative writing, hybrid art forms, and literature of those that are marginalized, such as gender/queer literature, disability literature, and literature that addresses multiple intersections of otherness. Her poems and creative nonfiction have been previously published in journals such as *NOON: A Journal of the Short Poem*, *American Letters and Commentary*, *Forklift, Ohio*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *The Collagist*, *The Volta* and *Post Road*, among others. Her queer Asian young adult novel, *Dear Twin*, will be published by NineStar Press in August, 2018. She was co-conceiver for Dominic Walsh Dance Theater's dance theater adaption of *Victor Frankenstein*, and narrative collaborator of DWDT's production, *Camille Claudel*. Addie Tsai currently teaches Composition and Literature at Houston Community College, where she has coordinated a nationally-known reading series focusing on writers of color, and has taught creative writing classes on Personal Essay and Creative Nonfiction at *Inprint* and *The Jung Center* (in Houston). She received her Master of Fine Arts at Warren Wilson College in Poetry, and

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Notes

[1] Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality," 135.

[2] Ardolino, 1987.

[3] Soderbergh, 2012.

[4] Stoller, 2018.

[5] Ficarra and Requa, 2011.

[6] For more information on other texts which have referenced Dirty Dancing, please see The Internet Movie Database's entry for Dirty Dancing, under "Connections."

[7] Ibid., 139.

[8] Ibid., 138-139.

[9] The adjective straight is used in parentheses throughout this paper to make reference to the ways in which the identifier white men has, throughout contemporary American vernacular, and particularly in the 20th century, been employed to assume a heteronormative as well as American white male identity. With regards to the trope that "white men can't dance," a similar implication of sexuality has also been implied.

[10] Saturday Night Live Transcripts, snltranscripts.jt.org

[11] Ibid.

[12] Eddie Murphy's Joke From 1987 Inspired The 'Carlton Dance,' Alfonso Ribeiro Shares, http://comedyhype.com/eddie-murphys-joke-from-1987-inspired-the-carlton-dance-alfonso-riberio-shares/

[13] Eddie Murphy Raw, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=eddiemurphyraw.htm

[14] *Eddie Murphy Raw*, 1987.

[15] Many AIDS scholars have addressed this relationship; however, the episode titled "The Fight Against AIDS" in the documentary miniseries The Eighties, which premiered on CNN on June 9, 2016, offers the most cogent depiction of the ways in which the AIDS epidemic caused widespread fear of homosexuality.

[16] Moody, *The Complexity and Progression of Black Representation in Film and Television*, 48.

[17] Please see Johnson's *Appropriating Blackness* for further discussion of this homosexual signifier.

[18] Connell, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 832.

[19] For more information, please see Louis Bien's article titled "Colin Kaepernick's movement continues just outside the walls of Super Bowl 52" on SBNation: https://www.sbnation.com/2018/2/4/16969134/super-bowl-protest-colin-kaepernick-will-players-kneel

[20] Please see Dave Holmes's GQ article titled "Revisiting the Justin Timberlake-Janet Jackson Wardrobe Malfunction Minute-By-Minute": http://www.esquire.com/entertainment/music/a16020580/justin-timberlake-janet-jackson-super-bowl-halftime-show-wardrobe-malfunction/.

[21] Dyer, "White Enough," 77.

[22] Chow, "Every Little Thing He Does," np.

[23] Johnny's embodiment of the hustler archetype is further explored in Gary Needham's article "Heteros and Hustlers: Straightness and Dirtiness in *Dirty Dancing*".

[24] Fennessey, "The Two Goslings," np.

[25] Ibid., 141.

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Choreographing "ChinAfrica" through Transnational Encounter

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Abstract

A dance film made by two Belgian directors collaborating with Guangdong Modern Dance Company, *An African Walk in the Land of China* (2015) attempts to explore the encounter of an African woman with Chinese workers in urban China in the age of "ChinAfrica." In this work, the co-directors create a "duet" between an ensemble of Chinese dancers portrayed as blue-collar workers and a black female dancer depicted as a woman from an unspecified country in Africa. In my analysis, I juxtapose choreographic and cinematic representations of the African woman and Chinese workers with the complex social reality of their diverse experiences of encounters. Resisting any singular reading, the dance film provokes questions and stirs up reflections about the ever-intensifying interactions between Chinese and Africans at economic, political and cultural levels operating under global capitalism. This seemingly detached approach, while offering opportunities for multiple readings of the film, also glosses over the complexity of the very ideas of Africans and Chinese as well as their transnational encounters. The gap between the filmic representation and reality unveils the directors' reductionistic approach to representing ethnic figures and their experiences of each other on screen, indicating a persistent but well-masked colonial gaze.

Keywords: screendance, Africa, China, gaze

Introduction

The advent of the 21st century has witnessed increasingly more intimate relations between China and countries in the African continent. The Forum for Africa-China Cooperation created in 2000 as well as China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 promoted the flow of capital, labor, and natural resources between these two parts of the world.[1] With substantial investment from China, the African continent, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, has experienced the influx of over two million Chinese workers and a growing range of Chinese activities.[2] Reciprocally, hundreds of thousands of Africans have also embarked on journeys to China to seek new opportunities. The ever-intensifying economic relationships between China and countries in Africa have led to increased people-to-people interactions between

Chinese and Africans. As a result, there also appears an increasing number of media productions, particularly documentaries and fictional films, that engage with stories about their encounters, explore the Chinese diaspora in Africa or the African diaspora in China, and offer various perspectives on China-Africa relations.[3] Shot in the city of Guangzhou, the most popular destination for African migrants in China, "An African Walk in the Land of China" (2015, 14min) is the first internationally circulating experimental dance film that addresses this interracial and transnational encounter in a Chinese urban space.

Commissioned by the City Contemporary Dance Company in Hong Kong and premiered at Jumping Frames International Video Dance Festival, this film is a transnational collaboration between Guangdong Modern Dance Company and two Belgian directors, Pierre Larauza and Emmanuelle Vincent. In this work, the co-directors create a "duet" between an ensemble of Chinese dancers portrayed as blue-collar workers and a black female dancer depicted as a woman from an unspecified country in Africa. Analyzing this work in light of recent economic and sociocultural activities between China and various African nations, I ask the following questions: how does this film imagine the encounter between an African woman with Chinese in this urban space? How do choreographic and cinematic elements work together to depict their encounter, and why are these choices made? What kind of social reality is evoked through these artistic expressions? And does the film project a particular stance on Africans' experiences in China or comment on China-Africa relations?

In this article, I engage with theories of transnationalism and sociological studies on Africans in China. First, I will first probe the term "ChinAfrica" used by the directors in the synopsis of the film to provide the larger historical and social context that sets the stage for this work.[4] Then, I will perform two rounds of readings of this film: a close textual analysis that derives an understanding of the dance film from its choreographic and cinematic elements, followed by an over-reading of the work that attempts to unpack several recurring signs appearing in the film through its wider social context.[5] Finally, alluding to some ambiguity in the film that resists easy conclusion and value judgment, I will offer several possible and even contrasting readings of the work.

Contextualizing "ChinAfrica"

The co-directors provide the following synopsis (with some grammatical issues): "In the contemporary labor China, an African young woman roams in streets in search of a meeting. She crosses workers in her wandering. How will they welcome mutually at the age of"ChinAfrica?"[6] This statement reveals the historical context of this film - the age of"ChinAfrica."[7] I define"ChinAfrica" as a transnational and translocal space where Africans and Chinese interact at economic, political and cultural levels. These intimate connections between China and many countries in Africa exhibit multiple dimensions

of global cultural flow as articulated by Arjun Appadurai's notion of -scapes.[8] These -scapes are manifested as the following: the unprecedented numbers of migrants to both the African continent and China as part of the ethnoscapes;[9] China's involvement in media production in Africa,[10] forming part of the mediascapes; China's act of providing loans for many African countries in finanscapes;[11] the proliferation of the Confucius Institute in Africa as well as the increasing number of African students studying abroad in China as components of ideoscapes;[12] and finally, China's investment in the telecommunication industry in many countries in Africa as a manifestation of technoscapes.[13]

These dimensions of interrelations also led to inventions of new rural and urban space in both China and countries in Africa. According to Henry Lefebvre, space produces and is produced through relations of production.[14] In other words, space sets conditions of possibility and is generated through the interaction of everything in it, such as human activities. Lefebvre's theory of space offers an explanation for the transformation seen in neighborhoods in Chinese cities as well as many places in African countries where demographic shifts and new human activities resulting from cross-continental migration have reconfigured rural and urban spaces. The city of Guangzhou, where this film takes place, is a case in point. The rise of diasporic African communities has brought into the city new restaurants, shops, and other types of businesses. The districts where they tend to congregate have gained new names such as "Chocolate City," "Little Africa," and "Guangzhou's Harlem."[15]

This multidimensional global flow that transforms both space is never inherently neutral but motivated by different objectives. The ever-intensifying China-Africa relations have received much scrutiny from a wide range of perspectives. The Western press and some scholarly writings denounce Chinese engagement with Africa as a form of neocolonialism through the expansion of soft power.[16] However, a number of scholars recognize the much more complex dynamics at work that resist being explained through paradigms of neocolonialism.[17] The idea of "ChinAfrica" points to a wide range of heated debates surrounding the economic and political relationships between China and Africa and their implications for the world order. While Chinese activities in Africa have gained spotlights in both academic and non-academic press, stories of Africans in China have received much less attention. "An African Walk in the Land of China" sheds light on interpersonal transnational encounter only made possible as a result of this large-scale phenomenon. Rather than focusing on Chinese in Africa, the film explores an African's experience in China. In what follows, I attempt two different ways of reading the film to understand how the co-directors portray this encounter.

Attempt #1: A Close Reading of the Film

This is how I first experienced the film as a viewer who did not have much knowledge about the large presence of Africans in various Chinese cities, particularly in Guangzhou.

Scene 1. The film opens with a panning wide shot that gradually reveals ten Chinese workers. Dressed in identical blue uniforms and wearing anti-pollution masks, they lie on their stomachs with their heads turned to the side near a waterfront. Behind them the faintly visible skyline of the hyper-industrialized city of Guangzhou appears across the Pearl River under the dark gloomy sky. Cut. A still shot of the interior of a construction site piled with debris of shattered bricks. A grey mouse is scurrying around. Cut. Two adjacent shots of the exterior of the construction site. The demolished low rises pale against a high rise that is under construction. Cut. Underneath the inner-city highway that flies over the city, ten Chinese workers lie on their sides in front of a woman dressed in a bright patterned dress that is often associated with an African-style garb. She plants her body firmly on a pedestrian bridge, center framed. The camera slowly dollies in towards them, creating smooth motion that disrupts their silencing stillness. Her upright body contrasts sharply with their collective horizontal body spread out on the ground, suggesting that they are in separate worlds though sharing the same space. These carefully constructed shots work together as a grand establishing shot that frames the encounter between an African woman and Chinese workers in a hyper-modern city that undergoes continuous renewal.

Scene 2. On the same pedestrian bridge, she holds still, her body upright, fixing her eyes straight ahead. They crowd around her, pushing her forward in tiny but speedy steps. They direct their heads toward her but do not directly gaze at her. Cut. The camera dollies in as she reaches her arms into the sky and then stretches them behind her, lifting her shoulder blades and undulating her entire back. She smiles. Like her guards, they hold their bodies in absolute stillness and alertness, lining up in two rows of five on each side of her. They wear no expressions on their faces. The dolly effect of the camera creates an illusion of movement, as if they are transporting her forward on a vehicle, this time, with no need to directly contact her body. These two types of bodies, with their gazes never crossing paths, share the same space in close proximity but not yet encountering.

Scene 3. She slowly wanders through a busy street, passing by pedestrians who simply walk past her without acknowledging her presence. Her well-put-together outfit that signifies her Africanness makes her highly visible on the street and exaggerates her foreignness in this land. They, individually or in a group, push against a wall, sit in a restaurant, crawl on the back along a grocery aisle, and spin around near a staircase, implying that they are actively engaging in their mundane daily activities, eating, working and resting. Cut. Positioned in the center of the frame, she fixes her body in front of a gigantic excavator digging and flipping the soil among a thick pile of debris.

They, however, playfully interact with various objects at this construction site, sitting on a coil of metal, tip-toeing on a manhole, and crawling out of a pipe. They line up, congregate tightly and then dash out into the space, jumping and spinning. Situated amongst them, she acts as a detached observer quietly taking in all of these actions. She and they not only occupy a different kind of space but also demonstrate a different relationship to space. Their more intimate interaction with various sites imply a sense of familiarity with the space, sharply contrasting with the African woman's explorative relationship to space that signifies her position as an outsider.

The choreography of the camera implements distinct techniques and reinforces the construction of the African woman as someone who sees, while the Chinese workers are being seen. Dynamically situating the camera amongst their bodies presents close-up shots of a "de-territorialized choreography."[18] By not including their gaze in the frame, these shots imply that the Chinese workers are immersed in their own activities, not aware of being seen. Contrarily, when filming her, the camera consistently presents either a center-framed wide shot or medium shot of her body, revealing her uptight posture and active gaze in search of something. At times, the camera follows her from behind, granting viewers an almost embodied perspective of her visual field. This position of the camera emphasizes her point of view instead of theirs.

Scene 4. The relationship between the African woman and Chinese workers takes a dramatic turn in the next scene from indirect engagement to face-to-face interaction. Alone in a deserted building, she folds a red doormat in front of her waist. The very instant when she opens it up, the workers appear on screen from behind the columns at the site, dashing towards her. They turn their bodies, toss their arms, kick their legs, and bend their hands. She looks forward quietly without engaging in eye contact with them, holding a red doormat that says, "Welcome" in both English and Chinese. It is not clear whether she is welcoming them into her space or if she is seeking welcome from them. Point-of-view shots of her and them are both inserted in this sequence, revealing their experiences of each other from both of their perspectives. Cut. They carry her around and position her on the red mat. She obeys. They look at her while she gazes straight forward, still avoiding any direct eye contact with them. Cut. They walk away while leaving one of them to share the empty space with her. One of them pushes her shoulder. She responds by moving her spine. Sharing an intimate space of a tiny rectangular doormat, she and one of them converse through their distinct movement languages, her movement indicating African aesthetics and theirs an unmarked postmodern dance. With little eye contact and only occasional physical touch throughout the scene, she and they seem to just happen to share the same space but fail to communicate with one another.

Scene 5. The last scene lasts for more than one third of the entire film. On a rooftop, against the skyline of the modern city of Guangzhou, in extreme slow motion, she runs towards the red doormat while they leap, turn, and twirl from outside the frame to land

inside until eventually they collapse onto the floor, recalling the opening scene of the film when they were also lying on the ground. She lifts up her dress to reveal her bare feet. Bending her elbow, she moves her shoulder blades forward and back. Looking straight ahead and wearing a gentle smile, she looks forward into the camera, again center framed. The screen gradually fades out into black.

She and they, traditional and modern, outsider and local, single and ensemble: these are sets of binaries that the dance film establishes. Through the costume choices, choreography, the performers' intersubjective relationship embodied on screen, and cinematography, Larauza and Vincent dramatize the differences between the African woman and Chinese workers, portraying them as personae who share little in common except for being present in the same temporal space. Dressed in garb of vibrant colors and intricate patterns, her dark skin stands out amongst the collective body of Chinese workers who dress in plain blue uniform. While they blend together multiple movement styles, at times pedestrian, at times theatrical, at times a fusion of all kinds of gestures, and at times with a twist of Chinese martial art influence, she performs Africanist movement, popping her chest, undulating her back, and throwing her arms forward and backward with a controlled looseness. Although there are instances when she looks at them and they look at her, their gazes never land on each other simultaneously. This consistent absence of mutual gaze further suggests a failed encounter between them. The choreography of the camera approaches filming the African woman and Chinese workers in distinct ways. The African woman is mostly situated in the center of the frame, gazing into the camera as if she is performing for the camera. Chinese workers, on the other hand, never stare directly into the camera. They are portrayed as natives who only mind their own business, trapped within the hyper-production of capitalist modernity.

Attempt #2: An Over-reading of the Film

This is how I experienced the film by reading into three recurrent representational signs, namely, the hyper-modern cityscape of Guangzhou, an African woman, and Chinese workers, against accounts from the body of recent literature on Africans in China.

The hyper-modern city of Guangzhou, traversed by highways, spiked by skyscrapers, and overwhelmed by omnipresent construction sites, sets the stage for the encounter between the African woman and Chinese workers. This backdrop is not merely an imaginary construction of space achieved through careful selection of the sites, camera framing and composition. Instead, it provides a realistic documentation of the rapidly changing landscape of the city at the moment of this film production. Positioning the African woman and Chinese workers in the dance film against the realistic backdrop of the city, the dance film summons the viewers to read their representations as embodying the lived experiences of Africans and Chinese in this transnational city.

With its rapid economic development, China has been frequently framed in many Africans' imagination as "a new land of opportunities," attracting hundreds of thousands of migrants (men and women alike) to set their foot on this land and chase "gold."[19] Since the end of the 20th century, Guangdong, a province in the southeast corner of China, has become the major trading site for industrial goods in China with a strong labor-intensive manufacturing economy, even acquiring the reputation of the "world factory."[20] Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province, immediately became the most popular destination for African traders who would travel to the city to purchase Chinese manufactured goods in bulk for resale in their home countries. Since early 2000s, the number of Africans visiting or living in Guangzhou has reached an unparalleled high in the history of the region.[21] These migrants have tended to cluster in the same neighborhoods in the city, leading to a change of their demographic composition in various districts such as Sanyuanli and Xiaobei.[22] Most of the scenes in the film were taken place in Xiaobei, the so-called "Little Africa." This deliberate location choice evokes this social process of migration and place-making.

The appearance of the gigantic excavator on the street of Xiaobei in one of the scenes also invokes the urban renewal project taken place in 2014 in this neighborhood as part of a larger initiative that aims to create a "clean, safe, and orderly" Guangzhou.[23] "An African Walk in the Land of China" was made at the beginning stage of this project that eventually drove out many African populations and the businesses they had established. While the Western press critiques the anti-black racism that prompted this project,[24] Wilczak challenges this common assumption, arguing that this special transformation should also be understood in the context of Guangzhou's efforts to become a competitive "global" city through neoliberal restructuring.[25] *Who is this woman?* What does *she* think of this urban renewal project and its entangled relationship with the Chinese discourse of race? Is she confused? Is she angry? Is she amazed? Does she care? The dance film does not provide any answer. In front of the excavator, the African woman simply looks around, observing the space without giving away any visible hint of her emotional state.

A large amount of literature on Africans in China zoom in on traders from sub-Saharan Africa who represent the largest African population in China.[26] These traders actively participate in the non-hegemonic world economy of "globalization from below."[27] Robert Castillo, however, problematizes this narrow understanding of Africans' experiences in Chinese cities.[28] He underscores the complex and diverse trajectories of these individuals from various countries in Africa who are driven into transnational mobilities between their countries of origin and Guangzhou for a wide range of reasons and purposes. Some intend to stay in Guangzhou; some recurrently visit the city; and some others only pass through Guangzhou in order to go elsewhere. This view challenges the common misconception that regards Africans as a homogenous population.

How does the African woman, as the protagonist of the film, fit into the multifaceted experiences of African migrants in this city? *Who is this woman?* Which African country is she from? Is she a trader, am exchange student, a tourist who happens to pass through Guangzhou, or a college graduate who is exploring new life opportunities? Rather than specifying and locating the African woman, the dance film offers little sign that indicates her identities. With quite a stretch, one may be able to argue that her outfit suggests that she is of middle class background.[29] This possible indication would be consistent with demographic studies of Africans in China who tend to be well educated and of higher socioeconomic class compared to African migrants in European countries and Chinese internal migrants.[30] In this case, this portrayal of an African woman would have countered the dominant representation of a black woman as backward, poor, and of low socioeconomic class in Western media. However, by offering very little information that helps the audience understand who this African woman is, the directors provide a highly abstracted depiction of a much more diverse and heterogeneous population. In this representation the absence of details about her mark her within a colonialist gaze where her (generalized) African subjectivity is never fully interrogated or represented. She becomes an uncontested sign that represents "an African" and perhaps also "Africa" confronted with Chinese modernity.

While the dance film portrays the African woman as an outsider exploring a new urban space, the Chinese workers are presented as locals who are familiar with their environment. Roberto Castillo problematizes the rhetoric employed in scholarship that frames Africans' presence in the city simply as a binary of foreigners vs. a "fixed" Chinese local population.[31] He argues that "rather than a group of foreign migrants encountering a settled local population, Africans in the city mainly intersect and interact with 'Chinese' individuals on the move: 'internal migrants' of different ethnicities."[32] Zhou, Xu and Shenasi affirm Castillo's argument by noting that the majority of Chinese with whom Africans interact tend to be internal migrants who share the similar experience of precarity and transiency.[33] Thus, the choice of portraying the Chinese as a collective ensemble of workers who are dressed in uniforms that resembles the Mao Suit, a symbol often associated with socialist modernity,[34] seem to stand at odds with this capitalistic heterogeneous space.

The intersubjective relationship between the African woman and Chinese workers in this dance film alludes to inter-racial interaction between Chinese and Africans in this city. Zhou, Xu and Shenasi point out that for self-made African entrepreneurs and traders, they have developed an interdependent economic relationship with Chinese entrepreneurs.[35] Though frictions do arise due to their cultural differences, their economically interdependent relationships "create room for cooperation that transcends race, class and migrant status."[36] To facilitate this interdependency, they also find various tactics to overcome language barriers, for instance, through using a calculator, performing basic body gestures, and learning to speak simple words in each

other's languages.[37] In contrast, many other accounts of their interracial interaction focus on African migrants' experiences with local authorities who frequently carry out immigration raids and random visa checks, especially when major international events are taking place in Guangzhou.[38] While some Africans feel unwelcomed and discriminated against, some also express that they are treated with much more respect than if they were in a European country.[39] The literature highlights that there is no one single narrative regarding how the Chinese and Africans interact.

In this dance film, the African woman and Chinese workers dance out an ambiguous power relationship. It is not confrontational, not cooperative, not one-sided, nor is it discriminatory in any obvious way. Despite having some face-to-face interactions, the African woman and Chinese workers are portrayed as disinterested in each other. Associating these recurring signs in this film with the social reality of Africans' experiences in Guangzhou, I find the dance film too elusive to comprehend. *Who are these people?* On the one hand, the co-directors appear to be making a connection to the lived experiences of an African visitor in Guangzhou by situating her in the neighborhood where African migrants populate. On the other hand, they also seem to be unconcerned about making any references to their wide-ranging experiences in the city. Without adding much specificity about the African woman, the Chinese workers, and their relationship with each other and to the sites, the dance film projects a generalized narrative onto a complex social, cultural, and economic landscape. Thus, in its reliance on certain aesthetic juxtapositions (e.g., Chinese, African, traditional, modern), it falls short in complicating the socio-economic realities of these two communities living next to one another in contemporary Guangzhou.

Conclusion: Artistic Abstraction or Essentialist Reduction?

Approaching this dance film based on its filmic and choreographic texts and re-examining it as an artistic rendition of a social phenomenon, I have generated different perspectives towards this work. Its many layers of ambiguity due to its lack of specificity render multiple readings. On the one hand, I applaud the film for engaging in the exploration of an inter-racial relationship beyond the classic black-white dichotomy. Its lack of specificities in the portrayal of their relationship may be seen as an artistic choice for opening up interpretation of the power dynamic between the racialized subjects, rather than situating them into a fixed category of domination and subjugation. By invoking the Chinese workers and African woman in a dynamic city space that is going through reconstruction, the dance film invites us to reflect on the role of neoliberal global capitalism that brings people together across the continent for the purpose of serving the very machine of capitalism, rather than encountering each other in an intimate or empathetic level. On the other hand, while the directors attempt a detached and neutral gaze as outsiders trying to make sense of their experiences of encounters, they have also taken on a reductionist approach that glosses over a rather complex

social reality. For instance, literature on Africans in Guangzhou stresses that there is not a single narrative that can sum up their experiences. Their lives in Guangzhou exhibit multiple trajectories, diverse experiences, and various strategies of place-making. Their inter-racial interaction with Chinese people also demonstrates a level of complexity in which cooperation and friction co-exist. The film collapses this much more dynamic social reality into a singular representation: an impossibility or unwillingness of their encounter. The film exaggerates their differences instead of acknowledging any of their shared experiences.

Moreover, the directors also abstract and essentialize the woman from Africa and the Chinese working class. Africans who go to Guangzhou come from a wide range of countries in Africa and for different purposes. Chinese people in Guangzhou are also composed of diverse populations, of which a large number are internal migrants rather than locals. They experience similar conditions of transience and precarity as international migrants. The film generalizes these populations and reinforces a binary that portrays their encounters as that between foreigners and locals. All of these issues may be due to the mismatch between what the directors set out to do and what the film accomplishes. While the directors attempted to depict an African's experience in China and titled the film "An African Walk in the Land of China," this scope is too large for a dance film of this length to address, which leads to generalizations, stereotyping, and a lack of specificity. This attempt is associated with a persistent colonial gaze on ethnic figures who are fetishized on screen, not accurately represented or understood.

Biography

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Notes

[1] Bodomo, *Africans in China* 13-14, 225-226.

[2] Ibid., 13.

[3] For example, *Guangzhou Dream Factory* (2017) is a recent documentary film about African migrants' experience in Guangzhou. *When China Met Africa* (2010) is a documentary film that follows the lives of a Chinese road builder in Ethiopia and a trader and a farmer in Zambia.

[4] IMDb, "An African."

[5] Martin, 178. Martin defines "over-reading" as a method of dance analysis that goes beyond the dance itself and reads the context where the dance takes place. This approach "[reads] through and past the dance to the point where it meets its own exterior or context" (178).

[6] IMDb, "An African."

[7] Curious about its meaning, I put this term in the Google search engine. The results pages were inundated with news articles that commented upon Chinese engagement in Africa and African migrants in China. However, few used the term "ChinAfrica," except for two sources: an article published in *The Economist* in 2007, titled "Laboring in ChinAfrica," and a monthly magazine called *ChinAfrica*, published by Chinese government-affiliated CHINAFRICA Media and Publishing Ltd in South Africa. This magazine focuses on news and policy analyses regarding China-Africa relations. Published in both English and French, it mainly targets readers from Africa. For more information, see Hanauer and Morris, 76.

[8] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 33.

[9] Bodomo, 13.

[10] Li, *Mediatized China-Africa Relations*, 8.

[11] French, *China's Second Continent*, 12.

[12] See King, *China's Aid and Soft Power in Africa*.

[13] Li, 8.

[14] Lefevre, *The Production of Space*, 32-33.

[15] Yang, *Globalization from Below*, 154.

[16] Langan, *Neo-Colonialism and the Poverty of "Development" in Africa*, 95.

[17] See Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift*; Rotberg, *China into Africa*; Kachiga, *China in Africa*; and Rich and Recker, "Understanding Sino-African Relation."

[18] Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, 43-44.

[19] Huynh, "A 'Wild West' of Trade?," 503; Castillo, "Feeling at Home," 235.

[20] Yang, 154.

[21] Castillo, 287.

[22] Yang, 154.

[23] Marsh, "The African Migrants."

[24] Ibid.

[25] Wilczak, "'Clean, Safe, and Orderly,'" 73.

[26] See Huyn; Yang; Müller and Wehrhahn, "Transnational Business Networks"; and Lan, "Transnational Business and Family Strategies."

[27] Mathews and Vega, "Introduction," 1.

[28] Castillo, 288.

[29] This inference is made based on my consultation with Al Roberts and Polly Roberts, scholars who study visual arts and cultures in African countries, regarding this costume.

[30] Zhou et al., "Entrepreneurship and Interracial Dynamics," 1573. See also Bodomo.

[31] Castillo, 291.

[32] Ibid., 291.

[33] Zhou et al., 1571.

[34] Metzger, *Chinese Looks*, 142.

[35] Zhou et al., 1581.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Bodomo, 43-44.

[38] Yang, 168. See also Castillo, 294.

[39] Lyon et al., "In the Dragon's Den," 882.

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Curatorial Practices for Intersectional Programming

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Abstract

Screendance finds its roots in the traditions of concert dance, museum culture, and film festivals. Film festivals - from which we borrow the structure for programming screendance - boast a history of discrimination towards bodies of color, varied gender expressions, bodies of different abilities, and more. Through an exploration of the history and socio-cultural context of film festivals in the west and dialogue with curators and directors from a handful of screendance festivals across the United States, this piece will present a set of curatorial challenges particular to our field, the creative solutions being explored by presenters and champions of screendance, and a consideration of where the field falls short, so we can better mitigate issues of underrepresentation of marginalized groups in screendance spaces.

Keywords: Screendance, Curation, Programming, Discrimination, Race, Film, Media

> We do not discriminate. San Souci Festival of Dance Cinema does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status in any of its activities or operations.[1]

Many screendance festivals operating in the United States today have statements like the one above in their literature. If they do not, many festivals and curators hope and attempt to echo such sentiments in their work through their programming. While many screendance curators may be aware of issues of underrepresentation in media spaces and are working to embrace diversity in terms of the work they screen, the artists they support and the audiences they attract to their screenings, the challenges to producing inclusive creative spaces with respect to race and other identities are manifold. Issues of accessibility, implicit bias, and the ways screendance continues to be tethered to the institutions and traditions that precede it create barriers to fully realizing the dream of truly inclusive, equitable, and intersectional experiences for artists and audiences, alike.

Through an exploration of the history and socio-cultural context of film festivals in the west and dialogue with curators and directors from a handful of screendance festivals across the United States, this piece will present a set of challenges particular to our field, the creative solutions being explored by presenters and champions of screendance, and a consideration of where the field falls short, so we can better mitigate issues of underrepresentation of marginalized groups in screendance spaces.

Screendance, with its ties to cinema, museum culture and concert dance finds its roots in a long, Eurocentric history of discursive socio-political discourse that is fraught with theoretical contradiction. In particular, film festivals – the structure of which we have borrowed to showcase the work made in our communities – have historically acted as sites of socio-political agenda, promoting either fascist or anti-fascist ideals, promoting nationalism or globalism, and courting Hollywood money. An extreme example of this history is demonstrated in one of the first film festivals in the world, The Mostra Cinematograpica di Venezia, and the film festivals that came shortly after in opposition to it. Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong's research in her book, *Film Festivals: Culture, People and Power on Screen*, explains the Mostra in this way:

> The Mostra Cinematograpica di Venezia, which began in 1932, was a creation of Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime, which saw cinema as 'the most powerful weapon…' Given the blatant Fascist/Nazi sympathies of the Mostra Cinematograpica di Venezia, Cannes must first be read as a national as well as artistic response within this new arena of cinematic debate.[2]

Moving farther into the 20th century, the growing popularity of both film festivals and Hollywood in the United States brought us a racist, capitalist system akin to its Europeanist roots in which filmmakers and audiences of color were relegated to specialized forums, or given no visibility, at all. While many festivals touted artistic diversity of theme and aesthetics throughout the mid 1900s, they did not offer the world the opportunity to experience the artistry of people of color, as well as people of various gender identities, religions and classes. Again, Wong describes the structures of power at work in the film festival world:

> Race films—casting ethnically marked actors for audiences who reflected this ethnicization—were screened across the United States, sometimes at racially segregated cinemas, sometimes at midnight shows in mainstream cinemas, and sometimes even in churches. These film practices of African Americans were very much divorced from activities advocated by ciné clubs or film societies.[3]

The film festivals of the 21st Century offer the communities in which they operate myriad more options than the opposites of Fascism and anti-Fascism, in terms of socio-political and aesthetic theme and content. They are also, at least in theory, integrated both on screen and in the audience. Screendance festivals are of course, among this constellation of specialized film festivals that offer audiences a chance to engage with specific content in intimate ways. And like most cinema festivals across the United States and the contemporary western world, dance film festivals can most generally be labeled as socio-culturally liberal spaces. However, even screendance, with its experimental leanings and examples of counter-cultural explorations such as Maya Deren's *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945) which featured Talley Beatty at a

time when black men were seldom seen on the cinema screen outside of stereotypical roles, or on the concert stage in well-known ballet and contemporary dance companies, has its own challenges to inclusion which reach back to the roots of film festivals' inception, citing issues of accessibility. Particular to experimental art, and art that is considered "intellectual" in any way, is the assumption that one must have a certain level of education or knowledge to be able to fully appreciate the form. Wong describes how a history of the assumption of knowledge creates barriers to diversity in this way:

> … a closer analysis of film festivals yields similarly contradictory impulses in them as well. Just as the engagement of early coffeehouses demanded a literate public, film festivals, especially the most powerful ones, allocate major discursive roles to a selected few … In terms of class, many festivals consciously build on an elite sense of distinction … that means that whatever their attractions for those outside this field, working classes are rarely targeted as audiences or listened to except as witnesses.[4]

"An elite sense of distinction" is a phrase that can accurately describe issues of accessibility, and challenges to inclusivity in screendance curation and presentation given its reference to elitism –the same elitism found in the concert dance world that follows us into deliberations when choosing dance films to be screened in programs. This kind of elitism and by extension, racism in the dance world is demonstrated through Frances McElroy's 2016 documentary, *Black Ballerina*, which was a popular offering among screendance and cinema festivals alike during the 2016 and 2017 festival seasons.

An obvious marker of the imbalance described in McElroy's film and in screendance today, is the fact that white, young, thin, cisgender, able, female bodies are the most visible bodies found throughout creative communities that feature the body as an aesthetic subject. Published in *The International Journal of Screendance* in 2017, my article "Visual Politics in American Dance Film: Representation and Disparity" points out that consistently over the past several years of taking demographics from festival submissions for ADF's Movies by Movers – the screendance festival under the auspices of the American Dance Festival which I myself direct, curate, and use as a research platform – that half of all bodies seen on camera in American submissions are white and female, with both female and male white bodies consistently accounting for about two-thirds of all bodies visible on screen in the submissions pool. Similar inequity is found behind the camera, too with regard to directors and choreographers. In all groups, males of color are least represented.[5]

It seems that the directorial and curatorial landscape of screendance looks similar when examining the leadership teams of the United States' most recognized screendance festivals. Again, white women dominate the landscape.[6] Given this imbalance, and the realities of implicit bias, one could assume that an unconscious preference toward

whiteness would have an influence in programming decisions. After all, the screen has been proven time and time again as a space that elevates whiteness. This has been demonstrated by the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA's annual Hollywood Diversity Report, and Harvard's Project Implicit, which uses the screen to show pictures of people from different races so those taking the test can associate those faces with either positive or negative words. Since its first publication in 2014, the Hollywood Diversity Report has noted consistent underrepresentation on screen and behind the camera of people of color.[7] Additionally, Project Implicit, which has been taken by over five million people, shows that the majority of the population, people of color included (70% of white people and 50% of people of color), prefer white faces to faces of color on screen, and more readily associate positive words to those white faces.[8] It should be noted that none of the directors and curators spoken to in preparation for this piece (included ones not mentioned here) actively cull demographical information from their submission pool, and very few record that information for their audiences. As such it stands to reason that demographic diversity in screendance with regard to what is being sent to festivals is an area of awareness that the community as a whole could look into more deeply.

Another "elite sense of distinction" lies within the concept and structure of the festival, itself. The festival structure assumes that the artists submitting have the capital to do so, which directly alters the demographics found in submissions to screendance festivals as opposed to projects found on more accessible internet platforms like, YouTube. This is where most festivals struggle, because unlike cinema which uses the festival as a marketplace for artists to network and sell their work for profit, there exists no such structure for wide distribution in the screendance community. It should be noted that the marketplace concept most often applies to the largest cinema festivals, and to feature films. However, the fact that there exists an industry at all suggests that there exists a pathway for cinema artists to make a living if not through their own work, then the work of others. For screendance this means that those who cannot afford to make art for the sake of love alone, which implies a certain level of class privilege, are prohibited from participating as there is little guarantee of a return on investment. Further, it means that the festivals themselves are often caught between needing to at least break even on expenses for resources like screening space, while still making the price of submissions attainable to a wide range of people. Despite the lack of market opportunities, many festivals still hold high cinematic standards by which the films are judged, placing importance on production value and cinematic execution. Even though consumer equipment like smartphones and free editing software have become advanced enough to compete with pro-sumer and professional equipment, many times DIY projects that utilize consumer equipment fall through the cracks as they don't often meet the standards of larger festivals that attract projects that are grant supported, institutionally supported through universities and arts organizations, or supported by

private or personal monies. In this way, the festival automatically assumes an elitist stance, unless consciously mitigated.

So, how are screendance curators making conscious efforts and decisions in their programming to mitigate the challenges mentioned above? What are some challenges they face particular to their own festivals? Where are their blind spots? What collective solutions for the screendance community can be gleaned by conversations with multiple curators and directors? The following passages include information culled from pieces of longer conversations with curators and directors from four festivals of varying sizes, aims, and locations. Their individual commentary aids in igniting a larger discussion about what the role of the screendance festival is, and how leadership teams influence the culture of screendance as a whole with regard to issues of diversity and representation.

San Francisco Dance Film Festival (San Francisco, CA)

Judy Flannery is the Artistic Director of the San Francisco Dance Film Festival, which is now in its ninth season. She says that one of the challenges to curating a program each year that shows all of the diversity to be found in dance film is that one cannot control what comes through the submission process. For example, she notes that submissions for 2017 were much more ballet-centric than previous years:

> We try to work with just the submissions, but we find sometimes that we just don't have the content that supports our philosophy of diversity in styles, genres and artists. We want to support this field and we want to embrace it in all its glorious diversity. So when we're not getting as many films that support our philosophy, we will make a conscious decision to go out and seek films that will fill a void we have.

While it is not uncommon for curators to actively seek films for their programs, Judy makes it clear that she is a champion of non-traditional approaches to dance genres and enjoys presenting films that go against the status quo in terms of casting. Flannery states that, "this art form will help people see outside of normal – outside of the box. That's why this art form should be celebrated. I think we have a duty as a festival to say,"you need to show diversity!"

Judy also expresses the importance of supporting the local arts community, which adds to the inclusivity of the festival. "I noticed that we were getting a lot of films from Europe and New York," she says. Five years ago, the San Francisco Dance Film Festival started the Collaboratory, a collaborative initiative for San Francisco area dancers and filmmakers that pairs artists who have never worked together before and provides them with resources, screen time during the festival, and opportunities to have their work shown on touring reels that go to community partners. As a result, long-term artistic

relationships are often forged, and artists can support each other in their making. In addition, the festival often pairs local, live dance groups with screened work for multi-faceted events that draw audiences that may choose to support the artists at other events. A good example of this practice was the screening of *Shake the Dust*, a hip-hop documentary, in 2017. The SFDFF collaborated with the San Francisco Hip-Hop Festival and had live performance in conjunction with the screening of the film. Judy cites similar collaborations with lindy hop, contemporary, ballet and other dance groups whose practices are rooted in styles from around the world.

When it comes to audiences, the San Francisco Dance Film Festival is equally as active in cultivating rich dialogue around issues of inclusion and inviting many facets of the community to the festival's events both within the regular season and year-round in between submission cycles. Most notably, the festival engages partners in the community in conjunction with films that are screened, inviting non-artists to dialogue with artists, and vice-versa. For example, in 2016, the festival screened Frances McElroy's acclaimed documentary, Black Ballerina. In preparation for the screening, SFDFF asked patrons to buy blocks of tickets that were then offered to groups of children from public schools, dance studios, and community centers and other places where young people of color are taking dance. The screening included a guest appearance by San Francisco Ballet dancer, Kimberly Marie Oliver, who presented the film and assisted in leading a discussion after the film.

My interview with Judy brings up one of the points that inspired me to begin doing the work of culling demographics for ADF's Movies by Movers in the first place. As people are *self-selecting* to submit to our festivals, this information gives us insight into who is most readily able to create and disseminate work. It gives us information about stylistic trends happening in the concert dance and media worlds, and how select voices are privileged within those trends. Most importantly, this information calls into question what our role is as curators and programmers. As Judy points out, it is our job to actively seek films that highlight the work of less visible groups and styles of dance.

Unique among many festivals in the United States is the Collabratory that Judy describes, a rare opportunity in the screendance community for artists to be supported through networking and commission. The reason this type of program is so rare is that many of the festivals aren't able to support this type of program financially. Again, issues of a lack of industry affect our ability to be better stewards of this art form. While the San Francisco Dance Film Festival also struggles financially – all of the festivals interviewed for this piece do in some way – the Collaboratory, and other programs that bolster the local arts community are prioritized in ways that compel the festival's organizers to forge strong community partnerships which help this and other outreach programs to be sustainable.

Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema (Boulder, CO)

David Leserman and Michelle Bernier of the Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema in Boulder, Colorado, which is now in its 15th season, agree that there are challenges to curating in the midst of a time when so much content is available on the Internet and many people simply choose not to submit to festivals. Because part of their mission is to introduce audiences to screendance and to educate them about the art form, in the curatorial process they often curate programs that are not representative of the demographic landscape of screendance that they observe. Michelle says:

> Part of me feels like there's dance cinema, then there's all the dance that you see on the Internet and TV. A lot of our audience doesn't look at this [screendance] any differently than they look at that [mass media]. Too, they can see different people dancing on screen on the Internet. They don't have to see how biased things are and how frankly, white-washed things are. In dance film, I think that there is the same bias [as mass media] but on a smaller scale, and we can actually do something so it doesn't look that way when we put a show out. That's the way I think about it. You know our submissions may be whatever, say, as a guess, 80 percent white – it doesn't mean what we show has to be 80 percent white. And because that's what happens in Hollywood and that's what happens on *So You Think You Can Dance*, that's what happens in all the other screen dance that they get, dance cinema might be another good place to remind people that, 'oh, that's not actually all there is out there,' even though that may feel like we are giving an unfair representation of what the field looks like. I actually think that's totally ok. I think that if you're coming here for cultural enrichment, just go smorgasbord style. And let's just do a little bit of everything.

Michelle and David believe in the practice of honesty when confronting new material and not turning away from their areas of unfamiliarity. David readily acknowledges that there are areas where he may fall short with regard to diversity. "There are cultural differences that I don't feel the least bit qualified to make a judgment about. I don't always have the cultural underpinnings to recognize something as valuable."

In the curatorial process, David points out that inclusivity and sensitivity to varied subject matter can be cultivated by having people from marginalized groups on the curatorial team:

"I have a bias toward diversity because I'm a disabled dancer. I danced actively for about ten years in a wheel chair as a mature person. And so I never did perform in a dance in any way before I did it in a wheel chair. And so I'm consciously biased towards disability related dance and we usually show one if we get one. We usually get one every year." David goes on to note that the founder of Sans Souci and fellow curator Ana Baer, is of

Mexican descent and that she brings more sensitivity to the table around race and non-western dance.

Michelle then points to the reality that there are times in the curatorial process when they question their ability to make a judgment on whether something they've received is culturally sensitive as a work of art, or not:

> We do run into this issue sometimes, where we feel unqualified to say, "does this feel like an accurate representation of a thing?" because we are talking too, about how we want to assume that every artist that submits something to the festival is also fully qualified to make a statement about the thing they're making a statement about. I want to respect the artists and I want to err on the side that everything the artist does is an artistic choice.

With these acknowledgements, both David and Michelle consider the choice to have a curatorial team of several people from varied backgrounds, both personally and professionally, a way to mitigate some of their individual pitfalls. Michelle says that solo curating would make the program, "heavy-handed." And David and Michelle talk about how conversations about diversity and intersectionality have come up organically in their deliberations as a result of their model of working.

The curatorial team at Sans Souci demonstrate the necessity of dialogue between people of various backgrounds and viewpoints in curation. Through this kind of collaborative curation, we can better understand that issues of representation aren't just about one thing. Issues of race, gender, class, education, ability – they're all intertwined, and in the context of screendance, we have an opportunity to influence how audiences encounter and understand these concepts aesthetically. While each of the Sans Souci curators may not be able to fully consider the cultural and aesthetic aspects of the films they receive and ultimately choose to screen individually, the three of them together can better do the work of creating diverse experiences for their audiences. As a part of the mission of Sans Souci is to introduce and educate audiences about screendance, it is important that the curators recognize how their conversations in the curatorial process influence what audiences may leave with, after their first screendance experience. Having had the pleasure of attending the San Souci festival in September of 2017, I can attest to the fact that the team stays true to their mission, creating for the audience a multi-faceted experience through multi-media performance, films featuring a variety of dance forms, people, and production values.

Dance on Camera Festival (New York, NY)

Co-Curator Liz Wolff says that the Dance on Camera Festival, the oldest screendance festival in the United States now in its 46th season – benefits greatly from being situated in New York City, with such a long history. "We have a very open market; the submissions

are far and wide and incredibly varied. We benefit from that cross selection," she says, and notes that while she hasn't had the experience of curating in other markets, she's happy to be doing work in one that invites such diversity because it's already understood that New York is a cultural and artistic melting pot.

Even so, the Dance Films Association (the organization which houses the Dance on Camera Festival) and the Dance on Camera Festival are known for the attention to detail in their programming, pairing sought-after feature-length films with innovative and lesser-known short films, curating shorts programs with a similar mixture of known and unknown talent, collaborating with community partners, and creating space for engaged dialogue throughout the festival. In comparison to many other festivals around the country, the amount of opportunities for discussion with artists and field experts brings an added dimension to the festival. Of the myriad discussion experiences offered throughout the festival, Wolff says, "We choose work for that reason – to have a conversation – whether it's about social inequities, differently abled bodies…we keep an eye out to make sure we're having a full conversation…we definitely delve into open forum discussions, so we're not just showing a film if we feel it needs discussion…Our job is to translate art to the audience."

Something that both supports Dance on Camera in having those successful conversations about the films they program and that sets the festival apart from other festivals is its relationship and collaboration with the Film Society of Lincoln Center, which co-presents Dance on Camera. Through relationships cultivated across the Center's wide range of programming, it provides access to potential audience members throughout the five boroughs, and beyond. Liz explains how this relationship translates into targeted audiences: "They have contacts to work with the community at large – inviting different groups like the School for the Blind [for the 2017 screening of *Looking at the Stars*, about the Fernanda Bianchini Ballet Association for the Blind in São Paulo], reaching out in to the tri-borough area – even if it's something like a New York City Ballet piece and the School of American Ballet is upstairs, something we can offer the students – if we find there's a special program that needs special attention, we have a way to help bring in audience." Again, Wolff recognizes this relationship as a benefit to the festival that festivals in smaller markets may not enjoy.

With a reputation for some of the most varied dance film programming among the dance film community, Dance on Camera's outreach efforts achieve similarly high standards. Capturing Motion is a program in collaboration with the NYC Department of Education that engages high school students throughout the five boroughs in creating dance films that are then entered into the Capturing Motion annual competition. Winners have their work screened at Dance on Camera. Through the process of workshop, to production and submission, students get to learn about the process of creating a film and working to get it screened. Wolff says, "what you get from these kids is pretty incredible. Capturing Motion gives them an opportunity to express themselves

differently. The Department of Education in New York City has a deep dive into the arts in schools, and Capturing Motion is that marriage of filmmaking and dance."

Finally, the Dance Films Association regularly collaborates with other curators and organizations to curate and present varied screenings throughout the year. Partners in recent years have included, ADF's Movies by Movers, Trikselion Arts, DCTV, and more. By opening up a dialogue and collaborating on programming efforts, the Dance Films Association helps to keep the conversation percolating about curation, new work, diversity, screendance and mainstream culture, and how to keep advancing the art of screendance.

The Dance Films Association in many ways exemplifies how a long-established organization can bolster the screendance community as a whole. Situated in a long-standing artistic center, a balance of well-known and lesser-known artists, community partnerships, partnerships with other screendance presenters and organizations, a commitment to the history and preservation of screendance, availability of their material for other presenters to share, production grants for artists, and a platform from which the organization can garner diverse audiences all speak to why Dance on Camera has lasted so long, where other screendance initiatives have perished.[9] Most unique about Dance on Camera though, is its relationship with the Department of Education. No other festivals I interviewed (and very few across the country) have programs for young filmmakers. Indeed, creating opportunities for youth in such a diverse place as the five boroughs of New York will have positive dividends as those young people become adults, making art in the world.

Tiny Dance Film Festival (San Francisco, CA)

Kat Cole, a co-Curator of the now six-years-old Tiny Dance Film Festival in San Francisco says that in the spirit of accessibility, she and co-Curator Eric Garcia are champions of do-it-yourself films and do not place as high a priority on production value as other festivals might. Because of this, the Tiny Dance Film Festival gets to celebrate the emergence of newer, more accessible technologies, and show films that would be unlikely choices at larger festivals. As a commitment to accessibility for submitting artists, the price for submissions has remained low since the festival's inception, at only five dollars. This price is well below the price asked by most of the festivals operating in the United States today. For Cole and Garcia, the DIY spirit breaks the pattern of films that fall within a particular realm of representation and allow for a more fluid definition of the art form of screendance. "For example," Kat says, "there's these two young dancers and they've made a film about race with Barbie dolls, and it's really fun!" And it is films like this one Cole describes, which sets the Tiny Dance Film Festival apart from some of the larger festivals and gives Tiny Dance its signature quirk.

According to Kat and Eric, their particular brand of aesthetic boundary-stretching and definition blurring, means that for the Tiny Dance Film Festival intersectional programming is a "consciousness that is organic to our own progression as artists." Detour Dance is the name of the dance company that acts as the umbrella for Tiny Dance and boasts a roster of work that is socio-politically and community engaged. As people who both identify as people of color and queer, Kat and Eric actively encourage people of color, queer people and others who belong to marginalized groups to send work to the festival.

Kat says, "We want to showcase folks that are operating on the outskirts of contemporary dance, of film, of media representation in general. I feel like there is something significant in seeing those bodies on screen, that I always feel good about."

What the Tiny Dance Film Festival makes most clear, is that the screendance community is in need of spaces that champion and screen work that does not generally find a place at other festivals where the expectations for production value and virtuosity are high. The projects Cole and Garcia look for are expressions of experimentalism that challenge the white, patriarchal experimentalism of performance art history that our genre is tied to.[10] The need for queer, people of color voices to help the community be introduced to other queer, people of color voices, and other marginalized groups is invaluable. While the issue of marginalized people supporting and disseminating the work of other marginalized people has long raised questions of whether or not it is still the job of those people to see, appreciate, and share the value of work they make for non-marginalized communities, it is clear that the work Garcia and Cole are doing with the Tiny Dance Film Festival makes the screendance community a more equitable one.

ADF's Movies by Movers (Durham, NC and Boone, NC)

To conclude this exploration of intersectional curatorial practices, I need to discuss my own place in this work. I am the director and curator of ADF's Movies by Movers, and I am a woman of color. My mission in this position, other than celebrating and elevating the art of screendance, has been twofold. First, I wish to articulate and implement a curatorial philosophy, recognizing that in the field of screendance, there exist myriad workshops, courses, conferences, symposia, and books about creating screendance, and on the theory of practice in screendance, but there exists far less in the realm of curation. Second, I wish to use ADF's Movies by Movers as a research platform to interrogate issues of representation in dance film, recognizing that our issues regarding representation are tied to our philosophical and aesthetic forerunners, like concert dance, cinema, and performance art.

Speaking to my first desire in directing and curating the festival, my curatorial practice is most informed by intersectional feminism. Intersectional feminism – a term which gained popularity beginning in 1989 through the work of critical race theorist Kimberlè

Crenshaw – holds that various forms of oppression – racism, sexism, classism and more, and interconnected and inform the socio-cultural experiences of people whose identities meet at various intersections of oppression. For screendance, this means asking questions about how what we make and program creates space for discourse on the state of the arts landscape with regard to aesthetic hierarchies, representation of marginalized communities, and the goals and context of the works that exist in the world. The questions that emerge from being in conversation with the theories of intersectional feminism in looking at and curating screendance compel me to explore what I refer to as, *visual politics*. My definition of *visual politics* refers to the people and situations we see on screen with respect to the culture created in two-dimensional space by makers and presenters in the collective; influenced by socio-cultural norms in the real world; affected by the lens through which we view the arts and arts industries. In sum, what we see on the screen are a collection of artifacts that make our values as an artistic community visible. In holding intersectional feminism as a bedrock to my practice and process of curating, I find that issues of representation go beyond those tied to racism and sexism. Ableism and ageism are two issues in screendance that take center stage as areas of underrepresentation, misrepresentation, and blatant exclusion. While my work culling demographics from the submission pool to ADF's Movies by Movers involves data from race and gender to help paint a picture of the representational landscape of those submissions, there exists such an underrepresentation of older, and differently abled bodies, that having percentages seems less important than interrogating *how* these bodies are participating in the work. It should be understood that this notion of how people participate in the work goes for all groups I am looking at through my research. Hence, an ever-expanding list of questions regarding trends that I see each year helps to better articulate why this work is important. These are just some of the questions that keep me lying awake at night, especially during submission season:

- Is screendance really a feminist space if nine out of every ten nude bodies I see are young, white, thin, able-bodied, cis-gendered women? What about black women? Fat women? Trans women? Men?

- Is screendance really a feminist space when large groups of men of color (the most underrepresented group in screendance on all fronts), are often seen through the lens of a white director or choreographer? Why don't we see large groups of white actors being seen through the lens of directors and choreographers of color?

- Is screendance really a feminist space when most scenarios where large groups of men of color are seen at once, it is most often *about* being men of color? In fact, is screendance really a feminist space if most of the work created by, with, and for marginalized groups of people are about that marginalization?

- Is it fair that young, white, cisgender participants feel the freedom to make statements on a wide range of cultural and aesthetic topics, when marginalized people do not enjoy that same freedom given their lived experiences?

- Where is American dance in American dance film? Is screendance really a feminist space if a culture cannot more readily embrace forms of art that come from low-income communities and communities of color? Why aren't there more jazz, tap, and hip-hop screendances?[11]

- Is screendance really a feminist space if differently-abled bodies – both disabled and "untrained" or "non-dance" bodies – are not represented? If screendance doesn't have to necessarily look like dance, why aren't more "non-dance" bodies and their movements being explored? What is our relationship to virtuosity and why does that matter?

- In what ways have we made it clear that our space is off-limits to "non-dancers"?

- How can I make the experience of screendance more inclusive and more accessible? How can I help to make the experience of screendance more feminist?

Curatorially, these questions and my research have inspired me to become more experimental in my curating practice. While there is still the traditional approach of sifting through submissions to find what wants to be screened together or in juxtaposition, and filling in holes in terms of style, demographic, or genre through active solicitation, I also find myself creating more opportunities for audiences to interact with screendance in creative ways. One of my goals as a curator is to dismantle the expectation found historically in cinema, theatre, and experimental art spaces that audiences wishing to engage with the work should have a certain level of education, or previous exposure to fine art as a way of being able to fully appreciate the work.

In 2017 for example, I curated ADF's Movies by Movers' first mini-exhibition. I invited a handful of artists to create tiny movies for a collection of iPads organized around a maker's space in Boone, NC called The HOW Space. One minute at a time, patrons were invited to choose which order they saw the films in, curating their own experience. Some patrons likened the experience to hearing a full studio album, with each new track, or movie in this case, providing them with another piece of an overall energetic trajectory. In addition, I invited another handful of artists to send a series of photographs to me to be printed as stop motion flipbooks. Essentially, these little books were dances that patrons could hold in their hands, actively engaging in controlling speed and direction of the movies they held. For our youngest patrons in their teens and early twenties, many of whom have never seen an analogue movie, this was quite novel. There are three important accomplishments of the mini-exhibition. The first being that this exhibition featured work created specifically for the spaces it appeared in. Often when visiting screendance festivals, installations are created with work received

through the submission process, which undermines how the submitting artists wish for that work to be experienced. While I have no way of knowing how each festival chooses which works belong in an installation, I wonder how many of those feature people or approaches to screendance that are not as readily appreciated for their socio-cultural and/or aesthetic content as those films that are popular on the circuit each year. Second, among bodies and dance forms more common to the screendance community, the exhibition featured bodies and forms not often represented. I was most excited about ECHOING, a tiny screendance by practitioner and scholar Tamara Williams, that featured the ring shout – an African-American dance dating back to slavery which is a precursor to many contemporary African-American dance forms. Finally, the exhibition gave new audiences an interactive way to be introduced to screendance that required no prior knowledge of the form, in an open, inviting space. Many patrons expressed a desire to attend the more traditional screenings, after interacting with the screendances at the exhibition, where had they simply been invited to the screenings, they may not have been as inspired to attend.

For the 2018 festival, I have been using Instagram as a screening platform. In February of 2018, I launched ADF's Movies by Movers' first Instafest. By bringing the festival platform to the vast community that social media is, I have been able to find and showcase diverse pieces of work across genres, while highlighting the ways people are using social media and new technologies to create and disseminate work. I am most excited about having dance existing alongside "non-dance" movement forms like skateboarding, parkour, synchronized swimming, juggling, and more from a diverse collection of makers from around the world. I am also excited that the followers of this work are from diverse backgrounds and experience the work in different ways, dependent on the context of their cultural backgrounds and varied life experiences. Like curating for the more traditional screenings at ADF's Movies by Movers, this project has been a mixture of passive receipt – makers may tag @adfsmoviesby in their posts, and I repost their work – and active solicitation. I have been delighted to find new artists with whom to dialogue about their work and am finding a new community of curators (for lack of a better description, though many of these people would not describe themselves as such) using Instagram and other platforms in creative ways, raising questions of what "good art" is, and where to find it.

Through my experiments in curating, I have also found inspiration for my work as a screendance practitioner. Over the past year, I've been working on a collection of solo projects inspired by the finding that the majority of the solo projects (projects where the director, choreographer, actor/mover, cinematographer, editor are all the same person) that came through the submission process in 2017 were made by women of color. Given the production value of the projects, it seems as though they were made not as a way to necessarily explore the practice and possibilities of being a solo screendance maker, but are tied to issues of access to equipment, funds, time, and

collaborators, by people who would still like to participate in the conversation. Perhaps some of these pieces are meant as explorations into editing, perhaps they are meant to make a specific statement as intended by the artists, but one wonders what the use of spending time and money to disseminate a study would be. As of the writing of this piece, I have not yet finished my data collection for the 2018 season. I am interested to see how the numbers play out, in addition to seeing what's actually in the films to determine what the spirit of their making might be. My tiny films explore issues of access and the experience of being a lone artist through screendance made with consumer equipment, and scenarios and images which disrupt dominant narratives. *Aspirant Pursuits*[12] is the most recent film created for the series. Completed in January of 2018, the movie features myself acting in relationship to a white female mannequin to Missy Elliot's song *Pussy Cat*, engaging questions of my relationship as a female performer of color to white women in the context of being seen in both performative and private spaces. The second half of the film is an epilogue, two minutes of slow-motion twerking that asks the viewer to consider their notions of cultural consciousness and understanding around a dance as misunderstood as the twerk, as demonstrated by its representation in the media by celebrities like Miley Cyrus.[13] More production work is planned for the remainder of 2018 to create two more short films in this vein.

Between my curatorial practice, my research, and my creative output, I hope that I am presenting for our community a well-rounded conversation on the issues that hold us back from fully realizing the aims and dreams of screendance. To truly create an experimental, open source platform that makes space for varied approaches and a multitude of voices and the celebration of hybridity, it would behoove the community to more actively create that platform. If not by us, then by whom?

In Conclusion

It is clear that creative approaches to inclusion and the mitigation of a white washed, heteronormative, ableist, ageist visual culture in festival submissions and festival programs require creative approaches to the work and that a variety of types of festivals – of different sizes, scope and focus are needed to continue moving the community toward a culture that is a departure from the norms and narratives found in dance, cinema, and museum spaces. For festivals that exist outside of larger artistic centers especially, outreach, systems of artist support, collaboration with other cultural organizations and celebrating what is unique about the locality of these festivals seems to have an impact on how those festivals continue to cultivate more diverse rosters of films to share with diverse audiences. And while the festivals discussed here are examples of this kind of creativity in action, more attention is needed to questioning the make-up of our directorial and curatorial landscape, as it has been demonstrated that having people that occupy marginalized identities in positions of leadership and decision-making directly impact how films that feature people from those same groups

are considered. Unlike museum or film studies, there is almost no formal education for curators of screendance. There are very few opportunities for educators and curators to come together to talk about how our approaches to screendance impact how the public views and finds affinity with this art form. Moving forward, encouraging curators to delve deeper into the material they receive to get a better sense of what they're actually receiving and the ways in which their pools of submissions fall short in terms of diversity will help us all, as a community of makers and presenters, be more conscious about what we put out into the world. Working through the lens of intersectionality – acknowledging that issues of representation are related to issues of accessibility, while recognizing the ways histories of hierarchy are ingrained in our assessment of aesthetics, will help us be more inclusive on all fronts while also recognizing the ways screendance continues to change in the 21st century. More dialogue between directors and curators across festivals about what is working and not working, what themes continue to emerge through the work they receive, and how we can better define what our role is as curators will also help to build a stronger, more clear presence in the world.

Biography

Cara Hagan is an artist, educator, scholar and community organizer. She currently serves on faculty as an Assistant Professor of Dance Studies at Appalachian State University. Ms. Hagan is also Director and Curator for ADF's Movies by Movers, an annual, international festival celebrating the conversations between the moving body and the camera at the American Dance Festival.

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Notes

[1] San Souci Festival of Dance Cinema http://sanssoucifest.org/aboutUs.php.

[2] Wong, *Film Festivals*, 37.

[3] Ibid., 34.

[4] Ibid., 163.

[5] Hagan, "Visual Politics in American Dance Film," 104.

[6] Research on and personal contacts with sixteen festivals, including but not limited to: Dance Camera West, Dance on Camera, San Souci Festival of Dance Cinema, Cucalorus, San Francisco Dance Film Festival, Greensboro Dance Film Festival, and more.

[7] Hunt, Ramon, and Tran. 2017 Hollywood Diversity Report.

[8] Project Implicit https://www.projectimplicit.net/papers.html.

[9] Dance Films Association http://www.dancefilms.org/dance-on-camera/.

[10] Erin Brannigan's book, *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image*, explores the relationship of screendance to performance art in depth. Additionally, RoseLee Goldberg's book, *Performance Art: From Futurism to Present*, highlights the many ways performance art was both subversive and elitist.

[11] Many would argue that American dance can be easily found in American screendance, however there are usually only one or two tap films that come through the process each year. Similarly, there are few films that emerge from the submission process that feature other American forms like Lindy Hop. While hip-hop is seen more often, sometimes its representation on the screen is problematic with regard to a demonstration of knowledge about the history and aims of the form. Our relationship to post-modernism is one that elevates Eurocentric perspectives and hierarchies.

[12] Aspirant Pursuits https://youtu.be/yr2mmglcADo.

[13] Winfrey Harris, "A Twerk Too Far."

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Cucalorus. Directed by Dan Brawley. 1994-present. http://www.cucalorus.org/

Dance@30FPS - OSU Dance Annual Festival of Dance Film. Curated by Mitchell Rose. ?-present. https://vimeo.com/200465113

Dance and New Media Film Festival. Directed by Cari Ann Shim Sham. 2012-present. http://tisch.nyu.edu/dance

Dance Barn Festival. Directed by Molly Johnston and Ayumi Schafer. Curated by Robert Uehlin. 2015-present. https://www.dancebarncollective.org/festival

Dance Camera West. Directed by Tonya Barber. 2001-present. http://www.dancecamerawest.org/

Dance on Camera. Directed by Galen Bremer. Curated by Liz Wolff and Joanna Ney. 1971-present. http://www.dancefilms.org/dance-on-camera/

EMPAC. Directed by Johannes Goebel. Curated by Ashely Ferro-Murray. 2008-present. http://empac.rpi.edu/

Greensboro Dance Film Festival. Directed and curated by Robin Gee. 2014-present. https://www.greensborodancefilms.org/

New Dance Cinema. Directed and curated by Anji Crain. 2011-present. http://aplusproductionsnyc.com/

Oklahoma Dance Film Festival. Directed and curated by Jessica Vokoun. 2008-present. http://www.okdancefilms.com/Oklahoma_Dance_Film_Festival/ABOUT.html

Outlet Dance Project. Directed and Curated by Jamuna Chiarini, Ann Robideaux, and Donia Salem. 2011-present. https://www.theoutletdanceproject.com/

San Francisco Dance Film Festival. Directed by Judy Flannery and Regina Bustillos. Curated by Greta Schoenburg et al. 2010-present. http://www.sfdancefilmfest.org/

San Souci Festival of Dance Cinema. Directed and curated by David Leserman, Michelle Barneir and Tara Rynders, and Ana Baer. http://sanssoucifest.org/

Tiny Dance Film Festival. Directed and curated by Kat Cole and Eric Garcia. 2013-present. http://www.detourdance.com/tdff/

Utah Dance Film Festival. Directed and curated by Karen Jensen and Tyne Crockett 2013-present. http://www.utahdancefilmfestival.org.

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David Leserman and Michelle Bernier of the San Souci Festival of Dance Cinema, July 7th 2017.

Liz Wolff, of Dance on Camera, September 1st, 2017.

PROVOCATIONS AND VIEWPOINTS

Narrative Shifts: Race, Culture, and the Production of Screendance

Marcus White, Arizona State University and Moving 24fps

keywords: screendance, production, video, film, dance, race, intersectionality, gender

I am a curator and maker of screendance. I enjoy working with other makers of screendance. This essay is a snapshot of several years building relationships with film and dance makers in the production of this type of work. It is through those experiences that I see issues of race and representation in screendance in diverse spaces and places. From Europe to the United States, museum curated to home screenings, Blockbuster-style to indie small budget – creating equitable professional standards conscious of race and more importantly intersectionality is the 'key frame' of this essay.

Moving 24fps is a platform founded by Carlos Funn and me, where teams of one professional dance maker and one filmmaker are paired to create work in a single weekend. These 'creatives' make work as a part of the touring Festival: to date, it is the only project of its kind in the United States. It focuses exclusively on the production of screendance and is situated within various 'partner cities.' The goals of the project within a given city include: 1. foster a community of creatives who may have never worked together; 2. bolster the creative marketplace for high quality screendance work in the United States; 3. present a platform where equitable and inclusive storytelling is embedded inside the infrastructure of the experience. We intentionally selected cities outside of the mega markets for dance and film such as New York and Los Angeles. The two cities that I will highlight in this essay are Phoenix and Detroit. These cities have distinct histories with systems of oppression inside of the larger frame of the United States politic. We wanted to learn from creatives in these cities about race, gender, and politically charged image making. More specifically, we were curious how screendance can be used as a tool to help reimagine each city's narrative related to identity politics and what these stories could reveal about a national discourse of race and culture within the production of screendance. In this way, this underscores what critical dance studies scholar Melissa Blanco Borelli refers to as the function of film and dance "as productions for the socio-historical moment in which they develop."[1]

Part of the impetus for the project was rooted in early conversations about the public discourse in US-based mass media that spectacularizes black and brown bodies. The mediated narratives of these bodies through film, television, and social media created

a flood of viscerally irresponsible image-making rooted in stereotypes of quasi-minstrel presentation interlaced with trauma, grief, and death of the black and brown body. Diamond Reynolds' patient filming of her boyfriend, Philando Castile's murder by a Minneapolis police officer is exemplary.[2] We also see the male body displayed alongside substantial text and interviews that are rooted in racialized histories and ideology that frame whole communities of people as thugs, comedic relief, "drug dealers, criminals, and rapists."[3] Moreover, the appropriation of black and brown bodies and cultural capital vis-à-vis Miley Cyrus and her capitalizing on the black female posterior;[4] Madonna and her adoption of vogue performance from the Xtravaganzas,[5] or most recently Taylor Swift's[6] white-washed adaptation of Beyoncé's *Lemonade*[7] showcases White female "mainstream" artists and by extension mainstream society's obsession with black cultural products with little acknowledgment or citation to the makers or producers of these products.

These contemporary images, narratives, and representations are an extension of centuries of negotiating race and gender within dance and culture in the United States. These references and images serve as visual and political backdrops to illustrate the cultural context and time that birthed the Moving 24fps project. Positive representations of black and brown bodies seemed to be an essential and leading motivation of the project. However, once we began the process of vision planning and creating the project we uncovered a larger more poignant set of questions. We became less concerned about how hegemonic systems such as whiteness or racism construct, deconstruct, or borrow from representations of black and brown bodies[8] as this repeats, realigns, and recenters power dynamics that could not capture the nuance of what was actually happening in the field during production of the Moving 24fps projects. We were more curious about who was crafting stories or visual culture with bodies of color and how race, culture, and identity were embedded inside the dance film[9] production process including aesthetic choice making, creative collaborations, and the production of film/video in relationship to dance.[10]

Method – Nuts and Bolts

This provocation is informed by a collection of both informal and open forum interviews with over 25 creatives from across the country about their experience inside the Moving 24fps project. I conducted another round of interviews to zoom in on three creatives' processes as case studies. These case studies highlight particular aspects of the creatives process and I examine how by race, gender, and culture shape these dance shorts projects. For the purposes of this essay, I will use these case studies from the Moving 24fps iterations in Detroit, Michigan and Phoenix, Arizona to examine and situate screendance as a method to investigate representation, equity, and inclusion in screendance production.

From those interviews, two questions emerged that help frame this essay:

- What considerations and choices do creatives consciously or inherently make to center race and regional geopolitics?

- How do the projects and collaborations create or promote equity in dance film curation and audience development within these regions?

We instinctively understood that different cities and regions had specific needs and histories connected to social movement building. For instance, Detroit's black-white relations as an extension of the civil rights era is a much different social and political climate than the Latinx LGB and trans undocumented individuals in Arizona.[11] There are parallels that cut across these regions but there were also different needs to consider. This essay's scope and my position as an artist/scholar/curator zooms in on how these historically marginalized communities tell stories on their own behalf centering their own aesthetic values in the production of the work.

We selected creatives based on their body of work and their unique artistic lens informed by their identity and lived experience. In each city, the creatives met for the first time during a kick-off event at a local establishment where they planned their project from concept to post-production. They then had an entire weekend to craft a dance short to screen three days later. The pressure-cooker situation compelled them to immediately "trust their instincts"[12] and to create with a new collaborator quickly. Their process was informed by prompts that we as curators selected. The creatives used these prompts in addition to their own interests to highlight, promote, and engage their process around particular themes and pressing issues of our time.

We noticed individuals centered their perspectives and worldview inspired by the prompts. In the pressure cooker of a weekend, creatives had little time to second-guess their own assumptions, aesthetic choices, or heavily critique their decisions. The prompts we crafted differed in each city. For example, in Detroit, we selected keywords from a transcript from our director's meeting minutes: "Listen," "Care," "Joy," and "Unravel." These words were an extension of our meeting about how we saw the potential of screendance as a strategy to understand and promote humanity within a highly volatile socio-political climate. These words were pulled from that transcript and taken out of context where creatives randomly selected one of those words from an envelope at the kick-off event and used these words as a springboard for their creative process. These prompts energized and inspired creatives to tap into their own experiences and relationship to the words in collaboration with another person they did not know. These conversations, dialogues, and creative processes are among the highlights of the project.

The case studies within this provocation highlight creatives' processes and analysis of screendance works through a cultural critique and dance studies lens. These case

studies are not intended to be 'token' projects or exceptions; they simply are examples that we can pull from as models to demonstrate how race and culture may operate within particular contexts in the production of screendance. Moreover, not all racially marginalized groups are represented in this essay. This provocation is simply a snapshot of the project and is not intended to be a comprehensive blueprint about how to think, produce, or curate screendance. Instead, this is a recounting and analysis of the process and select projects produced during the weekend with the goal of opening up a conversation about how race and culture operate in the production of screendance in specific US cities.

Case Study #1: Black Feminist Craft in Dance Filmmaking

During our proof of concept phase, we positioned Detroit, Michigan as our initial city to engage the project. This choice made sense logistically as I have had long-standing relationships in the city. The city is a culturally fertile ground as evidenced by decades of producing arts and culture, chiefly the development of MoTown and the Techno sound. This fertile ground is also challenged by a whole set of historical consequences, which are compellingly told in the text "The Origins of Urban Crisis" whose historical depth spans beyond the scope of this essay. It is important to know that Detroit is a chocolate city.[13] 83% of the population is African-American and over 1/3 of households are under the poverty line.[14] This post-industrial city is still grappling with the realities and echoes of a destabilizing socio-economic climate largely developed in the latter half of the 20th century with the collapse of the American auto and manufacturing industries. The shift from Detroit as the car making mecca, racially contentious policy, along with transition of the tax base and economic power created a perfect storm for the decline of the city in the 20th century. As a result, the population decreased considerably, crime increased, and the city was fighting to recharge the financial base it had lost. Today, particular segments of the city are becoming economic epicenters that uphold the values of a growing city yet simultaneously displaces generations of black and brown families from their homes of almost a century. This is the economic and political reality of the city, which serves as the landscape for the project "Listen" developed by Ryan Kerr and Jennifer Harge.

Ryan Kerr self-identifies as a white male collaborating with Jennifer Harge, an African-American female maker deeply rooted in Detroit and Highland Park.[15] In our interview, Harge recalls how the prompt they received for the project "Listen" helped inspire a process featuring the act of listening as the key element in the production of the work. She recounts how quiet the shoots were with little to no background sounds with the exception of the natural environment. This created a sense of tranquility and peace for her as a dance maker. Her body responded to that energy in relationship to the camera often avoiding direct eye contact with the camera while remaining in "her world."

She also mentions that, as a Black female dance maker, this was one of the few times where she felt heard by a white male as embodied by her collaborator. She mentions how her partner Ryan Kerr was an astute listener and responded in a way that disrupted her initial apprehension of working collaboratively with him. This rupture allowed her to move and navigate the space as the primary voice of the project. As the director, she was able to foreground her Black feminist perspective. She mentioned leaning in on Ryan's expertise as a filmmaker where he was able to make choices that amplified her voice and body's presence on the screen. For instance, Harge drew on large swooping action inspired by the concept of 'play' and black girl gestural vocabulary. Kerr listened to Harge's motivations and intention and used his skillset to create a sense of drama and attentiveness to detail in his cinematic approach to the work. The camera surveyed the body and acted more as a voyeur than active participant in the world created within the collaboration. They worked together to strategize how best to represent her body, voice, and perspective in relationship to the sites they selected.

A key component of the project is that we asked creatives to be responsive to the sites they selected and to choose sites that were unique to their region. The creatives investigated the depth, scale, and contributions of their sites in the creative process. The body, camera, and site were used to re-frame their personal relationship to the city and its narrative. In this work, Harge's solo body is captured in three main sites: green spaces on Belle Isle, a well-known recreational and tourist attraction in post-bankruptcy Detroit;[16] her grandmother's basement; and an open field in her predominantly African-American Highland Park neighborhood.

As a maker, Harge recognizes that, for many viewers, the film is the entry point to her creative work including her alter ego, JJ LOVE. JJ dons a blonde wig, trench coat, and appears as the sole human subject in the film. Prior to this project, JJ and Harge had always "co-existed" in live performance where Harge would transition in and out of performative states of JJ and herself. In our interview, she mentions how the film "Listen" is the first time JJ makes her first solo appearance without the presence of the maker and primary architect. Harge mentions witnessing her own body through the archive of film and how this transformed her own understanding of the potential of her alter ego to "live" beyond Jennifer's own body. As JJ, her alter ego, Harge is able to witness her own body as a type of archive that comments and critiques race, gender, and desire. She mentions that some people may assume that JJ is an attempt to create or imitate "whiteness" through the specific cultural marker of the blonde wig that covers her face for the majority of the short.

Upon deeper investigation, Harge actually positions JJ within the larger framework of African-American women's/femme[17] experiences of participating and going to Black hair care businesses, beauty supply stores, and salons in Detroit and Highland Park. JJ not only functions as a metaphor and embodied representation of Black women's/femme engagement with these industries but, more importantly, JJ

demonstrates the power of Black femme/women as creative imaginators. The wig and her screen presence create a fantastical being, one that shows how a black woman can try on external parts such as wigs in an attempt to reimagine self. Harge mentions how this body on screen explores the edges of this fantasy in experimentation and play. She continues to state in our interview that looking at the film with some distance allows her to see the reality that Black women/femme have very few opportunities to express fantasy and joy in public sites such as a park or open field. She mentions how her fantasy is often policed in expected and unexpected places such as her experiences on Belle Isle. The film operates as an archive that captures this fantasy and places the site of Detroit as a space of escapism. This challenges the narrative of Detroit as empty, desolate, or struggling, allowing the individual and spectator to enter the site as a space of fantasy, play, and exploration.

JJ's/Harge's black body amongst the natural environment positions a different narrative about these spaces. She springs from one foot to another inside an abandoned caboose covered in graffiti art that has weathered the test of time. The caboose serves as a bridge between two green pastures where the camera shifts our point of view in relationship to her body. The camera always serves as an outsider to the solo dancer's pleasure. We see jump cuts between her negotiating the space of the caboose and playing the piano in the large grassy field.

She mentioned that this open and public space, however, left her feeling exposed or vulnerable in a way that simply did not exist in the comfort of her grandmother's basement—a site she knew intimately and felt as her home place.[18] The basement was a space she frequented regularly as she conducts day-to-day mundane tasks. It largely served as a space to pass through. For this project, the process of filming allowed her to activate this space and to see the space as a site of creation. Ryan Kerr brought in practicals (i.e., Christmas lights) to illuminate the space, the body, and the everyday objects that were in the basement including a tiny piano, which appears throughout the short. The collaborative filmmaking process allowed Harge and Kerr to see the potential of the everyday sites as spaces for visual storytelling and, more importantly, to imagine pleasure.

The final images capture the dancer performing large-scale swooping movement in super slow motion. These expansive movements have a sense of liberation and joy. The camera captures her expressivity and allows the viewer to see the dancer claim the physical space around her as a space of freedom. This joy and work was distinctly contemporary and distinctly black. Black joy serves as a metaphor to reframe this site and to re-envision the post-industrial city. Detroit is just one of many stories in the Rust Belt within the American Midwest.[19] In this moment, we see what McKee tells us is the promise of good storytelling: the discovery of "life, its pains and joys, at levels and in directions you have never imagined."[20] Screendance, in this instance, helps expand our notion of what is possible in space and time.

Watch: "Listen" (2016). Co-Directors: Jennifer Harge and Ryan Kerr. Performance and Movement: Jennifer Harge. Film/Video: Ryan Kerr. Shot on location in Detroit and Highland Park. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=69&v=leX66EpWyY0

Case Study #2: Indigenous Aesthetics to Challenge Assumptions of Nationhood in the US

In Phoenix, we wanted to learn more about the unique presence of racial and ethnic minorities and cultures beyond the densely Black urban spaces such as Detroit. We were confronted with the realities of how to honor and ethically uphold the rich cultural traditions and values of the region of the Southwest as it relates to race, culture, and the production of screendance. We invited Indigenous Enterprise to be a part of the Moving 24fps: Phoenix iteration. The cultural advocacy group is comprised of Indigenous people of the Navajo nation. The group is located in the urban center of Phoenix and negotiates the successes and challenges balancing traditional values of the reservation with the realities of living, creating, and working in the sixth largest urban center in the US. The group infuses hip-hop and traditional Navajo dances to promote their cause. In Phoenix, creative teams were given the prompt "Phoenix" - the Greek mythological creature of regeneration.[21] We wanted the creatives to connect to the city's namesake and to incorporate the idea of "rebirth" inside their choreographic and cinematic choice making. The creatives were also given a natural element such as wind, water, air, fire, and metal. Indigenous Enterprise randomly selected "water" and had to incorporate "rebirth" as the creative impetus for their project.

The group of six male dancers were inspired to use the traditional water warrior dances of the Navajo Nation as a movement point of reference.[22] The group's leader Kenneth Shirley, who is also a filmmaker, was interested in how to capture and best position the indigenous bodies on the camera to highlight the strength and vitality of the dancers while also increasing awareness of water as a precious resource within his communities.

The dance and film drew on an embedded indigenous aesthetic practice in the development of the short. According to indigenous scholar Steve Leuthold,[23] indigenous aesthetic refers to key concepts across multiple indigenous groups that bind these communities together including self-determination, cultural continuity, cultural distinctiveness, and most importantly, attachment to place. These points are a critical means to understand Indigenous Enterprise's creative decisions and aesthetic values in the creation of this project. Shirley, who directed and edited the film, along with dancers from the troupe, and videographer Kyler Litson, shot the short at the Pueblo Grande Museum and Archeological Park as a part of the Annual Indian Market, a gathering of several indigenous nations. This archaeological site was once inhabited by the Hohokam people and is the largest preserved archaeological site in the city of

Phoenix and includes indigenous arts, galleries, and replicated houses from the Hohokam. Once a bastion of culture and life for these people, it is now, many years later, the site and container for the dance film created. The site serves as background and offers a sense of legacy; however, I would be remiss if I did not distinguish the cultures of the Hohokam and the Navajo dances referenced in the film.

Using the element of water as a point of inspiration has a sense of irony within the context of a desert, which largely has limited access to water. The dancers had few opportunities to access physical bodies of water, but were expected to demonstrate water in their project. The dancers used their water warrior dances as mode of expression within the film. The use of slow motion in the dance film highlights details such as the frill of the traditional dress and the thunderous beat of the footwork pumping vibrations through the body. The ability to slow the motion of the action allows the viewer to witness a flow of movement that parallels the flow of water. The film suspends time and allows the viewer to witness flow and command of the body.

The background included audio speakers, POW-MIA Flags, portable restrooms, food stands, and a predominantly, though not exclusively, white audience. Having visited the site before and after the performance I had a chance to chat and engage with these audience members who attended this event as a cultural experience. The camera captures the performance of the dancers and the audience who are additional subjects in the film. They are both watching and being watched. They watch and capture the performance of the dance on their mobile phones and the viewer of the film observes the audience watching the dance, creating multiple layers of seeing and being seen through the medium of screendance. This spectacle within the frame of a screendance project produces different meanings about how the dance is read in the particular context of a Indigenous "market." Indigenous Enterprise mentions how these dances have culturally specific meanings particularly when performed within native-centered spaces and ritual places. Shirley also mentions the importance of building cultural understanding for non-Native audiences. His group's mission is to educate audiences about these dances in various spaces and to increase awareness of the dance and culture. He saw the Moving 24fps project as a way to bridge his two passions, dance and film, and to expand the reach of his indigenous culture to a wider audience.

The film ends with a slate that conjures Standing Rock along with the hashtags #NoDAPL and #WaterisLife. This reference serves as a call to action for the viewer and places dance filmmaking as a political act. The slate is in direct response to the actions and policies enacted by the US government that directly impact federally recognized tribes in the Dakotas.[24] This call to action unites indigenous communities around the central themes in indigenous aesthetic practices most specifically natural resources and connection to the land. The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) is an underground oil pipeline within the Dakota region of the US. In Winter 2016/17, this project gained national attention due to the legal ramifications and impact on the Sioux nation and

Lake Oahe, the primary water reservoir for the reservation. This policy would violate preexisting tribal treaty rights and complicate notions of tribal sovereignty within the US.

The use of social media hashtags increases the level of virality and connection to a larger online movement. When connected to the dance film and shared online it offers wide scale distribution of their work and the justice movement more broadly. The final slate and the dances presented remind the viewer of the socio-political complexities that exist and complicates our notion of what constitutes an American or US nationalist politic via screendance. This reveals the opportunity of screendance to reignite conversations about federally recognized tribes, government policy, race and culture. More importantly it is an opportunity to ask more complicated questions rooted in nationhood, sovereignty, and defining an 'American' aesthetic within dance film.

> Watch: "Untitled" (2017). Director: Kenneth Shirley. Director of Photography: Kyler Litson. Performance: Indigenous Enterprise
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1kW-97Wbxg

Case Study #3: Cross-Cultural Limits in Urban Spaces in the US

Mary "Mama" Ar-Rasheed is a Cambodian-American Muslim B-girl[25] who calls Detroit home. During her process in creating 'resolute' with DMV[26] artist C. Funn she was faced with many challenges related to her identity as a B-girl. At the time, she had recently injured herself during a battle, and talked about how this prevented her from being able to execute movement distinct to her style, specifically floor work, freezes, and power moves. These moves demanded the engagement of particular parts of her body she simply could not access because of this prolonged injury. This situation compelled her to share her emotional journey inside the biopic style dance film. Her story was recorded and her voice serves as narration in the project.

Shot at night on the street corners of Detroit, the work opens with hand gesticulations. She sourced these movements from her study of waacking as a direct result of her inability to "hit the floor"[27] as a B-girl. The close ups during this opening montage style action sequence accompanied by a trap beat, captures the mood, and presence of her Asian body. The first few images capture her face in relationship to her dynamic and dexterous hand dances. In our interview, she mentions how these hand motions incorporate Apsara[28] gesticulations as performed by the Royal Ballet of Cambodia. This traditional dance is her link with her own cultural upbringing and serves as an entry point to her distinct style of waacking, a form that highlights the dexterity, strengthen and control of the arms and hands. As Cambodian-American, her body maintains a cultural memory as a part of an Asian diaspora within the context of a predominantly African-American post-industrial US-based urban center. Her body simultaneously exists within a metaphysical and cultural space of US and Cambodia. When asked where

she learned Apsara dances, she mentions pockets of time and people introducing her to the form at gatherings such as the Cambodian New Year celebrations or social parties. She stated that she would learn the movements through observation. These gatherings were a part of her upbringing in the US and helped her connect to her Southeast Asian heritage. Her body demonstrates an in-between - a cultural liminality where she negotiates her understanding of US and Cambodian culture. This is further complicated when she mentions her development as a K-Pop vocalist.[29] She situates her Asian-ness within the US, Korea, and Cambodia simultaneously. Yet, her "global" body also exists within a liminal space of racial constructions in the context of Detroit, US.

In our interview, I asked her how race showed up for her in "resolute." She clearly mentions how she understands black Americans' contributions and creation of hip-hop and street forms in the US, which she began to learn and perfect in the late 1990s and early 2000s. She also mentioned her mission to learn, engage community, and share knowledge in a way that supports the culture and honor the legacies of the creators. Implicitly, Mama negotiates Blackness and Asianness on camera as a part of the production process. Her fashion reflects an African-American urban sensibility as she wears a black shirt captioned "do what is right, not what is easy" in large font. She also dons a black snapback[30] with the iconic Detroit city logo positioned in place of the 'D' of the word—"HARDCORE." This word is the logo for her crew Hardcore Detroit—the most popular street dance crew in the region. Her dress signifies a particular type of Blackness rooted in urban and street culture. At the same time she wears a red veil with harem pants, signifying in some ways Asianness more specifically rooted in colonialist conceptions of the "Orient."[31] Her movement flows between waacking,[32] Apsara gestures, and breakin' vocabularies. The confluence of these forms allows her to find physical pleasure, a place to belong. This then helps her connect to her dance community, cultural past, and present position within the city's predominantly inner-city Black community.[33]

The centering of the dancers of color with the backdrop of an urban horizon opens up opportunities about how we understand the power of the marked body on camera. The project intentionally centers bodies that traditionally have not been seen or valued within the current curatorial and production practice of screendance. As curators of this project, we offer a wide range of 'visual politics' that supports screendance maker, curator, and scholar Cara Hagan's claim that screendance's default is to represent "largely Western, white, and college educated"[34] movers on screen.

Rosenberg makes mention of the various genres and subgenres of film and movement in his writing on "Evacuating Genre." In this work, he expresses the need to value screendance work both within the meta-narrative of the work and the meta-knowledge that informs the work including cultural assumptions, artistic predecessors, and how the medium of screendance constantly straddles the visual cultures and rules within dance and film. He attempts to break up formalism as a frame of reference to view

screendance work. Though he does not expressly mention the role and presence of hip-hop or urban as subgenre, I would like to suggest that, perhaps in the case of "resolute," urbanism or an urban aesthetic practice could shift how we think about screendance practice and visual politics. In this instance, I refer to urban aesthetic[35] as an aesthetic rooted in legacies created in urban spaces in post-civil rights era United States. Through this lens, we can situate the work of Danny Hoch and his hip-hop manifesto that articulates the practice of graffiti, MC, breakin' (dance), and DJ-ing as having distinct aesthetic value. This is not to suggest that we cannot apply the suggestions in Rosenberg's work and dance filmmaking techniques holistically when capturing urban dance. In fact, I think they are directly applicable. I do though want to suggest that perhaps there is an urban visual politics influenced by inner-city Black and Brown makers that impact how one produces dance film. It is through these forms where we see the artist and art making reclaim space within urban blight and understand the public space as visual canvas. In "resolute," we witness examples of this as we see the dancer and the camera capture and move alongside graffiti in public spaces and abandoned lots while also framing the body from worm's eye view with skyscrapers positioned in the background. The soundtrack created by D-the-Cypher references and sources trap techniques inside the track to support the narrative and text. In this short, we see the confluence of race, culture, and geography embedded within the styles of dance and the dance short.

> Watch: "resolute" (2016). Co-Directors: Mary "Mama" Ar-Rasheed and C.
> Funn. Performance and Movement: Mary "Mama" Ar-Rasheed. Film/Video:
> C. Funn. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLe_xyzXfPU

Changing the Visual Politic – Understanding the Screendance Consumer

It was important that creatives who participated included a representative cross-section of communities within the region where we were hosting the event. The particular case studies in this essay center creatives of color in order to amplify their stories, bodies, and perspectives as a central component in the making of work. These projects also exist within particular social and political movements where creatives leverage their skills to respond to current cultural themes.

The presence of "skinned representation" as exampled by these case studies brought up other questions relating to identity politics. Intersectionality was a current that existed in all of these cases. It was difficult for us to separate racial representation for the screen and the invisibility or hyper visibility of particular bodies. In Detroit, the centrality of the woman's body in front of the camera revealed the reality of a marketplace and availability of particular dancers or dance makers in the specific region. This in and of itself is not a negative but does bring up questions about how gender and race intersect in representation for the camera. Moreover, where are the female filmmakers? In the examples provided in this essay, the woman's body was subjected to the gaze of the

male filmmaker. Regardless of how "progressive" these men were, this initial process uncovered some of the gaps within the project that reflects the larger field of dance filmmaking. This goes beyond a multicultural approach rooted in tokenism (i.e., one woman, one person of color, etc.) yet points to a more equitable framing of inclusion, specifically thinking about how life experiences as an artist and storyteller are informed by how one navigates through the world within their multiple identities. We have successfully made efforts to develop a representative cross-section of creatives and remain curious about what considerations other curators make to amplify diverse voices: the "queer" body as maker? The "differently abled" body? The "trans" body?

Beyond representation and production, we are also curious to know who is the audience for screendance? When we visited these cities, we noticed very few persons of color in the audience. There were people of color closely connected to the creatives, but overwhelmingly the audience who attended these screenings self-identified as white. This instinctively is not a bad thing but it does make us wonder where are the people of color in the WATCHING of screendance? This points to a much larger quagmire in the screendance economy and marketplace of how to get communities of color excited about this experimental approach to dance and film/video. How do we as curators engage people of color to be interested in both making and watching dance film? I will continue to grapple with these questions in order to discover new ways of engagement with intersectional perspectives, viewpoints, and practices.

Biography

Marcus White is an American movement maker, educator, community engagement advocate and cultural WERKer. He is the Founder and Creative Director of Detroit-based performance production company White Werx. One of the company's initiatives is Moving 24fps – a Festival co-created with Carlos Funn/Funn Foto – where film and dance makers make new work in a single weekend. Marcus' teaching and creative practice centers embodied performance as transformational and is informed by his experiences and embodied investigations of black social and contemporary dance. In 2016, he joined the faculty of Arizona State University where he serves as an Assistant Professor of Dance within the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts. At ASU, his research and teaching infuses justice and equity within creative practices for dance in relationship to live theatre and film, personal movement practice in urban, social dance formations, and arts business/career development. Marcus earned his MFA from the University of Michigan where his research explored dance making for the camera to unpack themes of surveillance, desire, and hypervisibility.

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Notes

[1] Borelli, "Introduction," 12. See also Borelli, "Screening Nationhood."

[2] See Smith, "Minnesota Officer Acquitted in Killing of Philando Castile." It should also be noted that a significant number of black cis and transgendered women are also victims of gun-involved incidents with the police that largely go uncovered by mainstream media at the scale of the Castile case.

[3] See "Drug Dealers, criminals, rapists.'"

[4] See Duca, "The Miley Cyrus Twerking Backlash, for Idiots."

[5] See Lawrence, "A history of drag and vogue balls."

[6] See Gamp, "Lemonade and Minute Maid."

[7] For more about *Lemonade*, see https://www.beyonce.com/album/lemonade-visual-album/

[8] In this case "black and brown" specifically is an attempt to draw links between the African/African-American, Indigenous, and Latinx experiences. Paul Ortiz makes a strong case about intersectional perspective, shared history and struggle in *An African American and Latinx History of the US*.

[9] For the purposes of this essay, I use screendance and dance film interchangeably.

[10] For the purposes of this essay—person of color refers to any historically marginalized group based on their race in the US context, which encompasses but is not limited to African/African-American, Latinx/a/o/Chicano, Arab/Arab-American/Middle Eastern, Asian/Asian-American (excluding Slavic countries), Native/Indigenous. This is a slippery area as race is socially-constructed within particular contexts and is culturally specific. This is the limitation and failure of the word "person of color" but is an attempt to create working language about how race operates in the US context.

[11] See Santiago, "Transgender and Undocumented Leader Fights for Rights," which positions the Arizona, US political climate as it relates to intersectional identity.

[12] Faulkner, K. Quote from Moving 24fps focus group

[13] A colloquial term used by African-Americans to identify urban centers in the US with a predominantly black population. Black here is defined widely across the African diaspora.

[14] Data provided by US Census-State of Michigan
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/detroitcitymichigan/RHI805210

[15] A municipality adjacent to Detroit—griped with similar, and in some cases worse, economic and political conditions as an echo of the changes in the once-booming auto industry—which the region monopolized for a long time.

[16] Kerr and Harge, "Listen" from Moving 24fps Project date accessed April 2017
https://youtu.be/leX66EpWyY0?list=PLEbzlUa-QxQaDgQhFytqmYFFOE97V9SZc

[17] Femme—female figure cisgender, transgender, gender non-conforming experience—where one assumes the gender performance of femininity, which may be distinct from performance of woman.

[18] See hooks, "Homeplace."

[19] See Czerniak, *Formerly Urban*.

[20] McKee, *Story*, 236.

[21] There are many layers that I could unpack as it relates to the reference of Grecian definitions of the Phoenix and by extension Euro-centered models and philosophies, which expand the scope of this essay.

[22] Indigenous Enterprise as a part of Moving 24fps: https://youtu.be/p1kW-97Wbxg December 2017 "Moving 24fps: Phoenix"Untitled" by Kenneth Shirley/Indigenous Enterprise.

[23] See Leuthold, *Indigenous Aesthetics*.

[24] More information about Standing Rock and the Dakota Access Pipeline can be found here: https://nycstandswithstandingrock.wordpress.com/standingrocksyllabus/

[25] break girl. Female/woman practitioner of breakin' a social dance that started in the Bronx in the 1970s and has garnered international reputation.

[26] Colloquial abbreviation for DC, Maryland, and Virginia.

[27] "Hit the floor" is a social dance reference in which a dancer, particularly a break girl or break boy goes into a cypher/cipher and demonstrates their breakin' movement vocabulary and prowess.

[28] "Apsara" performed by Cambodian Royal Ballet
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Erbp1Isk96M date accessed December 2017

[29] Korean popular music largely inspired by American hip-hop culture and music yet has developed as distinct to South Korean culture, context, and people.

[30] A large flat brim baseball cap with an adjustable strap comprised of two plastic pieces that snap together.

[31] See Said, *Orientalism*.

[32] A cultural product of LGB and trans black communities in California. Popularized by syndicated show "Soul Train," the form includes fast-paced arm movement initiated from the corps, high energy footwork, and a dynamic funk feeling to communicate an idea or mood.

[33] It should be noted that regions outside the city proper have large racial minorities that are not African-American including Arab-American (Dearborn), Asian-American (various pockets), and Latinx (Southwest Detroit).

[34] See Hagan, "Visual Politics in American Dance Film."

[35] Most street dance practitioners would define hip-hop as specific to breakin, graffiti, emcee, and dj as essential "starter" elements. Urban or street serves as a broader term to encompass various cultural formations forms that include and may exist alongside hip-hop culture.

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Danced Out: When Passing for Almost Straight Is Not Enough

Mark Broomfield, State University of New York at Geneseo

Keywords: screendance, documentary, LGBTQ, race, gender performance, masculinity, western theatrical dance

Danced Out emerges from my lived experience as a professional male dancer. In a world filled with anxiety about masculinity, and the policing of its boundaries, this documentary film shares my deep commitment to understanding, exploring, and revealing the multifaceted aspects of gender performance. It shows the crucial function gay men have in contemporary society and culture. With its nuanced approach, *Danced Out* offers critical insights that challenge individuals, institutions, and society that perpetuate gender norms about masculinity.

Danced Out challenges the longstanding default associations of Western theatrical dance as a welcoming safe space for gay men and queer male dancing bodies.[1] At root, the documentary gives visibility to the complicated and contradictory notions of masculine gender performance by gay men in dance. More specifically, the film illuminates the critical role and function that gay men play in both destabilizing and deconstructing social expectations of gender performance on and offstage.

The documentary speaks to myriad ways in which homophobia, sexism, misogyny and the policing of masculinity constrains diverse masculinities and gender expression. *Danced Out* raises questions about the different set of political stakes and investments in performing masculinity that gay male dancers experience and heterosexual men might not. It does so while also recognizing the multiplicity and spectrum of gender expression for gender nonconforming, gender non-binary, and LGBTQ identified people. In sum, masculine gender performance is not tied to the cisgender heterosexual white middle class male body. The film centers the experiences of gay male dancers of color to both reimagine and redefine masculinity for the twenty-first century. Indeed, assumptions about masculinity in dance and popular culture routinely ignore the lived experiences of gay men. In fact, gay men are not considered "masculine," nor are they assumed to be.[2] *Danced Out* challenges this false perception.

Heterosexual men do not have a monopoly on masculinity—and never have. Gay male dancers in the tradition of Western theatrical dance have been *dancing out* for decades. No one seemed to notice, however, because they looked "straight." Gay men have been "straight acting" before the phenomena bore its current name.[3] Imagine, how have gay male dancers accomplished this feat? For the purposes of my documentary feature film

Danced Out, I coin the phrase "passing for almost straight" to examine a contemporary manifestation of sexual passing.

Danced Out represents the collective exhaustion, among gay men in dance, of playing "straight" roles on and offstage. Like theatre, and drag performances, gay male dancers break the fourth wall by exposing societal gender norms and the fragility of masculinity.[4] These gay men share an intimate relationship with masculinity that many heterosexual men do not.[5] Gay men can perhaps see more clearly than most, that masculinity is in fact—a performance.[6] Gay male dancers routinely grow up being told heterosexual men define masculinity, shamed by a masculine ideal to which they purportedly do not fit. The men in *Danced Out* own masculinity in all its complexity. The film demonstrates the indispensable social role gay men have redefining masculinity in American contemporary culture.
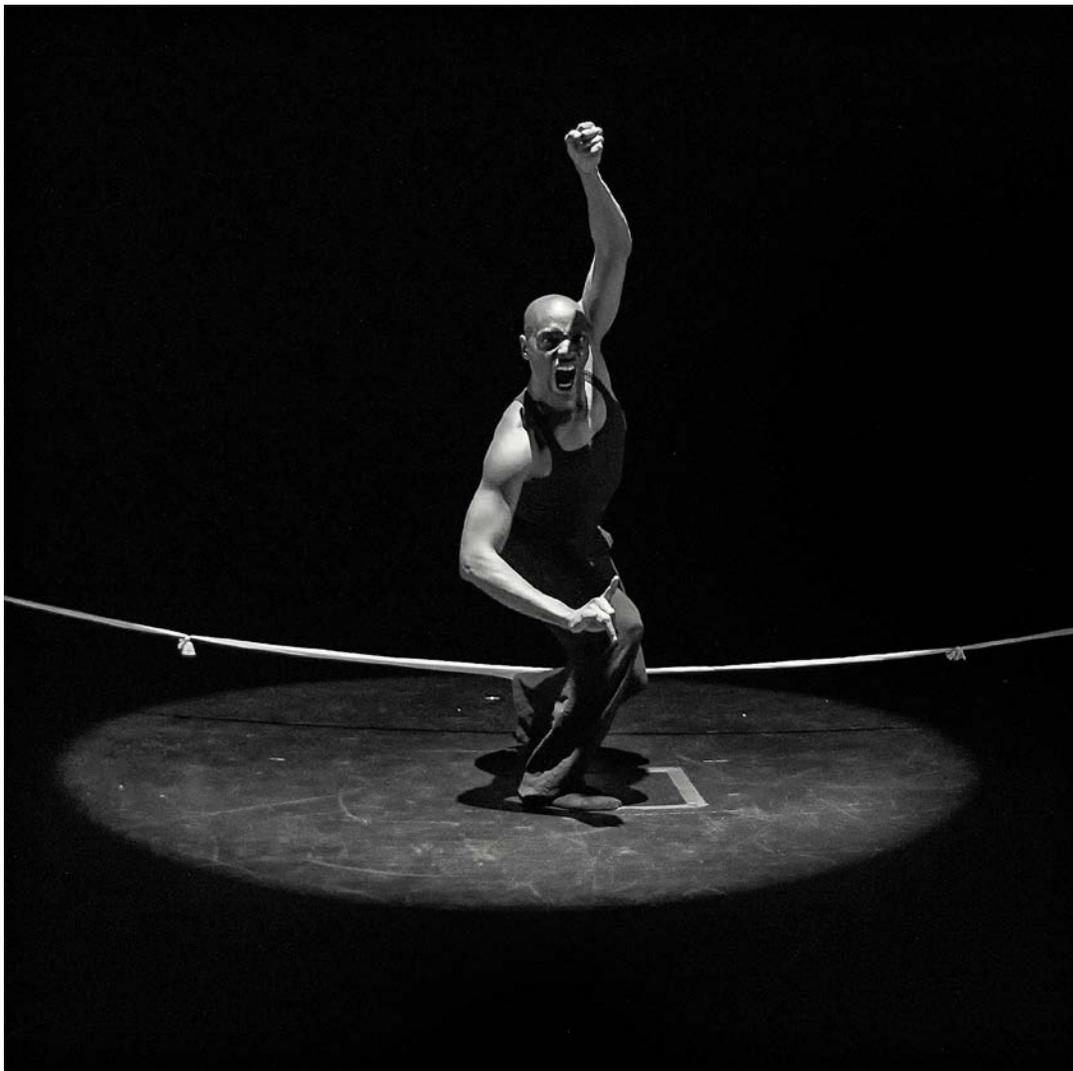
Germaul Barnes. Photo by Marc Millman.

In a culture that views gender largely through visual codes, the inability to distinguish between gay and straight men poses a threat to dominant notions of masculinity.[7] On one hand, these visual codes determine the legibility and legitimacy of men's social relations based on power and status. On the other hand, the inability to distinguish heterosexual and homosexual men faces repeated calls for gay men to "do out." For some "doing out" might include engaging in public displays of same-sex affection, embodying stereotypes of gay men as effeminate, sissies, or "flamboyant." In the absence of these performances, it makes identifying distinctions between heterosexual and gay masculinities that much more difficult. The inability to largely make distinctions between "gay" and "straight" masculinities gives greater credence to how "passing for almost straight" functions—not as an act of duplicity—but as a means of strategizing survival based on social expectations and gendered bodily norms.

Constrained on the spectrum of gender expression from hypermasculine to hyperfeminine, gay men are critiqued if their gender performance is perceived as conforming to gender norms, in other words, sexual passing; and on the other hand, critiqued if their gender performance is perceived as feminine—deemed "too out."[8] When heterosexuality is presumed and normative, passing—although it historically has depended on markers of visibility that approximate whiteness—*does* allow gay men to survive.[9] When gay men successfully pass as straight by imitating the codes and gendered performance of heterosexual masculinity, or in the case of "straight acting" they are in large part made invisible.[10]

Gay men face repeated calls to "come out." However, the term is misapplied, and it is essentially a call for "doing out" that signals the human need to categorize and make selections about sexuality based on gender performance. Because the documentary features many black gay male dancers, the related phenomenon of the "down low" ("DL"), black men who do not identify as gay but who have sex with men, and who practice heterosexual norms of masculinity—underscores issues of race to sexual passing.[11]

In his book, *Sexual Discretion: Black Masculinity and the Politics of Passing*, gender studies scholar Jeffrey McCune's dual framing of the DL yields important insights about black masculinity, sexuality, identity, and gender performance. By making distinctions between discreet and discrete sexual practices of black men who have sex with men who do not identify as gay, McCune reveals how the DL functions as a space of sexual freedom and autonomy outside state surveillance of black bodies. His work rejects the closet as a liberatory space for queer of color LGBTQ people.[12] State surveillance of black bodies coupled with dominant masculine gender performances, along with notions of men on the DL, and policing masculinity disrupt narratives about black gay men as deviant and pathological. Thus, this "passing for almost straight" demonstrates the multiple configurations that conceal my theorization of "doing out."

Brother(hood) Dance! (dancers Ricardo Valentine and Orlando Zane Hunter). Photo by Ian Douglas.

Unlike white men in dance, whose bodies function as the abstract universal norm, black gay male dancers face a culture in which race and sexuality significantly marks their difference.[13] In American culture, black men vacillate between hypervisibility and invisibility coupled with heightened surveillance.[14] Arguably, queering the *white* body follows a narrative trajectory of liberation and emancipation, whereas blackness is itself *already* queer according to normative standards of whiteness. And so being queer functions differently for the black male dancing body, which complicates sexual passing.

Sexual passing is not about "coming out." The male dancers in *Danced Out* all self-identify as gay. The historical focus of LGBTQ people to "come out" of the closet emphasizes it as a one-time act. Therein lies the tension between "coming out" and the ethics of sexual passing. In its call to all LGBTQ people to "come out," nuances of what "coming out" individually means are hidden. In fact, "coming out" is not a one-time act, but a life sentence to "coming out." In the documentary, my conceptualization of "passing for almost straight," denotes the ethics of sexual passing as strategic gender performances and the performance of identity. It requires navigating spaces that necessitates deft perception of each encounter, and the risk of certain behaviors not deemed masculine enough.

"Passing for almost straight" implicates an explicit correlation to a "straight" sexual identity. Yet, while "straight" signifies heterosexuality, it is actually a code for masculine gender performance. Therefore "straight" passes as the performance of masculinity. "Straight" assumes heterosexuality is tied to dominant masculinity. It even has its own terminology "straight acting." Highly desirable, the phenomenon of "straight acting," reveals its potency among men in the gay community. The premium for both heterosexual and gay men: dominant masculinity. "Natural" in heterosexual men, and "appropriated" in gay men. Perceptions about "straight" men require debunking. In fact, "straight" men have no more ownership of masculinity than gay men. Therein lies the ultimate threat to heterosexuality and masculine gender performance—the role that gay men play in exposing the illusions of gender performance.

Gay black male dancers use strategic gender performances in how they seek to embody masculinity because, while hegemonic masculinity applies to all men, it performs differently for black men in American society. This strategizing of gender performance aligns with Ramón Rivera-Servera's definition of queer as a position and strategy. "As a strategy, 'to act queer' refers to the set of practices engaged by queers themselves in their creative navigation of everyday life in a heteronormative society."[15] Failure to achieve and maintain dominance exposes black men to criticisms of emasculation, weakness, or not being "real" men.[16] Far removed from the white masculine ideal, black gay men have a history of using performance and performative techniques to negotiate and navigate their survival.[17]

Desmond Richardson, former principal dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, co-artistic director of Complexions Contemporary Ballet, and dance icon, explained to me that even early on, as he was learning the art form, he was aware that dance was a feminized space, calling on him and others to prove their masculinity.[18] Because gay men grow up in a homophobic culture that repudiates any equation of homosexuality and masculinity, their early awareness of gender sets in motion a distinction between who they are and what they do.[19] Consequently, these men are more inclined to see gender as an act, as performance, as theatre—and as play. This distinguishes gay men, and especially gay male dancers, from their straight counterparts.

Desmond Richardson. Photo by Gene Schiavone.

The gender and sexual outlaw status of the gay men in *Danced Out*, reveals a gendered double consciousness that represents the different stakes and investments of performing masculinity due to their sexual identity. Gay men have a history of using performative techniques to navigate their survival in a homophobic culture.[20] The stigma associated with their sexual identity leaves many gay men struggling with internalized homophobia. Society frowns upon performances of gay men perceived as "too out." The phenomenon of "passing for almost straight" pertains to men who do not self-identify as straight, although their behavior and gender performance can be read as such. "Passing for almost straight" reveals the pressure to perform and constantly prove heteronormative masculinity. The persistent requirement to police one's gender performance, the self-surveillance it requires, and the psychological exhaustion resulting from continually policing one's behavior all take an oppressive toll.[21]

Danced Out demonstrates the tensions of gay men passing between multiple spaces. In a world often filled with uncertainty about maleness and masculinity, the "gay" male dancing body, to a degree, creates even more uncertainty by exposing the fictions of masculinity. *Danced Out* confounds the stereotyped popular perceptions and images of male dancers by calling into question the incompatibility of masculinity and "gayness."

Biography

Mark Broomfield, Assistant Professor of Dance Studies and Associate Director of the Geneseo Dance Ensemble in the Department of Theatre and Dance at SUNY Geneseo (PhD, MFA), is a scholar/artist who has danced with the repertory company Cleo Parker Robinson Dance, performing in leading works by some of the most diverse and recognized African American choreographers in the American modern dance tradition that include: Talley Beatty, Katherine Dunham, Eleo Pomare, Donald McKayle, David Rousseve, and Ronald K. Brown. His publications include the article "Branding Ailey: The Embodied Resistance of the Queer Black Male Dancing Body" by *Oxford Handbooks Online* and his poem "Passing Out" in *Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies*. Two forthcoming book chapters include "'Doing Out': A Black Dandy Defies Gender Norms in the Bronx" by Vanderbilt University Press and "So You Think You Are Masculine? Dance Reality Television, Spectatorship, and Gender Nonconformity" by Routledge. He is currently working on his book *Passing for Almost Straight: Queer Black Masculinities in American Contemporary Dance* and documentary *Danced Out*. Broomfield is the recipient of the Woodrow Wilson Career Enhancement Fellowship, the SUNY Faculty Diversity Award, and the Ford Foundation Fellowship.

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Notes

[1] Stoneley, *A Queer History of the Ballet*, 2; Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*, 6-7; Fisher, "Make It Maverick," 51.

[2] Neal, *New Black Man*, 155.

[3] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 6-7; Yoshino, "Covering," 935-36.

[4] Moore, "One of the Gals Who's One of the Guys," 110.

[5] Frank Leon Roberts (Scholar/Activist), in interview with author.

[6] Aubrey Lynch, (Former Principal Dancer Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre), in interview with author.

[7] Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities*, 219. Ronald K. Brown (Artistic Director, Evidence), in interview with author. Brown discusses not being on the DL and not being straight acting. Germaul Barnes, (Artistic Director, Viewsic Dance), in interview with author.

Barnes denotes that we are at a point where making distinctions gay and straight masculinities are hard to observe, questioning, "What is going on?"

[8] McCready, *Making Space for Diverse Masculinities*, 78-80.

[9] William Isaac, (Dancer), in interview with author. Isaac discusses the tensions of "doing out" and the need to survive.

[10] Harrison, *Sexual Deceit*, 6.

[11] McCune, Jr., *Sexual Discretion*, 8.

[12] Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship*, 27-8.

[13] Ward, *Not Gay*, 24-5; McCready, 9-10.

[14] Neal, *Looking for Leroy*, 4-5.

[15] Rivera-Servera, *Performing Queer Latinidad*, 27.

[16] Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 74-5.

[17] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps*, 17-18.

[18] Desmond Richardson (Artistic Director, Complexions Contemporary Ballet), in interview with author.

[19] Connell, "A Very Straight Gay," 736.

[20] Chauncey, 187-8; McCready, 72-73; Richardson. Richardson discusses the performance of masculinity in different spaces.

[21] Migdalek, *The Embodied Performance of Gender*, 27-8.

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INTERVIEWS

A Conversation with Abbey

Michael Sakamoto, University of Iowa
Angella Betina Carlos ("Abbey"), University of Iowa

Screenshot from *Abbey* (2016). Dir. Michael Sakamoto. Chor. and perf. Angella Betina Carlos. View the film at https://vimeo.com/155411637

Abbey *is a six-minute dancefilm produced in 2016, directed, photographed, and edited by Michael Sakamoto, and choreographed and performed by Angella Betina Carlos, who goes by her nickname, Abbey. The film was shot at University of Iowa, where Sakamoto is an Assistant Professor in Dance and Carlos was an MFA student. The following are excerpts from a conversation between the filmmaker and performer.*

By turns reflective and visceral, Abbey *depicts the interior life of a sheltered young Filipina alone in a university dance setting in middle America. Sakamoto and Carlos collaborated in an effort to bear witness as well as portray Carlos's sense of tenuous liminality as a stranger in a strange land. Issues of normativity around social roles in Asian and American contexts, gender and physical expression, and the mediating power of language and its relationship to postcolonial identity were all implicit and considered in developing Abbey's onscreen character. As filmmaker and subject, Sakamoto and Carlos also engage in implicit dialogue as gendered subalterns, the gaze of Sakamoto's technologizing camera and digital edit attempting to create and hold*

space for Carlos's spontaneous and multiple corporealities of transnational Asian female identity.

MICHAEL: Who is your character in the film?

ABBEY: Me. (Laughs). It's two sides of me. One is the dancer me, who wants to be seen, who wants to stand out and show herself, and the other is the everyday real me, who just wants to blend in and not be seen. Who's really shy, insecure, and all these negative self-images.

MICHAEL: Do you see those two sides as distinct?

ABBEY: I think I do. I guess when I'm dancing in class, it's this weird mix of I want you to see me, but at the same time, I don't want you to point me out. I want you to acknowledge it without highlighting me. It's different (in daily life) when I'm not in a studio, and I just want to hide, not interact.

MICHAEL: Do you think that's a cultural thing?

ABBEY: It could be. Back home, when you're in class and dancing, you have to respect your teacher, you can't talk back, be too opinionated, or too emotional. You have to be respectful and agree. If you disagree, just save it for yourself.

MICHAEL: I was probably interested in doing this project because, even as a fourth generation Asian-American, I grew up with a bit of that same pressure to conform. How do you think any of that played into your character in the film?

ABBEY: I think it's the part where I improv. I think it represents that way of freedom and vulnerability and confidence that I'm finding now, not just as a dancer, but as a person. Back home, people are more conservative because we're Catholic, and there are expectations of what you should be as a woman. You're the good girl, you're the person who always gets good grades, you're the great dancer. So I feel like here, starting fresh, where no one knows me, I can change, make something different out of myself.

MICHAEL: We shot the film only three months after you arrived.

ABBEY: Watching it, I was like, whoa, my accent was different. Even my movement was fresh from what I was doing back home.

MICHAEL: Back then, two years ago, we created a character that was influenced by a culture clash of you coming from Filipino, Asian, and Southeast Asian background, language, culture, everything, coming to middle America. Totally different people, culture, climate, and, to a certain extent, different language, even though you speak English.

ABBEY: Now, sometimes it feels weird when I speak Tagalog. I went home this summer, and they asked me to teach at my old university, and I could not teach in Filipino. I was like, I'm so sorry, but I'm so used to teaching in English now, that I have to. Whenever I would try to say something in Filipino, I had this weird accent, and I could not articulate myself. I think I rewired my brain.

MICHAEL: I think I was conscious that you were experiencing a really personal process of internalizing intercultural tension. That's why I shot your character mostly with fairly gentle camerawork, except for the first shot, of course, where I do a quick pan-zoom. That's the one insistent moment in the whole film because I want the viewer to know we're entering your world, one that belongs to you.

Looking back, though, does the depiction of that culture clash still resonate with you? Is it an accurate portrayal of what you were feeling, or what you still feel?

ABBEY: Of course, it's a blown up version, but I think it still holds true. I still feel like I don't totally fit in here and am more at home in the Philippines. It's still more the way I think. Here in the States, those differences already filter out some aspects of myself. Language alone changes who I am here. I wouldn't say I'm Americanized, but I'm not as conservative as before, or I feel more neutral about some things back home. I'm becoming more open.

MICHAEL: Do you feel stuck in between?

ABBEY: I'm at this point where I'm a little confused. Compared to when we did the film, I definitely feel more stuck in the middle.

MICHAEL: Maybe you're even more that character?

ABBEY: Probably, yeah! I feel like I'm in purgatory. Kind of belonging here, but not fully.

MICHAEL: What about the difference for you between dancing on stage and for the camera?

ABBEY: With a camera, there's no one there, and you don't get that audience energy, but it's also nice because it's not judgmental. It can't think. It's not going to judge me for the way I perform and look. And for this film, I think I was comfortable showing those things because I knew there are almost no Filipinos here. No one knows what I'm saying. They get to see part of my culture, but at the same time, no one's going to understand me, and that's fine. I was thinking, "This is healing to me." I do want them to see it, but I do like the fact that I'm the only one who truly knows what it is and understands what it is.

MICHAEL: When we were filming, did it matter that I was Asian-American?

ABBEY: It made it easier for me to open up and be okay with that difference. If I were working with a white male or female, to show those things, I don't know if I would be comfortable. Because I was trying to fit in, showing that side would have been not part of the plan. It's because you understand and you're not just using the stereotype of what an Asian or Filipino is. It wasn't just, "Oh, you love rice, so let's use a rice cooker." There was a purpose to it. It wasn't superficial.

MICHAEL: Yeah, I wanted to eat the rice too.

(Both laugh.)

MICHAEL: What are you curious about looking back at the project?

ABBEY: How did you process my performance? How was it to hear and see someone speaking a different language?

MICHAEL: For me, it's really important to let both the person and character speak for themselves and from themselves. I want to depict as much as I can how they experience everyday reality. Because we created a character that's lost in America, I wanted to show that sense of isolation in a very simple way, not too subtle and not too didactic.

But also, where does she find her agency, her sense of empowerment? And that's what we really build up to, when she starts dancing. So when you were speaking Tagalog, I just put myself in the position of your average American. Like, okay, this is who she is. I don't understand a word. I'm just trying to hold the space for her, or just be with her, not only as a filmmaker, but as an audience member as well.

I hope the average American viewer would bring a sense of acceptance to it. I always ask my audience to meet us halfway. So yeah, it's a question, why didn't you translate or provide subtitles, but it's also the question, why do you need it to be translated? This is who she is. What does it mean that she's here and has this experience? Why should she have to translate? It's like my other show, Soil, a devised, autobiographical performance with dancers from Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, and all of whom live part or most of their lives in America. Soil also has a couple untranslated scenes on purpose because we want the audience to reflect on what the character-performers are going through mentally, emotionally, and physically, when they're in a space where they know, "Nobody understands me right now, but I do, and what I'm saying matters to me."

ABBEY: Was there a noticeable difference between when I was speaking Tagalog in the film, like in my body language, my personality, my character, and when I speak in English?

MICHAEL: When you were speaking Tagalog when we were shooting outside, you were like a closed-off shell. It felt very intimate. You were speaking to yourself. And then

there's the scene at the end in your dance outfit. It's who you are on the inside. You're physically relaxed, just eating on the floor, and your body language is loose. I was happy for that as a filmmaker. Earlier in the film, though, it's a very black and white depiction. We set it up where when you walk into a ballet class, you're not a part of that environment initially. You're not able to be you until you somehow move in your own way or from your own motivations.

ABBEY: I think dance would be the one thing that brings me together, where I'm truly myself. I don't feel there's a gap between what I was doing before and now. I think it meshed and melted into each other. I for sure have absorbed a style here, but the influences from back home are still present in my body.

Biographies

Michael Sakamoto is an interdisciplinary artist and scholar active in dance, theatre, performance, media, and photography whose works have been presented in 14 countries worldwide. He is currently touring three full-length, dance theater performances: *Flash*, a butoh/hip-hop duet with Rennie Harris, *Soil*, a trio featuring dancers from Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand, and *blind spot*, a full length work-in-progress in collaboration with digital composer-musician, Christopher Jette. Michael's photography has been exhibited in museums and galleries in Los Angeles, Bangkok, and Chiang Mai. He regularly publishes scholarly and creative articles and book chapters, and his book project, *An Empty Room: Butoh Performance and the Social Body in Crisis*, is under contract with Wesleyan University Press. Michael is Assistant Professor in Dance At University of Iowa and holds an MFA and PhD from the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance.

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Angella Betina Carlos ("Abbey") is a Filipina contemporary dance artist with a passion for performing and teaching. She has been given featured roles in multiple performances and has danced in competitions and festivals in the Philippines, around Asia, and in the United States. Her awards include the Luva Adameit Award (Special Award for a Female Dancer) during the 1st Cultural Center of the Philippines National Ballet Competition, as well as national and international scholarships to study and train in dance. Abbey graduated cum laude with a Bachelor in Music, Major in Dance degree from the University of the Philippines Diliman, and was a member of the resident dance group, the UP Dance Company, for six years. Abbey recently completed an MFA in Dance with a focus on performance at the University of Iowa.

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REVIEWS

Bodies in Confined Sites, or, 'When You Go Out, Let Them Know That We Are Not Monsters'

Ariadne Mikou, University of Roehampton

Il Mio Grido (2010). Dir. Vito Alfarano. Screenshot.

Il Mio Grido (2010),[1] a short screen project by Italian choreographer Vito Alfarano, has emerged from a series of movement and voice laboratories that involved the inmates of the Penitentiary Institution (Casa Circondariale) at Rovigo in North Italy. Positioning the audio-visual work in a broader frame that deals with the rehabilitation scheme of dance and performance arts in Italian prisons, Alfarano's *Il Mio Grido* is in dialogue with internationally and socially engaged mediated choreographic practices such as Amie S. Dowling and Justin Forbord's film *Well Contested Sites* (2013) and viral videos that feature movement by the incarcerated.[2] Abstraction, constructed narrative and video documentation provide the ways that the technology of the screen confronts the spectator with multi-racial and predominantly male bodies that inhabit forgotten and excluded spaces; places of social justice and discipline.

The movement and voice laboratory in Rovigo's Penitentiary that constitutes the material of *Il Mio Grido*, has been realized from 2008-2010 under the support of the Italian Ministry of Justice. The incarcerated participated into a series of theatrical and

movement-based laboratories that aimed to restore their self-estimation and helped them to reflect on themselves; processes that will eventually be useful for getting integrated into society upon their release from jail. Furthermore, the laboratory aimed to open the prisons to the City of Rovigo and to elaborate the Aristotelian idea of polis as a concept of an all-encompassing society that also embraces prisoners. Regarding the ethics of this initiative, performers were not obliged to participate in the artistic laboratories, but were free to choose the rules of participation. The outcomes of the laboratories include a dance performance inspired by Dante's Inferno, two books that document the artistic process, three film documentaries, a photo-exhibition, a video-installation with portraits of prisoners projected on the main walls of the city, and two videos: the aforementioned *Il Mio Grido* and *Peter Pan Syndrome*.

Il Mio Grido (My Shout) is an audio-visual work that sits closer to the genre of video art. Some occasional slow motion and speed adjustments, color correction and camera lens flares are the main video effects of the work. The short video begins with a series of medium shot portraits during which the eyes of the performers look directly to the camera and to the invisible spectator and potential judge. After the introduction, a stationary camera frames the upper bodies, feet and hand gestures of the naked inmates. A series of excerpts from the movement laboratory such as runs, exercises designed to build trust and support among the inmates and their free dances, constitute an integral audio-visual output. Prisoners are shown to have fun and to make fun of others like school children. Their movement often recalls animals, especially the ones trapped inside cages, and it is characterized by a humorous and light tone that gradually builds in tension and recalls the trauma of arrest. When a hand covers the camera lens, a series of screams emerge in correlation to extreme close-ups to open mouths that desperately try to release sorrow or regret. Micro-movements of breath and pulse, arm gestures as being arrested or slowly forming a punch as a symbol of lost power compose the additional movement vocabulary of the performers. Do the incarcerated still have courage and strength to survive the living conditions inside the prison?

Actions positioned in front of a white sterilized background disconnected from time and space is a consciously made artistic choice that aims to completely annul the surrounding environment of the prison in order to focus the gaze of the spectator on the individual mediated performers. The cell has been transformed into a white cube that helps to disassociate the bodies from their current social stigma. Screendance scholar Harmony Bench defines the white background as a *no-place*; "[a]bsent of spatial and political markers and relations, *no-place* is an anonymous, acontextual, blank space, often visualized on screen as a smooth, empty field of white or a black abyss in which dancers float."[3] *Il Mio Grido* challenges the notion of *no-place* by purposely erasing any architectural traces of the Penitentiary and the prison is paradoxically transformed into a paradise to be inhabited by angels without wings: guilty and innocent men. What

remains if we remove prisoners from their cells and expose them naked in front of a white background? If place has been re-placed by an abstract and endless space and clothing is removed, what identifies them as prisoners and possibly as criminals?

The white *no-place* also creates a sharp contrast to the dark skin of some of the prisoners and it could potentially increase racialization. However, the camera keeps the same framing and proximity towards all the performers no matter their age, skin color or body type. Since the camera is static and avoids directing the attention of the viewer, the performers are the one who decide when to approach, look at, or perform for the lens. Furthermore, a fast cut between frames in the editing process does not allow any prioritization of the performers either. All of them, no matter their external characteristics, are equally guilty and evenly innocent. This becomes clearer as the clip of the sliding hands by two people of different skin color is often repeated. In the middle and towards the end of the video, two hands, one of dark skin and the other of white, slide towards opposite directions and reveal the empty white *no-place*; a spatial void that could reflect the abyss of their residing place and their souls. It is only at the end of the video when it is revealed that the performance takes places inside a prison, and so the white *no-place* in relationship to the static camera and the fast edits between the clips cannot be necessarily associated to techniques for increasing racial discrimination or attaching racial attributes to criminality. The camera attempts to maintain objectivity with these filmic tactics, yet objectivity is impossible since the white *no-place* makes the different skin colors among the prisoners even more apparent.

Exposed skin color, marks, texture, and different body types compose a male and mixed raced landscape full of homoeroticism and fragility. The performers of this participatory project are anonymous and their identity remains protected until the video credits reveal that the project took place in Rovigo's Penitentiary. White *no-place*, naked bodies and anonymity are artistic choices that aim to eliminate any prejudice against the performers and to lend to the spectators a new pair of eyes that helps them to distance the male performers from the context of the prison. These tactics can eventually help the incarcerated to restore their social image and convince the public opinion that they are not monsters[4] or as said in their own words: "when you go out, let them know that we are not monsters."

This film's audience is invited to look beyond the artistic product and to reflect on the dynamics that dance has managed to activate and the conflicts that it has managed to resolve. Penitentiary institutions are places, which emerge from conflicts where clash, dispute and tension continue to grow. Prisons, at least in this video's context, are diverse and precarious environments that mirror problems and failures in their respective societies; places that are socially excluded and yet formed by micro-communities that deal with internal and external conflicts. Dance as an art that encourages socialization and a supposed freedom of expression through processes of self-reflection and care has a lot to offer in places of social justice and discipline where criminality lurks and

oppression is present. When the screen disseminates this dance that takes place in this prison, then a discourse may be mobilized around penitentiary institutions and the conditions of mass incarceration. Hopefully, projects such as *Il Mio Grido* will succeed to inspire new and inclusive perspectives in dance and screendance that bridge social imbalances and social justice and may help to bring change inside places of conflict. Movement oriented rehabilitation schemes may benefit the penitentiary system, but also help enrich dance and by extension screendance.

This review positions Alfarano's work together with promising artistic practices that embed choreographically driven and screen-based activism. *Il Mio Grido* has already been screened in several Italian and international festivals of contemporary art, video art, videodance and dance on film. I came across Alfarano's work when it was submitted to [SET.mefree] *Dance & Movement on the Screen*, a recently founded nomadic micro-festival of screendance. *Il Mio Grido* can be viewed in full here: https://vimeo.com/66759731.

Biography

Ariadne Mikou is an interdisciplinary dance artist, movement educator and emergent scholar from Greece. In 2017, she completed her PhD thesis entitled *Choreographing Events: Demolition, Trace and Encounter* as part of her fully-funded practice-as-research PhD at the University of Roehampton (UK). Her research interests focus on the spatio-corporeal and social intersections of event-oriented artistic practices that include architecture, choreography and the moving-image. In parallel to curating exchanges between artists through the art collective futuremellon/not yet art, her practice includes making and writing about works created for the screen, installations and mediated performances. Her writings have been published in the *International Journal of Screendance* and *CHOROS International Dance Journal*. Her forthcoming publications include a chapter in the book *Performing Process: Sharing Dance and Choreographic Practice* to be published by Intellect Books.

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Notes

[1] *Il Mio Grido* is part of Oltre I Confini (Beyond the Boundaries), an overarching project that is also initiated by Alfarano and it helps to provide tools to incarcerated for socialization through theatre, movement and music. Specifically referring to the geopolitical area of Italy, the project Oltre I Confini is in dialogue with the national rehabilitation scheme Teatro in Carcere (the National Theatre in Prison coordination) and it derives from other initiatives such as the Compagnia della Fortezza that is a theatre company with a longstanding experience in social projects inside prisons and it dates back to 1988.

[2] For instance, the viral video that featured detained of the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center performing a series of dancing routines on Michael Jackson's *Thriller*.

[3] Bench, 53.

[4] The inmates of Rovigo's Penitentiary addressed the request that 'when you go out, let them know that we are not monsters.' This phrase was used by Alfarano as the title for the backstage video that emerged from the movement and voice laboratories.

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