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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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Choreographing Urbanisms: Site, Spatiality
and Experimental Dance in Philadelphia

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Critical Dance Studies

by

Laura Duncan Vriend

December 2013

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Anthea Kraut, Chairperson

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The Dissertation of Laura Duncan Vriend is approved:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Choreographing Urbanisms: Site, Spatiality
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by

Laura Duncan Vriend

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Critical Dance Studies
University of California, Riverside, December 2013
Dr. Anthea Kraut, Chairperson

This dissertation explores the relationship between choreographic uses of space and social theories of space and urbanism in three site-specific choreographies in Philadelphia. Through in depth analysis of Headlong Dance Theater's *Explanatorium*, Nichole Canuso's *Wandering Alice*, and Kate Watson-Wallace's *Car*, I seek to understand how spaces and sites shape experimental dance in Philadelphia. By looking at how extant urban spatialities in Philadelphia shape choreography and how choreographies articulate spatiality, I develop a strategy for more thoroughly accounting for how space makes meaning in site-based choreography. The choreographies discussed actively choreograph the audience's movement through the sites in which they take place, drastically reworking the spatiality of spectatorship. By focusing on my kinesthetic experience as audience member participating or traveling through these works, I attend to

how space is produced choreographically. In generating a close reading of each work, I demonstrate ways in which choreography theorizes (through) space and intersects with both social theories of space and with critical theory more broadly. Following urban studies scholars, I understand spatiality as the social organization and production of space, and urbanism as both ideology and practice. Space as a formal element uniting both practices of architecture and choreography, emerges as the specific material basis for envisioning, choreographing and enacting urbanism(s). Building on what I see as a foundational element of dance studies theory- that the dancing body and choreography are both objects of theoretical analysis and generative of epistemological and theoretical modes of analysis - I demonstrate that the site-specific choreographies I examine are themselves constitutive of a performative discourse that also presents proposals for urban life. I place contemporary choreography in dialogue with critical theory in order to articulate the ways in which choreography in itself engaged in theorizing. My particular focus on spatiality – of looking at choreographies that are actively site-engaged and locating the production of space through choreography as *itself* a mode of theorizing – makes visible ways in which these works engage with performance theory, memory studies, race and film theory: interventions that if not for a focus on space, we might not otherwise see.

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Introduction

It is mid September of 2013 and Fringe season in Philadelphia is officially in full swing. I'm walking down 3rd street on my way to see a preview of Philadelphia choreographer Nichole Canuso's latest work *The Garden*. This is the first evening of the season that I feel the crisp fall air on my skin and I hope that we have seen the last of the heat and humidity of an East Coast summer. As I walk, I notice how familiar this route *used* to be to me. 10 years ago, I walked down these very streets to see shows at the Painted Bride or to attend Headlong Dance Theater's free First Friday performances. The kinesthetic memory of walking this pathway and the resulting memories of the dances that first sparked my interest in experimental dance in Philadelphia make me smile. But it is fleeting and my attention soon returns to the performance I'm about to see. As I cross Arch Street and continue walking toward Race Street, I run into Annie Wilson, Mike Kiley and James Sugg – all working on or performing in the *The Garden*. They are just coming out of Sassafras Market with beverages and snacks and I walk with them as they return to the venue to prepare for the performance. I'm a little relieved to have the company of these familiar faces as I have not yet visited the venue. *The Garden* takes place in the basement of Power Plant Productions – a photography studio that used to be the Wilbur Chocolate factory (www.powerplantproductions.com, 13 Oct, 2013). Heading through the entrance Annie, Mike and James disappear and I wait, knowing that this incarnation of *The Garden* is for four audience members at a time and so far, I am only one. I chat with the house manager about the big old safe that says "Acme Piano Company" that is nestled in the corner of the entry way. We wonder how long it's been

there and suppose that it must be too heavy to move as the remaining three audience members trickle in. Once we're all there and ready, the house manager gives us each a set of headphones and straps wireless receivers onto our arms. Fully equipped with the necessary technology, we are now ready to descend into the basement and enter the garden.

At first I hear only music through the headset, but it is not long before I hear Canuso's voice. She is telling me what I'm seeing – a room full of 10-12 chairs. She reassuringly directs me to take a seat. I notice the other audience members do the same and assume they have been given the same direction through their respective headsets. I'm looking at and contemplating the other audience members in the room, as directed to, when Canuso and dancers Annie Wilson, Scott McPheeters and Les Rivera enter and also take seats. Soon, Canuso's voice is directing me to focus on the person sitting directly across from me. This happens to be Rivera. I see him. I study his face. I try to absorb his presence. I can't help but smile and he smiles back. He must know what I'm listening to. Soon, I'm temporarily distracted by another audience member standing up and following a dancer out of the room, yet my focus returns to my own task as I am directed to follow Rivera.

I stand up and trepidatiously follow him out of a narrow exit, down a long corridor, eventually stopping as we encounter another dancer and audience member. Still focused intently on the soundtrack I'm hearing through the headset, I hear Mike Kiley begin to speak, giving me simple movement directions: place your hand on the wall, lean against the wall, take a step from the wall, turn, place your hand on the wall, lean against

the wall, take a step from the wall, turn. As these directions repeat, I notice my fellow audience member doing the same action and I also notice Rivera and dancer John Luna performing similar yet complementary movements. Their dance is playful and seems improvisational, structured around the simple repetition of our – the audience's – movements. Kiley's voice begins to fade as I find myself fully choreographed into this quartet.

The shift in my attention is profoundly and oddly noticeable. Already at this early stage in the performance, I feel close to the voices in the headset guiding me on this journey and I am also dependent on them – I need them to know what to do in this maze of rooms and corridors. I am deeply aware of my desire to get it right, to properly follow directions. Yet, as Kiley repeats those simple directions, I become less dependent and I discover myself inside the choreography. One moment I'm listening and following and trying so hard to be a good audience/participant, and the next moment I'm just in it, playful and improvisational like Rivera and Luna. Over the next hour, I continue to be led through the basement, meandering through rooms of newly erected drywall and passageways draped with gauzy fabric, by the disembodied guides in the headset. At various times, I find myself alone examining the specific contours of my face in a mirror while contemplating ways in which I perform my own selfhood, improvising with the dancers as they attempt to become my "other selves", and in a corner with only another audience member – no dancers present at all - tracing the lines of her palm with my finger. All while voices in the headset provide perfectly timed direction.

These kinds of intimate, sensuous interactions choreographed between audiences and performers in *The Garden* continue Canuso's experiments with how to use space and site to refigure the spectatorial experience in contemporary experimental dance. And, like the dances that I discuss in each chapter of this dissertation, *The Garden* incites questions around how dance studies can account more fully for space and spatiality in dance, particularly in site-based performance in urban spaces. I ask, how do spaces and sites shape experimental choreographies in Philadelphia? What kinds of urban spatialities extant in Philadelphia shape choreographic works and what kinds of spatialities do the choreographies articulate? How can dance scholars more thoroughly account for how space makes meaning in site-based/site-engaged works?

This dissertation addresses the above questions through close readings of three site-specific dances choreographed by Philadelphia based dance artists for Philadelphia sites: *Explanatorium* (2007) by Headlong Dance Theater (HDT), *Wandering Alice* (2008) by Nichole Canuso Dance Company and *Car* (2008) by Kate Watson-Wallace/Anonymous Bodies (see figure 1). More than site-specific, these choreographies, like *The Garden* described above, actively choreograph the audience's movement through the sites in which they take place, drastically reworking the spatiality of spectatorship. By focusing on my kinesthetic experience as audience member participating or traveling through these works, I attend to how space is produced choreographically. In generating a close reading of each work, I demonstrate ways in which choreography theorizes (through) space and intersects with both social theories of space and with critical theory more broadly.

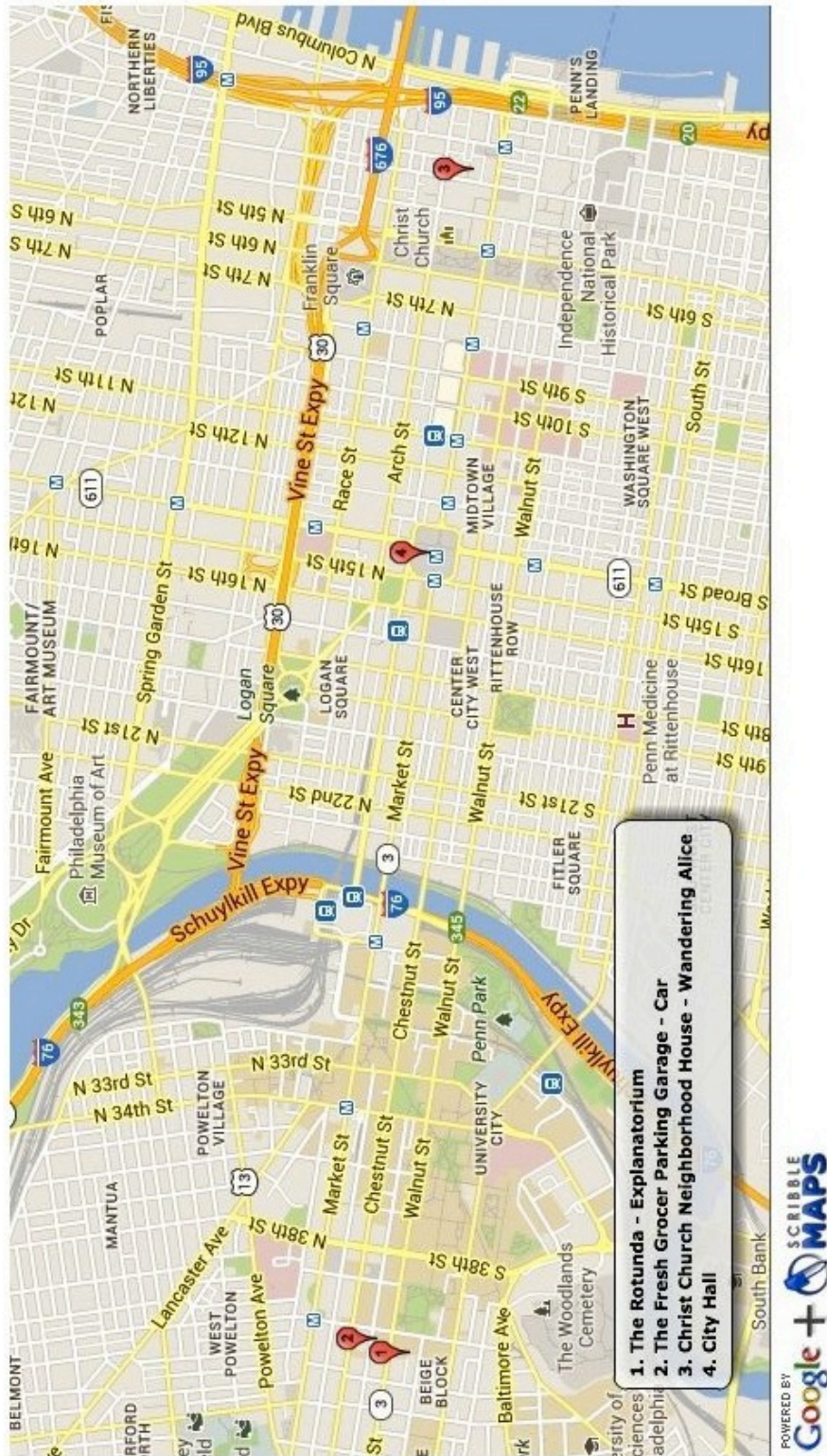


Figure 1 Map of Philadelphia with performance sites marked. Created on www.scribblemaps.com. 2013

Background

The presence of William Penn looms large over Philadelphia. With his statue firmly planted atop the City Hall tower, looking out toward Old City, William Penn has been for more than 100 years, always visible, always a figure to literally look up to. As Philadelphia writer and public historian Steven Conn argues, “It is fair to say...that no other American city is still so thoroughly identified with its founder as Philadelphia is with William Penn,” (2006:29). Founded in 1682, William Penn’s Quaker colony of Philadelphia was, like other colonies, a religious experiment in utopia. Seeking to build a perfectly ordered society, Penn planned Philadelphia after the Roman grid with streets running straight north/south and east/west. The plan included two major streets intersecting at what was intended to be a Center Square, where Philadelphia’s religiously diverse inhabitants could meet and converse in a public space. As Conn points out, Penn’s intention for the public square at the center of the grid was modeled in many ways after a Quaker meeting, in that spatially, no direction is prioritized over another (2006: 30-32). As a counterpoint to this model, Conn cites Washington D.C as “The city where Americans use space to display power,” (2006: 32). More than 300 years later, this grid plan still fundamentally structures the physical experience of space in Philadelphia. Penn’s two major arteries are now called Market Street running east to west and Broad Street running north to south and Philadelphia’s grand neo-baroque city hall stands at the exact spot originally intended as Penn’s public square. This grid is the foundation for my mental and kinesthetic map of Philadelphia: my body has become accustomed to walking stretches of straight lines and making 90 degree turns, I give directions by referring to the

cardinal points and number of blocks, I know which streets are one way and automatically look accordingly for oncoming traffic. My movements are shaped by the rhythm of this geometry¹.

In addition to Penn's spatial legacy that still structures Philadelphians' everyday movements around the city, Philadelphia's prominent role in master narratives of American independence also figure largely into the presence of the past in contemporary Philadelphia. Historian Gary Nash's *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (2006) explores processes of social memory making in terms of Philadelphia's "firsts" in the US: first bank, first medical school, first insurance company etc. Dark blue signs with gold lettering reminding Philadelphians of the city's historical "firsts" are familiar sights around Old City and beyond (see figure 2). If William Penn is a powerful presence in Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin as "first American" is at the center of the city's self-fashioning as seat of American history. The colonial and revolutionary historicity at the core of the city's identity can be thought of as Philadelphia's spatial Benjaminian aura. Like Walter Benjamin's notion that the mechanical reproduction of an original artwork lacks the "aura" of the original, Philadelphia as *oeuvre* stands as original "American" city space, whose origins can never be fully grasped. Contemporary Philadelphia "preserves" and reproduces the city's colonial origins, which still sometimes peak through the veneer of restoration in old city. And, while post-structural theory tears apart the very idea of "original", Philadelphia would fundamentally mean differently in the story of the nation without this specific

¹ Here I am following SanSan Kwan's method of kinesthetically describing movement

aura, without the promise that if we can put our bodies in the spaces where some old white men signed a famous declaration, we might connect to some fundamental American-ness that is both unstable and unknowable, but lost and to-be-longed-for nonetheless.



Figure 2 City of Firsts, Sign indicating "first insurance company" founded by Benjamin Franklin, 4th near Walnut street, 2013. Photo by Laura Vriend

Amidst and perhaps against this rhetoric of the old, the rhetoric of the “new”, “experimental” and “cutting edge” took shape in Old City in the form of the Philadelphia Fringe Festival. The three works I examine in this dissertation were all presented by the Philadelphia Live Arts (now FringeArts) festival and the significance of this festival for dance in Philadelphia necessitates consideration of how it situates itself within networks of performance in Philadelphia as well as within the city more generally. The festival was

founded as the Philadelphia Fringe Festival and presented its first festival in 1997, primarily as a platform for local experimental dance and theater artists, like Headlong Dance Theater, to present their work. Centered in Old City Philadelphia, the festival presented a multiplicity of work throughout the neighborhood. As the festival grew in size and acclaim, its structure as well as its spatial identity shifted. In 2004 Philadelphia Fringe re-branded itself as two festivals: The Philadelphia Live Arts Festival became the curated and produced festival and the Fringe Festival offered advertising and box office support to self produced performance (<http://www.theatrealliance.org>, 13 Oct, 2013). During this time, performance venues spread throughout the city into other parts of center city, south and west Philadelphia, the rapidly gentrifying Northern Liberties just north of Old City, Kensington and Fishtown. The term “fringe” as a spatial idea within performance denotes performance that counts itself “outside” the mainstream. Within the context of Philadelphia city space, “fringe” performances move in and out of the city’s center, with the festival’s historical center in old city, aligning with colonial Philadelphia’s city center rather than its current center. Still almost twenty years after Headlong Dance Theater left their old city studio and moved south, old city is more a center of visual art and commerce than fringe performance.

With growing international recognition and the 2004 rebranding, the curated festival expanded its presenting objectives to include more national and international works with an emphasis on “high-quality”. To a great extent, being curated and presented by Live Arts provided the necessary financial support for Headlong Dance Theater, Nichole Canuso Dance Company and Anonymous Bodies to present their works with the

spatial and technical requirements they envisioned artistically. Still, the values of the artists and the values of the festival do not always align. For instance, in 2008 the festival did two unusual things: they opened up the online box-office a full 4 months prior to the festival and they heavily and arguably over promoted shows with limited audience capacity like *Car* and *Wandering Alice*. These two decisions resulted in both shows being sold out before the official festival guides were even printed. While this does not diminish the work of these artists nor the theoretical interventions of their choreography as discussed in this dissertation, it does emphasize that at the same time the festival enables the work, the institution of the festival is situated within the capitalist economy of the contemporary city. It is a business with the fundamental goal of financial viability in the marketplace of performance.

In a personal interview, Kate Watson-Wallace explained her interest in and the difficulties of creating performance that can *both* access audiences from diverse social worlds *and* give them intimate performance experiences. The complex entanglement between making a living as a dance artist within the structures of dance production and pursuing one's own artistic values and concerns finds a matter of fact articulation in Watson-Wallace's conclusion that "it's hard to access people without a huge marketing machine". Philadelphia experimental dance artists maneuver within capitalist systems and spatialities to make work that embodies and performs their own artistic values – values that articulate overall dissatisfaction with the culture of American capitalism – while still benefiting and making use of its systems and spatial logic. This tension itself is

often what positions experimental dance as an instigator of critical discourse and a modality for imagining alternative spatialities for Philadelphia.

In 2013, the festival again re-branded itself as FringeArts, retaining both a produced component and a “neighborhood fringe” component for self-production. The festival’s relationship then to the idea of “fringe” both spatially and in content is still tenuous at best and the word “fringe” serves more to link Philadelphia’s festival to historical reputations of fringe festivals internationally. In 2013 FringeArts also opened a new and permanent facility in Old City at Race and Columbus along the Delaware riverfront. The new facility contains a theater and rehearsal space for year round use. The presenting of “new” performance from a “new” headquarters in “old” Philadelphia emphasizes a subjective and unstable understanding of what constitutes performance that is outside the mainstream and reflects the festival’s desire to present performance that is both “experimental” and “world class”. It remains to be seen how this shiny new space in the shell of a former pumping station built in 1903 will affect dance in Philadelphia (<http://www.stage-directions.com/theatre-buzz/4975-fringearts-rises-from-philly-fringe-and-live-arts-festival.html>, 13 Oct 2013). The 2013 curated festival under the FringeArts brand presented very little dance, and the institution’s assertion that they present “the world’s most cutting-edge, high-quality artists” (www.livearts-fringe.com, 13 Oct 2013) leaves the festival’s actual “fringe” appeal for experimental dance artists uncertain. Despite the changes in content and name throughout the festival’s history, in this dissertation I will use the term “Live Arts Festival” in reference to the festival as it was

called during the years in which *Explanatorium*, *Wandering Alice* and *Car* were performed.

Scope and Significance

In April of 2009, during the course of my research in Headlong Dance Theater's archives, I came across a letter. Dated August 19th, 1995, the letter, written to HDT from Deborah Hay, a choreographer and member of the Judson Dance Theater who now works in Austin, Texas, opens with the following sentence: "Dear Folks, what you do for the archaic image of Philadelphia I hold in mind is pure magic". This one sentence reveals several ideas. First, it suggests there exists a popular image of the city of Philadelphia. Second, the word "archaic" invokes the narratives of official American history embedded in the city's cobblestone streets, row houses, and churches, not to mention the numerous tourist sites luring visitors with promises of embodied encounters with the center of American independence and democracy. The word "archaic" also insinuates that, perhaps precisely because of the 18th century image of Philadelphia that is promoted to tourists, twenty years ago Philadelphia was not a city that one associated with artistic experimentation. This letter is also significant in that this recognition from an historically influential American dance artist such as Hay helps to establish HDT as influential in Philadelphia and respected within the larger world of American experimental dance. For twenty years, HDT has been establishing itself as a leader in this respect in Philadelphia and, along with physical theater companies Pig Iron and New Paradise Laboratories, helped to establish Philadelphia's reputation for experimentation in performance

nationally and internationally. This reputation was especially solidified when HDT won a Bessie award for their 1998 piece ST*RW*RS, in the same year that awards were also presented to Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, William Forsythe, Joe Goode, Tere O'Connor and Steve Paxton (Anderson 1999).

While HDT has recently undergone some structural changes, most notably in the departure of founding co-director Andrew Simonet, HDT can still be located as a nexus in the web of relationships that make up the community of choreographer/performers discussed in this dissertation. First, after twenty years, the company has had a relatively stable spatial home occupying both office and studio space in The Arts Parlor in South Philadelphia. Second, HDT, Nichole Canuso and Kate Watson-Wallace have been active in the last five to ten years in making site-specific choreography, which I view as a crucial way in which choreography can intervene in and re-imagine urban space. Third, HDT takes an active role in supporting and mentoring younger/newer Philadelphia choreographers.

Experimental dance, of course, existed in Philadelphia prior to HDT, Canuso and Watson-Wallace. I understand “experimental dance” to refer to dance that investigates or experiments with the boundaries of what is considered or counted as dance within a particular cultural context. In the context of Western concert dance my definition of experimental dance finds a primary historical basis in the movement experiments of dancers and performance artists in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Anna Halprin, members of the Judson Dance Theater, Allan Kaprow and Richard Bull. Contemporary experimental dance in this context is then an outgrowth of what is now called postmodern

dance as well as performance art and improvisational dance.² In the context of the community of dancers and choreographers who appear in this dissertation project, experimentation occurs frequently with respect to perceived boundaries between dance, theater and other media, with the vocabulary of movement used in performance and with site and performance venue. I have heard the community itself refer to its practice as “experimental dance”, “contemporary dance” and “hybrid dance theater”. While the dance community in general sees itself as highly collaborative and tight, I certainly do not make any claims to include the entire *experimental* dance community in Philadelphia. The term “experimental” always also exists in relationship to dance forms and companies that are seen as not “experimental”, upholding a form’s tradition rather than experimenting with it. While this binary positioning occurs discursively, it is, in reality quite unstable and problematic. It is for this reason that I define “experimental dance” as always in context.

In addition to HDT, Nichole Canuso Dance Company and Anonymous Bodies, there are numerous independent dance artists and small companies also working experimentally. The larger dance landscape in Philadelphia is both diverse and collaborative. Because I cannot cover all of Philadelphia dance in this dissertation, here I briefly outline four major professional dance companies that are both well known and of historic significance to dance in Philadelphia. The Pennsylvania Ballet, a Balanchine company that performs in center city Philadelphia’s Academy of Music and Merriam

² For a discussion of some of this work see Banes, Sally. *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body*. Durham: Duke University Press

Theater, presents romantic and classical story ballets in addition to Balanchine's work and often also presents contemporary work by choreographers like William Forsythe and Jiří Kylián. Rennie Harris through his company Puremovement maintains his mission of "preserving and disseminating hip hop culture" while also working beyond the specific histories of hip hop in works like *Rome & Jewels* (www.rhpm.com/rennie.php 21 October 2013). Joan Myers Brown's Philadanco, with a stable spatial home in west Philadelphia, preserves its connection to African American concert dance, while collaborating with outside choreographers on new works. Founded by Manfred Fischbeck, Helmut Gottschild and Brigitta Herrmann, in the 1960s, Group Motion brought German modern dance to Philadelphia also presenting work at Judson Church in 1968 (www.groupmotion.org/company-history 30 October 2013). Also operating out of west Philadelphia, Group Motion has a strong history of experimentation in Philadelphia, collaborating with choreographer Susan Rethorst in 2013-2014, while current director Fischbeck's choreography maintains aesthetic ties to recognizably modern dance. The landscape of dance in Philadelphia demonstrates both the historicity and instability of the term "experimental" while maintaining it as a category within dance in Philadelphia.

My ability to identify and to a certain degree bracket off HDT, Nichole Canuso Dance Company and Anonymous Bodies as a community, relies on both the artistic and personal relationships cultivated amongst these artists. This community is both recognizable as a sub-community of dance makers in Philadelphia and entirely fluid and unstable. The existence of the trio of works analyzed in the following chapters occurred as a result of the confluence of the necessary financial support from 2006-2008, the Live

Arts Festival's interest in supporting the work as presenting partner and the frequent collaboration and overlapping choreographic interests amongst these artists. These works do not necessarily represent a stable aesthetic trend, but a particular moment in Philadelphia dance.

This project, in its analysis of site-based choreography in a major American urban center, fuses dance studies with urban studies and cultural geography. To date, several works in urban studies, such as Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (2001) and Richard Sennett's *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (1996), link ideas about the body and somatic perspectives to conceptions of urban space and cities, and while this type of work is not prolific, I draw from it in approaching site-based choreography. More recently, scholars in dance and performance studies have begun to focus on issues of space, place and the city, merging the concerns of dance studies with those of urban studies. Valerie Briginshaw brings a feminist lens to site-specific choreographies and issues of migration and subjectivity in contemporary dance in *Dance, Space and Subjectivity* (2001). Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlik's *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces* (2009) brings focus to site specific choreography by bringing together interviews with choreographers and essays by these choreographers in order to understand choreographic intentions in using non-stage spaces. Judith Hamera looks at how dancing communities are forged across the sprawling globalized city space of Los Angeles in *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City* (2007). Ying Zhu brings a spatial perspective to choreographies of memory and memorial in her

dissertation “Remembering Through the Corpus: The Intersection of (Moving) bodies with Architecture at the Vietnam Veterans Memories” (2010) and most recently SanSan Kwan brings a kinesthetic approach to studying city space and the politics of racial identity in *Kinesthetic City: Dance & Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (2013). These texts also help situate my work historically, theoretically and methodologically and demonstrate that a dance studies lens can lend particular insight into the relationship between bodies, cities and choreography. Conversely, an urban studies/geographical perspective can open up new avenues in the research of urban dance communities. By looking at the ways in which dancing bodies interact, intersect with and theorize urban spaces, I add to these burgeoning bodies of scholarship and further account for corporeality in urban studies discourses.

In *Writings on Cities* (1996) Henri Lefebvre emphasizes the mutual construction of bodies and cities. Lefebvre introduces an important distinction between the city as “a present and immediate reality, a practico-material and architectural fact,” (1996: 103) and the *urban* as “a social reality made up of relations which are to be conceived of, constructed or reconstructed by thought.” (1996: 103). This particular distinction emphasizes the dialectics of materiality and sociality. Edward Soja takes up the work of Henri Lefebvre in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989), rearticulating Lefebvre’s theory through his concept of the socio-spatial dialectic. Soja conceives of the urban as both a social and material formation constantly in flux. He explains this socio-spatial dialectic by arguing, “If spatiality is both outcome/embodiment and medium/presupposition of social relations and social structure,

their material reference, then social life must be seen as both space-forming and space contingent, a producer and a product of spatiality” (Soja 1989: 129). This suggests that social, cultural and, most importantly for my purposes here, danced interventions in space are active in re-imagining and reproducing urban spatialities. In general, both Lefebvre and Soja only account for corporeality through references to ‘social practice’. My dissertation extends and complicates their theoretical models by framing the socio-spatial dialectic in terms of dance and choreography as both social and spatial practice.

Because the bulk of scholarship on American dance centers on New York City as the geographical locus of modern and contemporary experimental dance, historical trends, as well as the social and cultural particularities of theatrical dance as it occurs in other cities, are often ignored. Currently, the only book length study of any Philadelphia dance artist is Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s *Joan Myers Brown & the Audacious Hope of the Black Ballerina: A Biohistory of American Performance* (2011). Thus, through this project I make a small yet much needed contribution to this gap in American dance scholarship. This dissertation helps widen the scope of American dance studies as I investigate specific manifestations of the growth of dance in Philadelphia over the past ten to fifteen years. Still prevalent teleological narratives of American dance position New York City as the geographic center for artistic experimentation.³ These discourses

³ See Banes, Sally. *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body*. Durham: Duke University Press; Franko, Mark. *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995; Garafola, Lynn. “Toward an American Dance: Dance in the City” In *New York: Cultural Capital of the World 1940-1965*. Leonard Wallock Ed. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1988

are present in both dance scholarship and amongst dancers seeking professional dance careers. New York stands in for “American” by acting as the primary legitimizing space in the American dance world. Dance in New York City then becomes the performative discourse of what constitutes legitimate “experimental” or “contemporary” dance.

Missing from scholarship is a thorough investigation of how the specific urban geography of New York City (or any city) fosters particular kinds of dancing and how/why a professional dance community might depend upon the spatial and capitalist structures of a large city. This dissertation asks that we see dance as local and therefore intimately bound up in local spatialities.

Theory and Methodology

This research takes up discourses on the relationship between bodies and cities and emphasizes that the relationship is dialectic in nature. Following the work of Elizabeth Grosz, Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja, this research stresses that bodies and cities mutually construct one another and argues that choreography is an important site in which to theorize how these constructions occur.⁴ Furthermore, my project will build on the work of these theorists by taking up, analyzing and reading dance praxis as *both* a concrete material *and* socio-cultural terrain that foregrounds the relationship between

⁴ See Grosz, Elizabeth. “Bodies-Cities.” *Sexuality and Space: Princeton Papers on Architecture*. Beatriz Coleman, Ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992. 241-253; LeFebvre, Henri. *Writings on Cities*. Trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996; Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso, 1989.

bodies and space. I emphasize that the city is both a social and material formation crucial to the production and experience of corporeality and subjectivity. The development of these theories vis a vis dance in Philadelphia is dependent upon space as a meaningful formal element uniting both practices of choreography and architecture, urban planning and development.

Through my analysis I demonstrate that choreography's formal concern with the organization of space make it an integral component in what has been theorized by Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja as the dialectic nature between spatiality and cultural practice. Following Soja and Lefebvre, I understand spatiality as the social organization and production of space, and urbanism as both ideology and practice. Space, as a formal element uniting both practices of architecture and choreography, emerges as the specific material basis for envisioning, choreographing and enacting urbanism(s).

Embedded within the analytical works of urbanists like Michel DeCerteau, Henri Lefebvre, Richard Sennett and Elizabeth Grosz, which attempt to account for what and how urban life is, are proposals for how urban life *should be*; that is, their work is theoretically prescriptive. Building on the writings of these urbanists and on what I see as a foundational element of dance studies theory- that the dancing body and choreography are both objects of theoretical analysis and generative of epistemological and theoretical modes of analysis - I demonstrate that the site-specific choreographies I examine are themselves constitutive of a performative discourse that also presents proposals for urban life. In other words, choreography is a mode of urbanism.

Drawing on André Lepecki's work in *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (2007), as well as Susan Foster's work particularly in the chapter "Choreographing Empathy" in *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (2010) as both theoretical and methodological models, I place contemporary choreography in dialogue with critical theory in order to articulate the ways in which choreography in itself engaged in theorizing. My particular focus on spatiality – of looking at choreographies that are actively site-engaged and locating the production of space through choreography as *itself* a mode of theorizing – makes visible ways in which these works engage with theory that we might not otherwise see.

Undergirding my research process is Priya Srinivasan's rigorous focus on bodily encounters in *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (2012), which heavily informed my approach to mining these works' theoretical engagements via my corporeal encounters with bodies in performance. Srinivasan's methodology of "performance ethnography" informs my kinesthetic encounters with dancing bodies and their choreographies as space making practices even as my analysis of the works focuses on articulating choreographic modes of theorizing and the discourses engendered by such strategies. If these discourses are present in choreographies they are also present in the traces of these choreographies. As Srinivasan's develops her notion of the "bodily archive" she asserts that, "This archive leaves its traces in live bodily interactions, whose history remains captured in muscle memory and through bodily labor and kinesthetic contact. The traces can then be uncovered by searching for movement in the written record and in the live encounters between bodies" (2012:17). Performance produces a

proliferation of sensations, images and meanings, which last as somatic and spatial memories, and the continual accumulation of layered spatial understandings and meanings that bodies map onto sites suggests that these traces are in excess of material space itself. While specific architectural sites may seem somewhat stable, understandings of sites are constantly shifting as layers of performative meanings accumulate palimpsestically. I mine the multiplicity of meanings in these layers through my corporeal encounters with bodies and sites.

In recent years, the concept of kinesthesia has been rigorously theorized and historicized, perhaps most notably by dance scholar Susan Foster in *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*. Foster's genealogy of her terms "choreography", "empathy" and "kinesthesia" reveals that our very understanding of these words is culturally and historically produced. Thus, while I make frequent use of the notion of kinesthesia and kinesthetic experience as research methodology, I recognize the situatedness of these ideas. Sharing SanSan Kwan's methodological focus on her own body's apprehension of city space in *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (2013), I deploy kinesthesia, like Kwan, as both the physical experience of moving through space and as a mode of sensing other bodies (2013: 1-24).

My kinesthetic sensing is informed by my years of dance training in ballet, modern and post-modern dance forms, and perhaps most significantly, my training as an improviser. Attending to my kinesthetic experience as an audience member in highly participatory site-engaged choreographies, I have become deeply aware that I am not an average audience member. When afforded the opportunity to interact with the

performers, I am both willing and daring and perhaps, despite my best efforts, a little too eager. And, while it is certainly true that dance audiences in Philadelphia are populated by numerous dance artists, my own observation of my fellow audience members at each performance also betrayed that most audience members were *not* highly trained dancers. For the sake of research I have tried time and time again to adopt a more hesitant approach, but have found it virtually impossible. What should be most revealing about my inability to participate *less* in participatory performance is that I *like* these performances and I have *fun* when I attend them and these proclivities contribute enormously to my individual kinesthetic spectatorship. Still, Headlong Dance Theater, Nichole Canuso and Kate Watson-Wallace seem to have cultivated audiences who are, at the very least, interested in participating if not hyper-eager, and these artists are skilled at choreographing participation in ways that accommodate varying degrees of audience (un)willingness.

Spatiality

I develop my operative notion of choreographic spatiality directly from Lefebvre's three-part spatial dialectic, a model rooted in Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche, and finding its clearest crystallization as the theory of space elaborated in *The Production of Space* (1991). Given its centrality to my own understanding of spatiality as actively produced through choreography, it is worth outlining here in some depth. Each use of the word spatiality references the following conceptualization rooted in and elaborated from Lefebvre's cultural and historical context of postwar France as well as my own

positioning of the model as key modality through which site-based choreographies theorize and intersect with critical social and cultural discourses.

In “Right to the City” (1996) Lefebvre undertakes a Marxist historiographic tracing of industrialization and urbanization that offers both an account of the formation of the contemporary capitalist city and a critique of its formation. Lefebvre describes how the city has become a center of decision making while the artistic dimensions of city life have been appropriated by city planners and other institutions transforming cities into homogenous urban zones that enact hegemonic political and economic ideologies. “Right to the City” proposes the realm of the urban as the necessary site for revolution. For Lefebvre the urban revolution he seeks would maintain the aesthetic qualities of the urban, but through everyday life and artistic practice, rather than the institution of urban planning.

Lefebvre’s idea of the role of artistic practice must be seen in the context of his theory of space. Lefebvre’s theory of space is first and foremost based on the assertion that space does not and cannot exist as an ontological or a priori fact, but that it is always in a process of being produced. Lefebvre’s three-part dialectic emerges between what he calls perceived space, conceived space and lived space. Perceived space refers to experiential reality. Perceived space is the physical, material aspect of space that can be apprehended by the senses. Lefebvre also equates perceived space with spatial practice. By contrast, conceived space, also equated with representations of space, is the realm of theory, planning and mapping. Conceived space is ideological and can be institutional, but it helps articulate and communicate space and is in fact needed in interpreting

perception. The third realm is lived space, also equated to spaces of representation.

Lived space refers to the world as actually experienced by human beings in everyday life: the embodied relationship between a subject and his or her world. For Lefebvre, the lived cannot be fully grasped by theory: the lived is always more than the sum of its parts. The lived is where Lefebvre locates artistic practice (Lefebvre 1991, Merrifield 2006, Schmidt 2008)

Unlike in Hegelian dialectics, lived space is not the realm of synthesis or resolution. Instead space is produced through the interplay between perceived, conceived and lived, which are dialectically interconnected processes *continually* in motion. Christian Schmidt notes that “Lefebvre himself describes his dialectic as a radical critique of Hegel based on Marx’s social practice and Nietzsche’s art. At a general level, the fundamental dialectical figure in Lefebvre’s work can be seen as the contradiction between social thought and social action, supplemented by the third factor of the creative, poetic act,” (2008: 33).

For Lefebvre, a Marxist scholar who was also heavily involved with Guy Debord’s Situationist International movement⁵, “Right to the City” outlined how the twentieth century city as capitalist metropolis was a conceived urban ideology that alienated people from each other and their right to their own city spaces. For Lefebvre, the capitalist city was an imagined utopia that in actuality served as monument to the

⁵ Guy Debord, theorist, activist, artist and perhaps most famously author of *The Society of the Spectacle*, was a founding member of the Situationist International, a revolutionary and avant-gardist group seeking to disrupt and transform advanced capitalist society through “constructed situations”, often absurd artistic happenings meant to induce critical analysis of everyday life.

power structures that invisibilized violence and inequality. Thus for Lefebvre, the revolution of the people was fundamentally a struggle over space, and urban space in particular (Lefebvre 1996).

Within his three-part spatial model, everyday life or ‘the lived’ is the most unstable of the three formulations. Because the urban is both ideology and practice and because dominant ideologies find their expression through the abstract realm of conceived space and do not fully account for “the lived”, the possibility exists for the people to manipulate the abstract space of the conceived urban and reclaim their “right to the city”. If artistic practice rests within the realm of the lived, it could play a role in re-spatializing urban spaces. In my view, dance and choreographic practice, while they can certainly be located within Lefebvre’s account of lived space, complicate the assumed stability of materiality and representation, as choreography is both a representational practice and a practice that manipulates space, time and bodily presence to produce kinesthetic effects.

I find Lefebvre’s model useful in establishing my own understanding of choreographic spatiality as it provides language that accounts for perception, ideology and experience and emphasizes space as a social process continuously in motion. As a model that emphasizes dialectical action, it directs attention to how different kinds of space interact to produce spatial meaning. Using Lefebvre’s model and language as points of departure, choreographic spatiality, as I understand it, is then the lived, imagined and embodied production of space that arises from the choreographic manipulation of the dialectic: it emerges in the tensions amongst the materiality of the

body and the built environment, ideologies and conceptions of site and the excessive reality of experience.

Cartographies for Reading

While spatiality is the lens of analysis for the three choreographies examined in this dissertation, the bracketing off of space from time is, of course, arbitrary. In fact, the timing of how each audience experiences the spaces with which these works engage is crucial in attempting to approximate, through writing, the kinesthetic experience of traveling through these dances. While not strictly narrative in a linear sense, the precision of the sequencing of events through the site in each performance is essential to its production of choreographic spatiality. Thus, early in each of the following chapters I provide an in depth choreographic description of the work to be discussed in order to provide my reader with a sense of how each work unfolded over time for its audience. These descriptions are based on my kinesthetic experiences of each work as well as video documentation provided to me by the artists, which helped fill in gaps in memory. It is my intention that these descriptions serve as kinesthetically evocative points of departure in which to ground the analysis to follow, and that they continue to provide the reader a vivid choreographic frame of reference.

In Chapter 1, I explore how Headlong Dance Theater's *Explanatorium* uses structures of ritual and participation in constructing its choreographic spatiality. Discourses of space as produced in the piece intersect with discourses on the politics of community in artistic practice. Through these discursive intertextualities, *Explanatorium*

comments of the spatiality of community, refiguring the temporality of the performance itself by choreographically mapping the ritual of assembly and dispersal onto the city of Philadelphia through audience participation.

In Chapter 2, the complex histories of Old City Philadelphia come to the fore as I identify a haunted spatiality in Nicole Canuso's *Wandering Alice*. Using Henri Lefebvre's ideas around how artistic practice can figure into modern urbanism, I identify how specific choreographic strategies used within the site of the Christ Church Neighborhood House in the heart of Old City Philadelphia produce what Lefebvre called "structures of enchantment". Through these structures, Canuso's Alice becomes performatively intertwined with an historical Alice creating a space for forgotten ghosts of the neighborhood's past to have kinesthetic effects on a contemporary audience.

As a counterpoint to the romanticized urbanism found in Lefebvre's "Right to the City" and performed through HDT's and Canuso's use of historical Philadelphia sites as well as their choreographic foci on intimacy, community, discovery and wonder, Chapter 3 frames Kate Watson-Wallace's *Car* in terms of cinematic space, film noir and urban dystopia. Watson-Wallace re-orient the audiences' kinesthetic experience of dance by using the car as a mediator – as lens and screen – while at the same time, accentuating the bodily physicality of danger and fear. *Car*'s spatiality emphasizes the contemporary American city as dislocating and disorienting, mapping the kinesthesia of the automobile onto the postmodern image-based city.

The Oculus, the Aliens and the *Explanatorium*: Headlong Dance Theater's Urban Ritual and the Performance of Community

Introduction

Create the form of an alien creature with your hand. Take the shape of a constellation. Make the magic circle. Ascend to the spaceship through the alien tractor beam. Chant eyes. These are just a few of the choreographic directions I found myself attempting to follow when I attended Headlong Dance Theater's (hereafter HDT) *Explanatorium* as part of the 2007 Philadelphia Live Arts Festival. The piece began as a choreographic exploration of the inexplicable yet when Headlong finally found a venue for the performance – the dome-shaped sanctuary of The Rotunda⁶, an abandoned Christian Science church that had been in use only sporadically as a community space – further work on the piece followed a trajectory very much influenced by the character of the performance space itself.

HDT was founded in 1993 by its three co-directors Andrew Simonet, Amy Smith and David Brick who met as undergraduates at Wesleyan University. Based in Philadelphia, the company operated collaboratively for twenty years, each co-director sharing equal credit for all work with program notes indicating simply "Headlong Dance

⁶ Rotunda was bought by the University of Pennsylvania in 1996 and hosts a variety of community events and concerts primarily in the main room behind the sanctuary space ("Two rooms – one great tradition". *The Rotunda*. 2012. The Rotunda & the University of Pennsylvania. 3 Feb. 2012 www.therotunda.org/about)

Theater” as choreographer.⁷ Discursively and practically, this authorial stance positions collaborating dancers, directors and designers as co-creators, and disperses ownership of their choreographic work amongst anyone who might be working with the company over any period of time. Since its inception, and throughout its career, HDT has been highly influenced by the artists and scholars with whom they worked at Wesleyan University, notably Richard Bull, Cynthia Novack and Susan Foster. This influence manifests in HDT’s skillful and often witty structured improvisations including *Permit* wherein Smith and Simonet improvising together must ask for and receive permission from the other before moving, and *Take 3*, an improvisation between Brick, Simonet and Smith each explaining to the audience a different interpretation of what is happening. Together they have made over 40 dances that range from 15 minute structured improvisations to evening length works for the stage to site specific performance journeys for one audience member at a time. They currently operate out of office and studio space at the Arts Parlor – formerly Fiorentino’s Funeral Parlor – in South Philadelphia, where they also run a semester abroad program for undergraduate students called Headlong Performance Institute.

In this chapter, I address the choreographic modalities through which HDT and *Explanatorium* enter into a discourse of choreographic spatiality. More concretely, I examine the spatial specificities of the Rotunda that informed the creation of *Explanatorium* as well as the audience’s (ap)perception of choreographic meaning with attention to how participation molds the spatiality of the piece. These discussions are

⁷ Andrew Simonet retired from HDT at the end of 2012. HDT remains in operation with Smith and Brick as co-directors.

framed by examinations of the notions of community that participatory art invokes and by questions of how ritual structures shaped the choreographic spatiality of participation.

As performance is always an emergent art form, meanings generated during the course of the artists' creation of the work continue to arise and shift as audiences receive, perceive, act and react during performance in the mutable frame of *Explanatorium*.

HDT's elaborations of spatiality, which continue to emerge beyond the temporal boundaries of the performance, propel *Explanatorium* into a discursive realm wherein the spatiality elucidated through the creation and performance of the work both theorizes and enacts histories and conceptualizations of community, urban ritual and time with significant implications for dance theory and praxis. Through its positioning of the audience as co-performers and co-creators of meaning, *Explanatorium* maps a theorization of temporality in performance onto the Rotunda as site, the city streets and the bodies of its audience. This theorization cuts against pervasive notions of dance as an ephemeral art form by making alternative temporalities for performance visible, embodied and *spatial*.

The Meeting Place

While HDT has often made use of unconventional performance spaces and involved audience participation in its performances⁸, *Explanatorium* is the first of the

⁸ For example, HDT's 2004 work *Hotel Pool* took place in and around a hotel swimming pool, their 2006 work *Cell* led one audience member at a time via cell phone through old city Philadelphia and their 2012 work currently in development *This Town is a Mystery*, centers on HDT creating work on members of Philadelphia area households, who will then perform the work in their homes.

company's major works to attempt to implicate an entire mass of audience in a choreographed, simultaneously structured and open participation. Like many Christian Science Churches, the space is unique for its interior dome-shaped sanctuary space and the oculus or eye at the very peak of the ceiling. Brick describes the appeal of such a site, particularly for this piece: "Christian science spaces are very surreal. They're like space ships. They're like flying saucers and apparently they're like all like that. The Christian science version of religious spaces is something in between science fiction and fantasy, so bizarre and beautiful." But the space had also been neglected for many years. I asked Brick what qualities the architecture summoned, to which he replied, "It summoned a grandness and a spirituality, it summoned a shabbiness and a kind of ordinariness" (Brick, David. Personal Interview. 16 May 2011). Since moving to Philadelphia into an apartment just several blocks from the Rotunda, the contradictions between "grand" and "shabby" in Brick's description, hit me as entirely apt. The domed sanctuary space is indeed grand and celestial and in marked contrast to the cracked glass and peeling paint of the building's exterior. This description also seems characteristic of the neighborhood's style in general, with its striking and ornate Victorian and Neoclassical architecture, not quite restored to what one might imagine to be its original glory (see figure 3).



Figure 3 View of The Rotunda from the north side of Walnut street. 2013 Photo by Laura Vriend

Henri Lefebvre, in his most famous work *The Production of Space*, describes his own theoretical undertaking: “This project straddles the breach between science and utopia, reality and ideality, conceived and lived. It aspires to surmount these oppositions by exploring the dialectical relationship between ‘possible’ and ‘impossible’, and this both objectively and subjectively”. As perhaps one of Lefebvre’s more poetic articulations of his project, this passage is also reminiscent of Brick’s emphasis on both the “magical and actual” qualities of the space and the coexistence of the spiritual and supernatural with the material and ordinary at the heart *Explanatorium*.

Additionally, Brick emphasized the character of the space as a site for community gathering, noting that they'd have to suspend rehearsal now and then and clear out for the AA group that met there regularly. Indeed, I walk by the Rotunda on a nearly weekly basis noticing flyers for a myriad of events taking place at the site primarily in an event space behind the rarely used sanctuary space, which requires a special application for use. Poetry readings, concerts, film screenings, fundraisers, youth group meetings, community political actions groups, classes and lectures happen on a regular basis at the Rotunda.

As Brick related in an interview, the genesis of *Explanatorium* began with the question "what happens between the moment of perceiving something but before you can explain what it is?" This question and the resulting movement explorations, directly invoke questions around signification, interpretation and what remains mysterious or unknown in the processes of signification and interpretation. The unknown from the perspective of interpreting movement bled into a larger interest in explanation and the threads that link perception and interpretation in dance with perception and interpretation in spirituality and the cosmos. One of the primary questions became "How long can we hang out in the space of perceiving without knowing". Brick explained that the performers conceptualized themselves as "a group of people who convene a meeting every so often to ask questions that can't be answered" (Brick, David. Personal Interview. 16 May 2011). Akin to the AA meeting, *Explanatorium*, could very well be another regular community event, on the calendar at the Rotunda.

In working with the Live Arts Festival to find a space for the performance, HDT sought a "celestial" space, briefly considering a planetarium before settling on the

Rotunda for both its material and spiritual dimensions. Unlike site specific choreographies that can be performed at multiple sites with some amount of restaging, the specificity of the choreography of *Explanatorium* made use of very specific elements of the space that would be difficult (though not impossible) to transfer to other sites: pipes from a no-longer-working organ, an altar, a domed ceiling with an oculus: all and with the qualities of aged wood, peeling plaster, rusted iron and foggy glass that arose from the space having been abandoned. Having settled on the Rotunda and able to begin rehearsing at the site, the architectural elements of the space become essential to the choreography, and in particular, as I will discuss later, the choreography of the audience.

Prior to the opening of the show, HDT shared glimpses of its process on a blog. A posting on the blog written by the company's dramaturge Mark Lord echoes both the community-gathering aspect of the piece as well its ordinary and magical qualities. In addressing the community of performers, which for this piece potentially includes the audience, Lord writes:

Think about how to articulate the entire piece: the meeting structure. Who we are is a group of people who come together from all over the place, mostly from the bottom end of the stick that stirs society. We are the subprime sublime. And we gather in this abandoned shell of a beautiful truth beneath a peeling plaster sky. Because we have faith in some mystery that stirs in us and which we see stir in one another. Hamlet says I have that within which passeth show. And we see that in ourselves, each other. It's like a handshake so secret we don't know the grip-only the memory of the feeling of solidarity it might bring.
(www.headlong.org/blog).

The roundness of the space signaled ritual, the grandness of the dome emphasized both the vastness of space and the vastness of the unknown, the history of the space as church

underscored the site as locus of community gathering and the dilapidated state of the structure itself invoked the everyday reality of the ordinary. *Explanatorium's* performance of the “sublime”, the “magical”, the “inexplicable” and “the supernatural” is achieved in large part through its skillful conceptual and choreographic engagement with the space of the Rotunda and the material and abstract qualities suggested by its architecture.

In the Explanatorium

I arrived in Philadelphia in September 2007 specifically to see *Explanatorium*. As part of the Philadelphia Live Arts festival, the curated and produced counterpart to the Philly Fringe, *Explanatorium* had a full page listing in the festival guide with all the usual information: piece description, venue, dates and times etc. Strangely, the festival guide also presented this unusual directive “please come dressed entirely in blue” (Philadelphia Live Arts and Fringe Festival Guide, 2007). Intrigued, I swallowed the pill and wore all the blue I could pack. Walking through the city all day prior to the performance, I found myself already implicated in the piece. Was that blue-clothed person I just passed on the street going where I was going? Would we be getting on a spaceship together?

When I arrive at the performance venue, self consciously and monochromatically costumed, I am both comforted and excited to see other “blue people” begin milling about the entrance to the old church. I see several familiar faces: folks I have come to recognize as HDT regular audience members, other dancers and choreographers and their children. I chat with dancer/choreographer Jaamil Kosoko, as he hastily throws some blue

scrubs over his street clothes. Eventually the audience is informed by the ushers that we would be entering the space in groups of 15-20. I must admit that I had seen the inside of the *Explanatorium* (The Rotunda) prior to the beginning of the show. I had also seen unfinished parts of the piece performed during informal studio showings and had spoken to the choreographers about what they were working on with this piece. And in the interest of full disclosure, David Brick had suggested that I wait to enter with the third or fourth group for full effect. I comply with his direction as I finally enter with a group of equally eager audience members for this 60-minute performance. We gather in a small anteroom where Geoff Sobelle, one of the performers dressed in orange, weaves a masterful and supposedly true tale of ghostly apparition set in a snow storm in the mountains of northern California.

At the end of his story, and with no other explanation, Sobelle opens a curtain to a mixture of saffron orange and blue bodies. I know the orange bodies are the performers, but the space is occupied mostly by blue bodies also performing. Some of them are pointing up toward the oculus, some of them are running around trying to catch something invisible. The space is full of bodies moving with intent. Bodies that surprisingly already seem to know exactly what to do. Bodies who have been let in on the secret.

I notice that the sequence of movements performed by the orange bodies repeats, and between every repetition, the dancers stop to give tasks to the blue audience bodies that have entered. Thus, every time a new audience group enters, there is more and more action in the space. Once everyone has entered and the space is a swirling vortex of

intentional task based movement, set choreography and wandering exploration, the lights come down and Amy Smith appears at the altar blowing into a single pipe from the organ I assume used to be housed in this church. Sobelle answers her call from the pews with a lower pitched tone from a much larger pipe. This call and response continues several times before Andrew Simonet begins a wild and somewhat awkward improvised solo. He moves with a keen sense of intent as his body contorts, his arms twisting and jerking around him. It seems as though he is trying to do *something*, but I have no idea what that something is.

After watching him, the other dancers join him in similar kinds of effortful movement. Sobelle, now with a microphone, rushes up to the dancers, offering the microphone so each can offer an explanation of what they are doing thus satiating my curiosity. They respond with explanations like “I am moving backwards in time” or “I am growing a second head”. After this first exercise in explanation, Sobelle directs the audience to form a circle around the edges of the space to watch, and several more rounds of this improvisation structure are performed: one dancer begins and one by one the other three join in before each offering an explanation of what they are doing: “I am trying to carry the earth”, “I am life on mars”, “I am turning myself inside out”.

Immediately following the last round, Smith enters the space with pipe in hand. As other orange dancers layer in with organ pipes of their own, they perform rhythmic weaving walking patterns while creating a similarly rhythmic composition on their pipes-turned-horns. The continuous vibration of the lower tones acts as a sort of heartbeat while the higher tones call out, hauntingly. This section reads as a sort of invocation and

demarcation of the space. The dancers even draw arcs in the space with their instruments as they play, defining the space with their bodies and sounds.

As Simonet approaches dancer Niki Cousineau and gently takes her pipe from her, she wiggles spasmodically and runs off barking like a dog. The other dancers discard their own pipes before joining Cousineau in repeating the wiggly, percussive and carving phrase she had just performed. They end by forming a line across the space as Smith enters on a rolling chair, microphone in hand, sharing stories of strange and inexplicable experiences they have collected in their research. She invites an audience member to take her place in the chair and share his own tale of inexplicability as the dancers scoot, shuffle and jerk back and forth. The section ends with another spastic solo, this time performed by David Brick.

With all the other dancers watching him, Simonet offers the microphone to Sobelle who (on one of the nights I attended) offers this explanation: “You’re understanding the true nature of electricity”. Simonet, anxious to see how “accurate” Sobelle’s explanation was, grabs the microphone and offers it to Brick who responds, “That’s right. I’m understanding the true nature of electricity!” After a satisfied “wow” Simonet asks for the “first slide” and the lighting transforms the scene into a 3D corporeal slideshow, demonstrating and narrating explanations of tableaux presented as lecture slides: this tableau is an awkward break-up, this is crushed by the sky, this is lined up in order of popularity with the audience. There is even a tableau that, according to Simonet’s narration, “has no explanation”. Simonet then initiates a dramatic spatial shift. He invites the audience to move around and observe the action from any point in the

room, as close to or as far from the orange performers as we like. As people move about, duets emerge to Bob Dylan's *Wigwam*.

Having always been captivated by dancer Nichole Canuso's eyes, I get right up close to her face, staring into her eyes, following her as she dances with Simonet. This section ends with Smith laying on the altar, singing Sufjan Steven's *Concerning the UFO sighting near Highland Illinois*. She sings:

When the revenant came down, We couldn't imagine what it was, In the spirit of three stars, The alien thing that took its form...

Her words are discernible but muffled considerably by the vast dome of the space creating an equally soft and haunting melody. This moment marks the beginning of a choreographic transformation. *Explanatorium* shifts from its task-based improvisation structures, with seemingly straightforward explanations to a vastly more mysterious, intimate and sensory mode of perceiving the dome of the Rotunda.

Smith invites the audience to make the shape of a snowflake, directing us to walk towards the center of the circle and to lay down with our heads inward and our feet outward. As we take our places on the floor, I notice, quite obviously, that I am no longer actually observing anyone dancing. I am staring at the oculus of the Rotunda's domed ceiling. I am being choreographed and directed, as is my visual, kinesthetic and aural perception of the space. Looking up at the dome, Smith explains that oculus just means eye. Describing the architectural features of the oculus, Smith is at first quite literal, drawing our attention to the pupil and the iris of the oculus before suggesting what else might be seen: constellations, a celestial hand, a swirling vortex or an alien presence.

We are invited to think of ourselves as the consciousness behind the eyeball of the oculus and are directed to “pull the plug” with our voices to get consciousness swirling in the space and up into the sky. As we lay, the dancers give each audience member a small rubber eyeball. The sensation of Sobelle grabbing my hand and placing the little rubber ball in my palm leaves me nervous and excited – I am not used to dancers touching me, as audience member, during the course of a performance. We are invited to think of these rubber eyeballs as our third eyes. Smith directs the audience, still on the floor and staring at the oculus in chanting the word “eyes” three times.

With almost 100 people in the audience, the sound travels, bouncing around the dome and creating a fully engulfing chorus of expansive voices. On one of the nights I attended, there was an opera singer in the audience, who took some creative license with the invitation to sing. Her voice carried above the rest of the groups’ and we served as a sort of base section to her melodic improvisations. After this chanting, we are instructed to hold our third eyes up to the ceiling, allowing them to guide us to our feet, before making a “big bang” and spreading out again to the edges of the space. Canuso is left in the center still staring skyward as a remote control toy truck with a tin can on top of it drives into the space. Canuso takes the can, still staring skyward, and places it atop her head as Sobelle directs us on the count of three, to throw our rubber eyeballs, aiming for the can. This results in a frenzy of bouncing rubber orbs within the already spherical space. The other dancers approach Canuso, gasping with curiosity. Finding it empty they lay down in snowflake formation as Canuso rolls the can and begins another inexplicable solo.

Next, in what reads to me as the climax of the piece, the audience is choreographed en masse, given specific movements instructions and a choice to make. Simonet begins by asking the audience if we have ever had a paranormal, supernatural or otherwise inexplicable experience. Those who answer “yes” are to move to one side of the room and those who answer “no” to the other. I think for a moment and decide that I fall into the “yes” category. Andrew gives further instructions. When the music starts, (again, Sufjan Stevens’s *Concerning the UFO Sighting Near Highland Illinois*) the “yes” people are to slowly lift our heads until our eyes face the ceiling (the oculus). The “no” people are given a different set of directions and choreography: to lean into a part of their body that needs healing, and then turn slowly towards the center. Somewhat more complicated, the “yes” directions are as follows: at the point in the music when flutes enter, we are to make an alien shape with our right hand and lift it above our heads. Simonet demonstrates this to help us understand what he means as he contorts his hand into a shape that I would never interpret as an alien. Still, with Ridley Scott’s *Alien* popping into my mind, I too try to turn my hand into some kind of alien creature. When singing enters, we are to turn slowly towards the center. When we hear the words “three stars” in the song, we are to bring our alien-shaped hands down toward our hearts and lovingly caress them with our non-alien hands. When Sufjan sings “oh god” we are to mouth these words with both our mouth and with our right hands. Then, pulling our bodies from a place that needs healing (I chose my head, having had an almost massive headache since that morning) we are to move up towards the alien tractor beam, which Simonet gestures to be shining down from the oculus.

At this point the “yes” group and the “no” group are both faced with the same decision. With the lyric “oh what it was” we are to either follow Brick away from the alien tractor beam or we can decide to board the spaceship. If we choose to be taken aboard (as I did) we are to fall to the ground and make with our bodies, the shape of a constellation-real or imagined. The resulting dance I am unable to witness in the moment. I am, however, aware of the choreographic relationship between the “yes” and the “no” groups: two masses of about 50 people each performing set and contrasting choreography in relative unison.

I realize that either decision constitutes an explanation of the dance that is happening in this moment, of what we see in the oculus, and of how we choose to interpret mysterious phenomena in this dance and in general: can we surrender to inexplicability or are we determined to interpret concrete meaning? We all inhabit the space of having to actively make sense of this experience. Between getting on or not getting on the spaceship rests a multitude of other possible choices. This and other moments of audience choreography (as distinguished from the entire piece involving participation from the audience) gives me as an audience member a deep sense of being involved, of my choices upping the stakes of this performance.

Smith appears again in the pews blowing her pipe horn as the other orange dancers enter in a sort of procession, playing a more solemn and steady melody. The audience is redirected into a circle one last time before being led in our own processional, a walking meditation of concentric circular pathways.

Just as we are asked to dress in blue, to begin participating in the *Explanatorium* before we ever get there, we are left with an ending that lingers. The labyrinthine pathway ends as two parallel lines form, exiting ceremoniously out the majestic double doors with Brick and Cousineau leading the way. As the audience crosses the threshold back into the “real” world, two dancers above us on a balcony stand dropping handfuls of fake snow. The flakes float down landing on our heads, engulfing us as we proceed out. I get a concentrated handful in my face and I clear the white bits out from under my glasses so I can still see. I kneel down, quickly scooping up my own handful and scrunching the flakes through my fingers. Around me other audience members laugh in delight, palms upward hoping to catch their own flakes.

Having exited the rotunda, I look around me at the people trying to comb fake snow out of their hair and I am hit with the urge *not* to do the same. It is as if each flake is an idea having only softly landed on my head: I want to give them more time to seep into me before brushing them away. Outside, we cheer, applaud, thank and chat before eventually dispersing back out through the city, on our individual pathways.

Ritual Structure, Spatial Tactics and the Heterotopia: *Explanatorium*’s Spatiality

Explanatorium’s spatiality comes into being at the intersection of choreographic space, ritual space and the politics of participation. Through specific strategies of audience participation, the spatiality of the piece extends beyond the temporal and material spatial boundaries of the performance event and thus beyond the boundaries of the Rotunda as site itself, even as the spatial specificities of the Rotunda are themselves

essential in producing *Explanatorium*'s choreographic world and spatial logic. This section will ground the piece's spatiality in Michel de Certeau's notions of strategy and tactics as well as Michel Foucault's theorizations of the heterotopia, focusing on how the work's implication of the audience is essential in understanding the spatio-temporal fluidity of the performance event. I will then turn to a discussion of how *Explanatorium* deploys particular ritual structures to further elaborate on how the choreographic world performed in the Rotunda reaches beyond the practico-materiality of the site itself. This initial elaboration of the work's spatiality will become imperative to further discussions of the work's theorizations of participation, community and ephemerality later in this chapter.

Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) represents his specific theoretical contribution to the conceptualization of spatiality and arrives by way of his notion of tactics. First of all, it is important that de Certeau elaborates the idea of *tactics* in relation to *strategy*. He defines strategy as "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated," (de Certeau 1984: 35-36). De Certeau aligns this idea of *strategy* with the notion of fixed place, a panoptic gaze and the constitution of knowledge through power. De Certeau describes a *tactic* as "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus," and "an art of the weak" (1984: 37). From his subsequent discussion I take tactics to refer to practices by which consumers (which de Certeau calls users, as a way of arguing against the notion of the passive consumer) maneuver within a panoptic and capitalist strategy by creatively making use of

the products of strategies in unexpected, deviant and subversive ways. Tactics are an art of recombination.

De Certeau locates tactics in everyday practices such as walking, reading, and talking, thereby suggesting social theorists invest these practices with increased significance. It is important to note that the hidden-ness and secrecy of tactics is a conceptual feature of tactics, which de Certeau explicates throughout *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In the moment of performance, I am proposing, the *Explanatorium* stages a linkage between tactical decisions made in everyday life and tactical decisions made by audience members through the choreography and this staging makes tactical possibilities visible.

De Certeau writes, “The walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else. And if on the one hand he actualizes only a few of the possibilities fixed by the constructed order....on the other he increases the number of possibilities....he thus makes a selection,” (1984: 98). Here, de Certeau’s emphasis on walker tactics as spatial practice in relation to the relative fixity of the city as strategy marks de Certeau’s most potent theoretical contributions to spatiality. From this perspective *Explanatorium* thus becomes a space for the exploration of the tactical possibilities of the Rotunda on the part of the audience. My argument here is not that these audience responses are necessarily tactical. A tightly structured choreographic work like *Explanatorium* is too entrenched in the capitalist formation of the city and the structures of arts funding and presentation to become tactical itself, but the performance as a whole makes tactical *possibilities* visible and experiential within the context of the choreography of the site as organized strategy.

In other words, the performance presents itself as a laboratory wherein spatial tactics may be discovered, played with and rehearsed. The performance of *Explanatorium* thus reveals that the spatiality of strategy and tactics are not as clear as de Certeau conceptualizes. If de Certeau's tactics are hidden and secret, *Explanatorium* offers a way to make visible the hidden spatial poetics of the art of tactics. Thus de Certeau's vision of spatiality allows us to see *Explanatorium* as a space that opens up possibilities for tactical action, while the performance itself suggests a rethinking of the (in)visibility of tactics.

Participation is a key element in the dialectics of space both because the materiality of the space often forms the actual shapes and pathways of audience participation, and because participation results in a constantly shifting perspective on the space for the audience. The formal effects of participation - constant shifting in perspective, in being and interacting, in seeing the space, and imagining being seen in the space - form a fluid and continuous spatial enactment of tactical possibilities – and these tactical possibilities offer a modality through which to perform communities into being.

Michel Foucault's concern with spatiality in "Of Other Spaces" (1986) leads him to an interest in sites of suspect and inversion, of which he identifies two types. The first are utopias. Foucault explains that, "Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces" (1986: 24). But Foucault is more concerned with *real* spaces, which leads him to suggest the existence of heterotopias. For Foucault, heterotopias are "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the

real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (1986: 24). Here Foucault’s distinction between *real* and *unreal* seems to depend on material physicality and imagination. A utopia is unreal because it exists only in imagination whereas a heterotopia is a heterogeneous space of otherness and difference imagined and enacted within a real site.

The *Explantorium* as performance creates a space of imagination within the material site of the Rotunda. Thus I read the *Explantorium* itself as a heterotopia, even as the performance simultaneously recasts the Rotunda as heterotopia as well. It is fairly clear that Foucault takes “real” to refer to the practico-material fact of space. Yet, for Foucault, “unreal” is not necessarily the operative opposite of “real” in his conceptualization of the heterotopia. His clearest elaboration of the heterotopia occurs when he explains the dualistic nature of the heterotopia as a “simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live” (1986: 24). Foucault himself cites the theater as heterotopic for its ability to assemble multiple kinds of images, imaginaries and realities in one material space.

In total, Foucault suggests six principles that define and characterize his notion of the heterotopia. One of these principles in particular suggests a reading of a unique aspect of *Explantorium* and allows a consideration of how *Explantorium* pushes beyond the spatiality Foucault establishes for the concept of the heterotopia. What Foucault names as

the fifth principle of the heterotopia addresses the physical boundaries of the site itself.

Foucault writes,

Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures (1986: 26).

While this characteristic may apply to a variety of performances, one unique feature of *Explanatorium* was that HDT asked the audience to come to the performance dressed in blue. As mentioned above, this information was printed in the Live-Arts Festival guide as well as posted at the festival box-office. Extra blue clothing was available in the lobby of the Rotunda for anyone without. When people asked why they were asked to wear blue, the ushers indicated that it was an element of the design of the performance. While this may be true, it has other implications for reading *Explanatorium* as a heterotopia.

Wearing blue was an entrance gesture; it signaled that each audience member was now part of the heterotopic *Explanatorium* space. Yet this audience costume requirement also pushes the boundaries of the spatiality of Foucault's definition.

The experience of walking through Philadelphia, looking for other "blue bodies" and wondering if they too were on their way to the *Explanatorium* remained just as vital a component of the performance as the time I spent inside the Rotunda itself. I continued the practice of looking for blue bodies throughout the run of the show and my stay in Philly, always wondering if they had experienced the performance as well. The wandering blue bodies carried the imagined heterotopic community of *Explanatorium*

outside the specific site of the Rotunda and even into an imagined space where anyone dressed in blue was potentially part of the heterotopic space.

The significance of the heterotopia for Foucault is that it offers possibilities for subverting the homogenous, panoptic structure of society at large. Foucault's general formulation of the heterotopia clearly allows us to configure *Explanatorium* as heterotopia, but this specific extension of the *Explanatorium's* spatial boundaries as the performance carried into the streets is what forces a rethinking of the assumption of a bounded or fixed spatiality of the heterotopia. If the heterotopia extends beyond the site, *Explanatorium* as event becomes conceptually delinked from the Rotunda as material space, allowing the performance to be conceived of as an ongoing ritual event.

The choreography of *Explanatorium* elaborates a spatiality of intimate relation between audience members and performers who may not know each other outside the context of the *Explanatorium*. This is achieved through a ritual-inspired approach to sequencing and participation. It is significant that the site's former life as a church is already loaded with associations to gathering, community, spirituality and ritualized behavior. Brick noted, "The space has a theatricality to it, being in the round but that roundness is both theatrical – it has an altar, and a staging aspect to it – and there's a sense of ritual. It's a church and circles seem to have this inherent ritual aspect to them" (Brick, Personal Interview). The sense HDT had that the space was already a place for ritual provided direction as *Explanatorium* creators reinscribed and reinvested the space with the ritual it suggested.

In her discussion of ritual-like activities religious studies scholar Catherine Bell writes, “ritual-like action is activity that gives form to the specialness of a site, distinguishing it from other places in a way that evokes highly symbolic meanings. Such activities differentiate a sacred world – however minute or magnificent – in the midst of a profane one” (Bell 1997:159). Noting the ways in which the space influences the choreography, Brick postulates, “I think this space really brought out a kind of quasi-religious, but sincere kind of spiritual dimension of the piece” (Brick, personal interview). But the choreographers also mapped a spiritual dimension onto the space by, for instance, making use of and transforming the already highly symbolic pipes from the organ, and creating moments of reflection by asking the audience to chant or leading us through a labyrinthine walking mediation.

Anthropological research and discourse often come to focus on performativity as central to the notion of efficacy in ritual practice. *Explanatorium*’s ritual structure thus becomes an essential modality through which it performs its spatiality. Bell explains, “according to the anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff, in ritual-like behavior ‘not only is seeing believing, doing is believing’” (Bell 160). Bell goes on to suggest that because performance engages group multisensory perception, “even the less enthusiastic participants of the audience are cognitively and emotionally pulled into a complex sensory experience” (Bell 160). In *Explanatorium*, the audience comes together in order to make something happen – to ascend to the mother ship, to solve the mystery of the

Toynbee tiles⁹, to recreate the big bang- rather than just see a performance. HDT uses this ritual logic choreographically to gently encourage without coercing participation, a participation that is central to the spatiality created in the *Explanatorium*.

In *Space-Body-Ritual: Performativity in the City* (2010) urban planner Reena Tiwari attempts to understand the ways in which bodily rituals come to construct the character of urban spaces. In elucidating her notion of ritual she states that “any ordinary behavior transformed through sequencing, repetition, and rhythm into a structured event can be termed ritual” (Tiwari 2010: 16). Repetition is constituted for the choreographers and dancers of *Explanatorium* through rehearsal and performance, but how is a sense of repetition, of the *Explanatorium* as an ongoing ritual event, achieved for audience performers who generally only attend once? The transformative and repetitive sense of ritual is achieved in how the performers communicate and engage the audience in the choreography of sequence.

Verbal cues like “let’s make the magic circle” gently choreograph the audience around the perimeter of the circle after sections wherein we are invited to explore the vastness of the entire space. Smith says simply “now we make eyes” before directing the

⁹ The Toynbee tiles refer to tiles embedded in the streets of major cities around the world. The tiles are most ubiquitous in Philadelphia where they are presumed to have originated in the 1980s. The tiles usually contain some variation of the phrase “Toynbee idea in Kubrick’s 2001 resurrect dead on planet Jupiter” Documentarian Justin Duerr assumes these to be references to director Stanley Kubrick and historian Arnold J. Toynbee. Duerr’s film directed by Jon Foy and entitled *Resurrect Dead* was released in 2011. It is unclear if the tiles are the work of a single artist or multiple artists as new tiles continue to be found and font styles have varied over time. (“Toynbee Tiles’ Mystery Resurrected in Philly.” By Joel Rose. *Weekend Edition Saturday*. National Public Radio. WHYY, Philadelphia. 23 Sep. 2006; *Resurrect Dead*. Dir Jon Foy. Perf Justin Duerr, Colin Smith and Steve Weinik. Focus Features, 2011.)

chanting of the word “eyes” three times. Choreographic and participatory directions follow a specific and formal structure wherein it becomes clear that the sequence of events needed to complete the ritual has been established and repeated on numerous occasions over a long period of time and will continue to happen beyond any particular audience’s participation in the ritual. This further acts to imbue the piece with a sense of ongoingness. Rather than a more familiar choreographic logic wherein excitement, engagement and surprise are created through frequent, dynamic and spatial shifts intended to be unexpected, HDT simply tells us what’s going to happen and what we will be doing next.

After participating in these highly set and formalized activities - walking the labyrinth path as meditation, playing a role in “getting consciousness swirling” (as Amy Smith described it) through chanting, bringing about the imagined descent of a spaceship -like participating in other ritualistic activities – I feel a sense of having *been through something*. Tiwari argues that “In order to convert a theater into ritual, that is, to bring in the participatory experience, it is necessary to write the script on the space itself. It is essential to design the spaces in such a way that this dichotomy of spectator-performer is resolved” (2010:18). Here ritual as a framework is not only a modality through which to assess how performance transforms its audience through experiential and liminal states, ritual also becomes a choreographic strategy used to incite thoughtful and invested participation and to construct the spatiality of *Explanatorium* as one of ritual. Ritual as a choreographic structure serves as a strategy for risk management but it is also suggested

by the site, taken up by HDT conceptually and choreographically and enacted through the participation of the audience.

Tiwari further argues that

A city can be seen as a vast fabric where activities flow at intra and inter levels of built forms and open spaces. When this flow of activity occurs repeatedly or ritualistically, the space starts to become delineated or defined and can be termed as a space of practice. The space begins to be identified by that activity. It acquires a quality firstly due to its physical elements, secondly through the ritualized actions occurring in it, and thirdly, through the way the active body responds to the space. The user's body picks up memory cues from within the setting that provide a framework for rituals to occur. (2010: 13)

If spaces begin to become defined, as Tiwari suggests, by repeated and ritualistic activity, it is the intentional constructed and choreographed performance of repetition and ritual that defines the *Explanatorium* for its audience and is reinforced through the bodily participation of this audience.

Participatory Art and the Politics of Community

While the work's motives for using the Rotunda as its performance site were primarily aesthetic in support of the choreographic world HDT imagined, the element of participation necessarily entangles the *Explanatorium* in the politics of community invoked by the history of participatory art. This section will outline some of the key theorizations around participation in performance and visual art and how those theorizations are intertwined with discourses of urban space and community. I will demonstrate how *Explanatorium*'s particular strategies of audience participation engage with such discourses, departing significantly from the political ideologies historically at the core of much participatory artwork. Ultimately I will argue that the piece's spatial

aesthetics and emphasis on the choreographic success of its audience participation, ignores the ethical problem of attempting to achieve a political ideal and instead proposes a complex theorization of community that remains aware of the problematic politics of its circumstances of being.

The role of participation in *Expanatorium* functions very strongly to position the audience as essential members of a performed *Explanatorium* community, whose actions and, in many cases, whose aesthetic choices figure largely into the spatiality enacted by the piece. Community is a much theorized and still an ever contentious term as modes of connection become increasingly complex in a globalized world.¹⁰ At the same time, localisms have taken on new significance as “eat local” and “buy local” campaigns have gained momentum in American neighborhoods in support of local and community economies. The connections forged across vast spaces through technologies of communication, travel and global commerce, throw into relief the relationships formed on neighborhood streets by people who live and/or work in close proximity to each other and vice versa. The configuration of space and spatiality is a key filter through which notions of community are elaborated and experienced.

It is through the lens of community engagement that audience participation in works of art has been theorized and historicized. With respect to participatory art, theorist Claire Bishop identifies two historic approaches to audience participation: “An authored

¹⁰ See for example Amin, Ash, and Nigel Thrift. *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002; Jackson, Shannon *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011; Joseph, Miranda. *Against the Romance of Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002

tradition that seeks to provoke participants, and a de-authored lineage that aims to embrace collective creativity; one is disruptive and interventionist, the other constructive and ameliorative. In both instances the issue of participation becomes increasingly inextricable from the question of political commitment” (Bishop 2006:11).

These theoretical trajectories are descriptive of practices and discourses in both visual art and performance throughout the 20th century. In theater, for instance, German dramatist Bertolt Brecht sought to create disruptions in the narrative of his plays in order to incite critical distance between the action and audience, which he conceptualized as a modality of active participation, while Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty further involved audiences through physical participation, which became a central concern for avant-garde art and theatre of the 1960s (Bishop, 2006). Theorist Peter Bürger identifies participation and its intervention in community and authorship as arising out of mid-century European avant-gardist desire to blur distinctions between artistic practice and daily life (Burger 2006).

While Bürger cites the works of the European Dadaists, the drive to aestheticize everyday life is probably most famously articulated by Guy Debord in “Toward a Situationist International, 1957”, wherein he argues for an artistic engagement in urban spaces of everyday life through constructed situations. For Debord, the situation was imagined as a participatory event through which experimental, aesthetic and artistic behavior would disrupt the spectacle of capitalism and help re-spatialize the city and bring about a new urbanism. While perhaps the contemporary phenomenon of the flash mob is a clearer manifestation of Debord’s situation, Debord’s proposals in “Towards a

Situationist International” are relevant in more subtle ways for participatory art and performance. From this tradition of thought Bürger argues:

When the avant-gardistes demand that art become practical once again, they do not mean that the contents of works of art should be socially significant. The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society, a process that does as much to determine the effect that works have as does the particular content (2006:48).

Indeed Debord and the Situationist International movement were concerned not only with both rupture and aesthetics but perhaps more specifically with the aesthetics *of* the (dis)rupture.

The notion of ‘participation’ as a mode of experimentation in contemporary art has been perhaps more widely theorized within the context of visual art than in performance. Notwithstanding the thorough and meticulous histories Sally Banes has conducted about avant-garde performance in New York City in the 1960s¹¹, participation and its theoretical implications for notions of community and authorship particularly in site-based art has been theorized critically by scholars of visual arts, and most notably by Miwon Kwon in her book *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002). In this work, Kwon traces the history of site-specific art in the US and Europe, linking it to a political economy of institutional display and community engagement. Kwon emphasizes the importance of transience in site-specific art as an institutional critique of the gallery system of display and a deconstruction of authorship.

¹¹ See Banes, Sally. *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993.

The historical narrative of site-specific dance in the United States of the 1960s and 1970s -always already entangled in a discourse of impermanence – is also a populist one.

In *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (1993), Sally Banes cites the parallel political, social and aesthetic concerns of the dance and performance avant-garde. Already situating these performance practices in Greenwich Village's history of social and political organizing, Banes' narrative constructs avant-garde performance through its refusal to be constrained by conventions of both dance training (deconstructing notions of professional and amateur) and the economy of the theater. Like the history outlined by Kwon, avant-garde dance carries its critique into "alternative spaces". Unlike Kwon's account, Banes' narrative seems to cite economic necessity rather than conceptual and theoretical engagement with space as the underlying motivator. Kwon's history of site-specific art is also marked by a discourse of civic engagement whereby notions of public art are fundamentally shaped by city administration. While the web of aesthetic and political ideologies are clearly informed by genealogies of American postmodern dance, the institutional support required not only to use the Rotunda, but also to realize its more theatrical elements links *Explanatorium's* spatial discourse and theorizations more closely to the historical and political discourses outlined by Kwon. Still, when critic Nicolas Bourriaud published his writings on "Relational Aesthetics" in the 1990s¹² to examine what he saw as a contemporary trend towards critically involving the body of the spectator in visual art, choreographers and performance artists such as Merce Cunningham and the choreographers of the Judson

¹² Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Esthétique relationnelle*, Paris: Les Pres du reel, Dijon, 1998. Published in English in 2002 as *Relational Aesthetics*

Church era - those described by Banes - had already been considering these aesthetic relationships for quite some time as the relationships amongst and potential interrogation of bodies in space had always already been the terrain of choreography.

What Kwon theorizes more concretely is the specific role of audience participation in the critical linkage between experimental artistic practices and social change. Kwon problematizes the models of community engagement most commonly operative in site-specific art. The public interested model proposed that art in public spaces could be a democratizing force, de-privileging a specialized art audience and bringing art to “real people” outside the mainstream art world. Another popular model involved arts institutions curating “collaborations” between artists and activist communities (Kwon 2002: 106-126). Kwon rightly problematizes the idealistic goals of these projects and their rhetoric of access and inclusion that ignored a more complex understanding of race, ethnicity, class and power in these exchanges. Kwon continues to analyze and evaluate the “successes” and “failures” of both temporary and ongoing invented communities comprised of local artists working in their “home” communities outside the auspices of institutional support and organization (2002:134-137). Ultimately, and theoretically relevant to *Explanatorium*, is Kwon’s questioning of the category of community itself.

As contemporary experimental dance theater, participation in *Explanatorium* may indeed be part of the lineage of participatory art identified by Bishop discussed above, yet it certainly does not fall entirely into either of the two categories. It is both provocative and collective, and neither. Rather, it treats the audience as performers, as co-

conspirators, as co-investigators, who already know they are both part of the *Explanatorium* and have a specific role to fulfill in its gathering. In its engagement/creation/coalescing of a community, HDT is not giving up creative authority in favor of a fully collaborative, created-with-community approach to art. Instead, the achievement of HDT's aesthetic vision for the piece rests on the audience making choices within the already established spatiality of the *Explanatorium*. HDT maintained artistic authority over content and form, but within these parameters, audience participation ultimately decided whether or not these decisions fully brought to life the *Explanatorium* as such. It is up to the audience to complete the piece as the artists intended and in this process, those intentions might change significantly. Still the attitude and aesthetic of experimentation around participation in *Explanatorium* demonstrates and maintains a theoretical link with the historical trajectories of artistic practice outlined by Bishop and Kwon.

The remaking, retheorizing, undoing/redoing and rethinking of urban spaces and communities are woven into the very politics of participation. But what is getting created in the case of *Explanatorium* and how? What ideas of community are being performed? What is crucial theoretically is that *Explanatorium's* construction of community through site-specificity does not seem to be making a claim of inclusiveness or access. Unlike much "community-based" or "site-specific" art practice, *Explanatorium* is clear about both its institutional siting as a piece presented by the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival whose audience had paid for tickets *and* its assumption that its community of audience is,

to a large extent, already HDT's audience or audience that are already likely to be invested in the kind of work they produce.

In *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City* (2007) Judith Hamera writes:

Dancers make cities as friends, as partners, as corps, and, in so doing remake themselves, their audiences, and each other everyday, day after day. They create "civic culture" in multiple senses of the term: as a commodity for public consumption and as a vernacular connecting individuals who may otherwise have little in common. In performance as a final product, and especially as a daily discipline, dancers reach across multiple dimensions of difference to incarnate new shared aesthetic and social possibilities, (2007: 1).

Hamera emphasizes the need for deep, repeated engagement in the formation of dance communities, focusing on dance praxis as the mode of coming-into-being of dance communities. Yet as Hamera also suggests, audiences as communities are made and remade by dancing, and this is precisely what is choreographed to occur in the performance of *Explanatorium*. Not unlike a church service, the piece proceeds with a sense of the performers as teachers, mobilizers, group leaders or activity coordinators whose audience returns every week to participate in this "explanatorium" ritual.

Brick explained that the performers conceptualized themselves as, "a group of people and we're on the schedule to have our explanatorium meetings in this community space" (Brick, personal interview). This way in which the performers conceptualized themselves was visible in their performance attention as well as in the way they approached and instructed the audience. Like a Catholic mass, the audience has responsive roles to fill and we are gently treated as if we might already know them. While *Explanatorium* is not actually an ongoing weekly ceremony, HDT manages to

choreograph participation such that for the audience, it is *as if* we were a community formed through repeated engagement. The piece becomes both a literal gathering of an audience as a temporary community, and a conceptual engagement with the qualities of community itself.

Hamera also reminds us that aesthetics are inherently social. Aesthetic choices made by audience participants in *Explanatorium* are ultimately made in the context of being in relation to the socio-spatiality of participation. In other words, once inside the *Explanatorium*, being in a common aesthetic space of other audience/participants participating for and in support of a group *Explanatorium* experience encourages a giving over to the emergent spatial aesthetics of the work. Yet in this sense, what is choreographed is a risk. *Explantorium*'s "success" as a performance relies on its audiences making aesthetic decisions. Its spatiality depends on the audience participating willingly and enthusiastically, on joining this group of performers as researchers and becoming part of the community corralled and coalesced under the dome. Choreographically, the primary question to arise is: how do you convince an audience to participate in such a specific and choreographed role? How do you manage the risk of refusal?

Brick explains that HDT puts a great deal of thought into their publicity materials. Particularly for *Explanatorium*, HDT used publicity to frame the performance, as a sort of filter. The goal in coalescing the *Explanatorium* community was to filter out, at least to some degree, any audience members that would not be interested in participation. Those interested, to a large degree, are already HDT's audience. Based on my attendance at

over a decade of HDT performances, it should be noted that in general, HDT's audience of experimental dance and theater enthusiasts and practitioners, does not reflect the demographics of the city of Philadelphia as a whole. In terms of race, class and education, HDT's audience seems to be primarily composed of a white, educated and artistic class. This mode of exclusion represents a significant break with the utopian politics of community Kwon sees as fundamental in much site-based participatory art. While the categories of aesthetic and political cannot be disentangled, *Explanatorium* clearly prioritizes the aesthetic and experiential concerns of the spatiality of participation advancing a political ideology of audience intimacy rather than inclusion and access. At the same time that publicity discourages some dance audiences from attending, it simultaneously creates heightened investment in the performance as event for the audiences who do attend. Publicity materials act as both a challenge and an invitation. Perhaps the most pertinent piece of advertisement was the piece description in the festival guide:

Headlong Dance Theater, creators of past Live Arts hits, *Cell* (2006), *Hotel Pool* (2004) and *Britney's Inferno* (2002), bring you *Explanatorium*, an inquiry into and meditation on things we can't explain. We will meet in the abandoned Christian Science Church at 40th and Walnut Streets. Some have said that this domed Rotunda with its ornate oculus and massive pipe organ is, in fact the lost spaceship described in the mysterious Toynbee tiles found throughout Philadelphia. This and other confusions will be laid to rest by engaging in activities of explanation. Along the way, we will see human beings disperse their atoms, turn into teardrops, and recreate the Big Bang. Finally, each person will know the truth for herself. Some may choose to ascend to the mother ship. Tea will be served. Please come dressed entirely in blue. (Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe guide, 2007:9)

In addition to establishing the inexplicable as the topical site of choreographic investigation, the festival guide description already implicates the audience in the community of performers/creators by using the plural pronouns that invoke a sense of the collective. Phrases like “we will meet...”, “we will see...”, and “some may choose...” signal to potential audience members that their participation will extend beyond conventional dance spectatorship. Furthermore, they are already given a choreographic direction in the instruction to come dressed in blue. The piece is framed as a challenge to the audience to become a community of artists researching the inexplicable. The guide’s description of the piece offers the promise of becoming and being in on the experiment rather than only watching a group of performers elaborate their own movement research. Participants are asked to consider if and how it might change them to become art.

The instability of performance as art object makes it apt terrain to interrogate the instability of community. If Kwon critiques the operative assumptions of the ideal community as stable and transparent, the performance of community in *Explanatorium* reveals its fluidity and uncertainty. Here it is important to note that I make a distinction between ‘community’ and the ‘performance of community’ in order to emphasize the piece as a choreographic theorization of the complexities of community rather than an achievement of some ideal.

In Kwon’s elaboration of the operative assumptions about the very term “community” in site-specific artwork, she writes

The ideal of community, according to feminist social theorist Iris Marion Young is a dream that “express[es] a desire for selves that are transparent to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort.” The strength and seductiveness of such a dream rests on its promise of a “good society” that

can counter the experiences of alienation and disassociation (and the accompanying social problems) that characterize life in contemporary urban mass societies. (2002:149)

Here, Kwon makes explicit the key problematics of the ideal of community in the context of complex, diverse urban settings. What is key is that performance (particularly a performance that centers around the inexplicable and the imaginary) implies a destabilization of transparency in the presentation and reception of selves in a group. There is no promise of such a transparency in performance. Performance can even be seen to draw attention to the fallacy of the possibility of total transparency of self. Entering the space, we are immediately cast into the role of audience, donning blue costumes to distinguish us from the orange performers. What is visible then, are the roles that we fulfill in the carrying out of *Explanatorium's* staging and theorizing of tactical possibilities, ritual structures and temporary community as well as a certain amount of room to play within those roles tactically. A structured experience of intimate interaction between bodies as well as the aesthetic and conditional achievement of a space of otherness within the urban rhythms of a west Philadelphia neighborhood become the underlying ideology in how the work deals with the problematics of community. Choreography, as the formal and material processes of coming to be with other bodies, is emphasized and the political potentials and pitfalls are left open and undefined. While the performance of intimacy and the performance of community do occur within a framework of mutual identification in *Explanatorium*, the element of participation always involves the potential for discomfort, uncertainty and risk. As she continues to present and problematize various modes of participation in contemporary art practices,

Kwon ultimately argues, “As the artistic, political, and ethical pitfalls of community-based art become more visible and more theorized, the need to imagine alternative possibilities of togetherness and collective action, indeed of collaboration and community, becomes more pronounced” (2002: 153).

In building a potential framework for a critical kind of site-based participation, Kwon invokes Jean-Luc Nancy’s critique of community noting that “There is no communion, there is no common being, but there is being *in* common” (Jean Luc Nancy qtd in Kwon 2002: 153). Thus, following Nancy, she suggests an artistic praxis that would involve “a provisional group, produced as a function of specific circumstances by an artist and/or a cultural institution, aware of the effects of these circumstances on the very conditions of the interaction, performing its own coming together and coming apart as a necessarily incomplete modeling or working-out of a collective social process” (2002: 154). Here, perhaps even inadvertently, Kwon has signaled performance as a modality through which the ideal representation of community as a whole, stable and united entity can be disrupted and reworked in praxis. This type of performance of community that theorizes a “collective social process” rather than attempting to achieve an ideal of community engagement, is precisely what occurs through *Explanatorium*.

Kwon elaborates her understanding of Nancy’s notion of the “inoperative” or “unworked” community as “the idea that only a community that questions its own legitimacy is legitimate” (2002: 155). The being in common that occurs as audience and performers chant “eyes” while gazing up at the oculus (or whatever we imagine it to be) dissolves as fleetingly as it comes into being. Still, the choreography of bodies lying

together as we all form the shape of a snowflake, sometimes even touching one another, is a potent affective moment of being *in* common. Within a little over an hour of gathering at the Rotunda and entering the *Explanatorium*, the audience disassembles and *Explanatorium* disbands, but the performance continues. Still clothed in blue, the audience does not simply disband, it performs its own disbanding: with the audience still in costume, the temporal boundaries of *Explanatorium* are not so rigid. What is choreographed is the porosity of community, its contingent temporality and fluidity.

The conceptualizing of community deployed in *Explanatorium* is characterized by both its spatial reality during the performance as event, *and* by its imagined ongoing-ness established through its ritual structure. There is a constant tension between the actuality of performers and audience in the space together, the performance of *Explanatorium* as an ongoing exploration of inexplicability, and the imagined inclusion of the audience in this ongoing-ness. Moreover, something potentially identifiable as “actual” community is always in tension with the performance of community. This tension becomes a modality through which community is theorized as a porous and temporary formation whose unworking continues to be performed beyond the wall of the Rotunda. The disbanding of a temporary community occurs even as it is imagined as continuous: an audience of participants will indeed show up tomorrow, but perhaps what is more potent is the conceptual potential that these ‘explanatorium’ meetings are still occurring, next week, next month, *ad infinitum*. Every time I walk by the Rotunda, I imagine a group of people still meeting to enact this ritual. The porosity of *Explanatorium*’s spatio-temporality

emerges, then, to position participation as an enactment of spatial theorization rather than a carrying out of intervention itself.

Spatializing Affective Traces

Of central and recurring theoretical concern to the field of dance studies is the idea of ephemerality. Dance is often conceived of ontologically through its continuing disappearance, perhaps most famously articulated by Marcia Siegel in *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance* (1972). Siegel begins her book with the following

Dancing exists at a perpetual vanishing point. At the moment of its creation it is gone. All of a dancer's years of training in the studio, all the choreographer's planning, the rehearsals, the coordination of designers, composers, and technicians, the raising of money and the gathering together of an audience, all these are only a preparation for an event that disappears in the very act of materializing. No other art is so hard to catch, so impossible to hold. (1972: 1)

This section builds on the argument that *Explanatorium's* spatiality is one of porous temporal boundaries, wherein the audience is signaled into participation through costume direction before and after the "actual" performance, and that this porosity constitutes a potent theorization of the volatility and mutability of notions of community. Specifically I explore the significance of *Explanatorium's* spatiality to dance's discourse of disappearance, arguing that the piece adds a spatial dimension to theories that argue *against* dance as an ephemeral art form. Essentially, *Explanatorium's* choreography of its audience before and after the performance inside the Rotunda itself, acts as a spatialized theorization of André Lepecki's refiguring of dance's temporality in *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (2006).

The issue of dance's "vanishing" has, perhaps most notably, been taken up by Peggy Phelan who seeks in her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) to recuperate disappearance and imbue performance with a status that is resistant to capitalism. Phelan ultimately sees performance in a continual state of disappearing that resists capitalist reproduction through the impossibility of representation of performance to circulate in a capitalist economy while remaining live performance. André Lepecki approaches the issue of disappearance from a different perspective (2006). Rather than locating and recuperating value and power in the ontological status of performance as disappearance, Lepecki writes against Siegel's very notion of the vanishing point.

Lepecki's argument builds through the course of the book beginning with his identification of the "kinetic project of modernity" as a driving force in dance (2006:3). He then seeks to theorize dance's political potential as its ability to engage with and act as an interrogation of time. Before elaborating on Lepecki's theoretically rigorous analysis, it is necessary to point out that the metaphor of the vanishing point is, of course, already a spatial one, referring to the use of perspective in 2-dimensional media to represent the 3-dimensionality of actual visual perception. It is the point where all lines converge and appear to *disappear*. For concert dance, the notion of the vanishing point generally assumes that the performance is happening on a proscenium stage wherein the audience's visual field is akin to a 2d representation of 3d space. The vanishing point only simulates disappearance. In actuality it implies the infinite continuation of the represented space. *Explanatorium* enacts Lepecki's critique of the vanishing point and helps make visible the spatial dimensions of his argument, which primarily concerns the

temporal dimension of dance. Lepecki deploys theories of memory, the body and performativity to suggest that performance continues to act in an expanded understanding of the “present” rather than immediately plunging into past-ness as Phelan and Siegel suggest.

Lepecki makes use of Austrian psychoanalyst Paul Schilder’s concept of the “body-image” by proposing it as another way of conceptualizing Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri’s body without organs. It is an expansive notion of a body not bound by time and space. Lepecki explicates:

One’s body-image does not simply coincide with the visible presence of one’s body. Rather, one’s body-image extends itself to any place any particle of one’s body has reached across space and across time. Wherever one has left a particle of one’s body (feces, blood, menstruation, urine, sweat, tears, semen) there one finds the limits of one’s body-image. Wherever one has left an imprint of one’s body (including linguistic ones, affective ones, sensorial ones) there is the limit of one’s body image (Lepecki 2006:50).

Lepecki suggests that a potential application of these theories to dance studies might lead to a deconstruction of sorts of representation and a questioning of the assumed stability between a dancing body as it appears and the subjectivity of that body on display.

In critiquing the ephemerality of dance as Lepecki does, it is theoretically productive to look to time as dance’s fourth physical dimension as a realm for intervention. This is precisely what Lepecki does in building on Schilder’s idea of body-image as he looks to Henri Bergson’s theories of memory and time. While he also critiques both Siegel’s and Phelan’s assertions that dance resists capitalist reproduction

both through his own framework of the “melancholic project of modernity”¹³ as well as Phelan’s psychoanalytic framework, he eventually turns his focus to Bergson. Lepecki asserts that to simply recast dance as not “doomed to disappearing” (2006: 128) could potentially overlook the politics and ethics of memory, particularly with respect to histories of racial and colonial violence. Lepecki writes, “For Bergson, any act, as long as it continues generating an effect and an affect, remains in the present”(2006:129). What emerges is an expansive notion of the present coupled with the already established expansive notion of the body-image. With bodies and performance extending beyond their “proper” boundaries, Lepecki argues that any notion of dance existing at the vanishing point can no longer hold, and he asserts that “The present is to be found in whatever still-acts” (2006:130). *Explanatorium*’s own expansiveness makes visible the performative ongoing-ness of dance and its choreography of the sensing body through intimate interaction and participation emphasizes the body’s affective and sensorial “imprints”. The piece position itself in the swirling spherical midst of Lepecki’s temporal discourse.

Lepecki contends that “intimacy is the generative theoretical and phenomenological affect of a temporality that escapes dancing at the vanishing point, and yet could still account for an ethics of remembering” (2006: 130). In *Explanatorium*, the opening up of the visual field into a multisensory panoramic and limitless cosmic space of action and contemplation extends the narrative of the work into each participant’s individual kinesphere, creating the potential for the lingering effects and affects of

¹³ See Chapter 2 in André Lepecki’s *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* for a full discussion of dance and modernity’s melancholia

intimacy, and a choreographic spatiality that resists the vanishing point. For a piece wherein the author is always already in question, a piece that already choreographs the potentiality of an unruly audience, a piece that emphasizes its own meaning in-flux from night to night, audience to audience and moment to moment, the implications of Lepecki's retemporalization of dance become spatialized. As blue bodies from different corners of the city prepare for the performance, knowing that they are already a part of it, perform together in close proximity, experiencing the intimacy that comes through sensing each other, finally dispersing back into the city from the Rotunda, *Explanatorium* becomes not only an enactment of the expansive body-image itself, but a performative mapping of body-images as they move about the city.

Walking, driving or cycling and marked in blue, bodies leave cellular and energetic traces before coalescing under the oculus and continue to leave traces after re-dispersing back out into the city. *Explanatorium* is a piece that makes visible and palpable the choreographed trajectories of bodies in transit: in transit as a community of performance audience coming in and out of being, as individual body-images, and as *still* experiencing *Explanatorium*, still acting beyond the temporal confines of the choreography created by HDT itself. The piece may put these bodies into motion and serve as a choreographic impetus, but it is the city itself that suggests possible strategic pathways from a multitude of starting points to the rotunda, and it is the audience who maneuvers improvisationally and tactically through the streets.

In the case of the *Explanatorium*, the memory of performance is mapped not only onto the topography of the performer's or audience's unconscious, but also onto a

specific structure (the Rotunda) somewhat more fixed and stable in space and time than the bodies who occupy it on a daily basis. Yet the space does not act as monument. As a living community gathering place with a multiplicity of spatialities, the Rotunda does not become the *Explanatorium*. The experiential unfolding of the piece allows us to conceptualize the space of the *Explanatorium* as a continuous exploration—ongoing on the weekly events calendar at the Rotunda. We still meet to ask questions that cannot be answered.

Structures of Enchantment: Nichole Canuso's *Wandering Alice* and the Choreography of Christ Church

Introduction:

The steeple of Christ Church stands like a beacon in old city Philadelphia. For me, it has always been a landmark, a meeting place to return to after wandering through this historic neighborhood (see figure 4). While I now know the subway stop at 2nd and Market without thinking – which stairways will spit me out at which corner of the intersection – my early experiences of the Market/Frankfurt line left me momentarily confused at street level. To orient myself, I would spin my body around until my eyes found the church, providing me with the spatial information I needed to proceed with my journey.



Figure 4 Looking Up at Christ Church's Steeple. 2013 Photo by Laura Vriend

In September 2008, with Christ Church having become a personal kinesthetic signpost of sorts, I journeyed to the Christ Church Neighborhood House to see Nichole Canuso's *Wandering Alice*, presented by the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival. While this was only the second full-length work I had seen of Canuso's at the time, I had known her previously as a frequent performer with Headlong Dance Theater¹⁴. For *Wandering Alice*, Canuso and her team of collaborators, including local Philadelphia performers Meg Foley, Bethany Formica, Makoto Hirano, Jaamil Kosoko, Michael Kiley, Rainey Lacey, Lorin Lyle, Scott McPheeters, Heather Murphy, James Sugg, Mike Kiley, Dito van Reigersberg and Christina Zani, took over four stories of Philadelphia's historic Christ Church Neighborhood House, installing Canuso's first large-scale site-based work in this historic and familiar space.¹⁵ Inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and the work of Japanese surrealist writer Haruki Murakami (Live Arts/Fringe Guide, 2008), this site-specific work can be characterized as a sort of performance journey, wherein the performers and audience travel through the space, discovering, engaging and performing with each other as the piece unfolds.

This chapter explores the various ideas and configurations of enchantment present in the work, the strategies used to create them and the effects they produce in performance. After establishing a sense of my kinesthetic experience of the piece through

¹⁴ Canuso performed in Headlong Dance Theater's *Explanatorium*. See chapter 1

¹⁵ Canuso's previous works for the stage include *Fail Better* based on Samuel Beckett's *Act Without Words I: A mime for one player*, *We Spar Down the Lane* and *The Royal We*. Her works since *Wandering Alice* include *TAKES* (2010), a film noir performance installation wherein two dancers perform with video "takes" on their own bodies filmed live during the performance. Canuso's 2013 *The Garden* is also an immersive performance "journey".

description, I examine the site of Christ Church, following the work of Andreas Huyssen, as an urban palimpsest, exploring the layers – famous, infamous and otherwise – of history and memory contained within and invoked by the site. Building on the work of Henri Lefebvre in “The Right to the City” (1996) and scholarly notions of enchantment in relation to modernity, I argue that *Wandering Alice* proposes and enacts discourses of enchantment in its performance.

In the process, this chapter will bring together notions of the magical in the space of Christ Church by mining the theoretical implications of ideas of enchantment, haunting and ghosts and the role they play both in an understanding of performance, history, memory, and ultimately the spatial experience of *Wandering Alice*. I establish relationships between the materiality of what happened in the moments of performance, the effect the choreography produced during the course of the performance, and the lingering effects, traces and hauntings of the work in relation to the history and memory of Christ Church. Most significantly I focus on the intertextual relationship between ghosts as traces of the performance of *Wandering Alice* and a ghostly historical Alice whose presence haunts the performance and the site. I examine the significance of the relationships between haunting – wherein haunting is a performative effect of choreographic structures of enchantment – memory and materiality and how these elements affect and are affected by their situatedness in Christ Church’s (haunted) Neighborhood House.

Alice in Situ: Choreographing Enchantment

It is early September 2008 and a small audience of about 25 waits on the old cobblestone street, characteristic of the oldest neighborhoods in Philadelphia, outside the entrance to the Christ Church Neighborhood House. It is trying to start raining and we are eager to be let in for this 90-minute performance journey. From inside the house dancers peer at the waiting audience through the small window in the front door, curious and mischievous. As the door opens, dancers whisk about. They are cautious of us yet interested, welcoming and they clearly have an agenda for us. They position themselves along the old wooden staircase just inside the doors. At first they are silent but their eyes gently yet clearly indicate that we should begin climbing the stairs. We hear a voice humming, and as we continue up the staircase we see dancer Heather Murphy singing, chirping and pinning notebook pages to clothesline. In fact there are torn notebook pages everywhere, pinned to clothesline and strung about, handed between the dancers, exchanged and traded like secrets. This is a staircase with which I am intimately familiar, having taken many workshops and seen many shows in the second and fourth floor spaces, but already I am experiencing it differently. It is still a passageway, but it is also now its own setting. Dancers tease and play with the audience and a voice whispers in my ear, "One person per stair, one stair per person."

What is immediately created upon entering the space is the sense of a deeper interiority. As the ensemble of dancers navigates the tight turns and hallways of the entrance, they maintain a softness and ease of contact with the building's surfaces. These dancers seem to seep out of the walls: as the fluidity in their joints allows for soft impact

with surfaces it appears as though the walls and floors give way to absorb them rather than their joints absorbing the impact. They are librarians, documentarians, archivists of the space. They know it deeply and everything that has ever happened here. They care for the space, and keep track of its goings on, and through their fluid physicality they have already established a physical sense that the boundaries between surfaces of skin and surfaces of wood, brick, tile and plaster are porous in nature. They curate a meticulously collected and collated world beyond the walls. They are also our tour guides, ensuring that we respect the space they have let us in on and behave accordingly. Like the characters in *Alice in Wonderland* they speak in riddles. Dancer Rainey Lacey addresses the audience from a landing below some of us and above others repeating, “Can you hear me? Can you see me?” while gesturing assertively like a flight attendant. She will be giving us important information. Suddenly a bell rings and the other dancers race up the stairs leaving us with Lacey and dancer Makoto Hirano, who had been stationed in the corner of the landing at a makeshift reception desk with papers, records all organized using a logic only he seems to understand. Once we are all properly in place and paying attention to our guides, Alice, wearing a simple red shirt dress, and played by Nichole Canuso, rushes in and up the stairs, looking at us as though she must be late.

She is promptly stopped by the guides as they snatch away the piece of paper she is holding and read it aloud: “Found: spiral bound notebook containing the mundane details of your daily existence. If you want it back, report to Christ Church Neighborhood House.” Through Alice’s exchange with the two guides, this notice is

revealed to correspond to a similar “lost” notice Alice had posted. A loose narrative emerges: Alice has come to Christ Church to retrieve her lost notebook. This is the impetus for her and our exploration of this space. But it seems these magical guides speaking in riddles have something else in store for Alice and for the audience. As Alice looks around, curious and confused, a man in yellow, played by Dito van Reigersberg, runs up the stairs, drops several notebook pages and disappears through one of two doors on the landing.

Alice snatches up the notebook pages recognizing them as her own and attempts to follow the man in yellow. But she is stopped and we are all given vital information by our guides: “Instructions! Look for a river that flows inexorably yet forgivingly forward, like time. Listen! For the aforementioned notebook, mundane conversations with metaphysical connotations and those who are, slash, that which is integral, peripheral or peripherally integral to the aforementioned river, conversation and connotation. And don’t forget, life curdles in the tyranny of milk carton time. Life curdles. That’s all. GO!”¹⁶ As Alice rushes toward the door to track down the man in yellow, the guides stop her. “Wait,” they say, gesturing to the audience. “Take them with you.” Alice is confused, to which the guides respond, “Why should they follow you? How else would they know where to look? Besides, it’s a fire hazard”.

With that, we follow Alice into a dark room on the trail of the lost notebook, the mysterious man in yellow and innumerable other unknowns. Not only does the exchange

¹⁶ All transcription of spoken text are quoted from Canuso, Nichole. *Wandering Alice*. Vid. Garbriel Beinczycki, Philadelphia: Nichole Canuso Dance Company, 2008. DVD, 90 Min

between Alice and the guides set up the sense of absurd mystery one might expect from a piece inspired by *Alice in Wonderland*, but it also parallels our experience of the space with that of Alice/Canuso as one of discovery, encountering, and happening upon. We are with her in her search, our collective subjectivity aligned (at least for now) with Alice.

As we pass through the doorway, we enter into a dark room. Small lights on the floor alight a pathway for us to follow and Alice obsessively picks up the notebook pages she finds on the floor. I am disoriented because, while I am familiar with this building, I am not precisely sure which room I am in or where I am going. In this room we hear a chorus of voices chanting repeatedly “will you forget in time?” in varied rhythms and melody and accompanied by organ and drum. We cannot see the source of the music but it surrounds us.

We are led onto a platform at the back of the room. There is a screen showing a video of the man in yellow against a red curtain, there are strings attached to the screen pulled taught, fanned out and secured to the edge of the platform and a sign telling Alice where to stand. There is also a small window through which two figures appear played by sound designers/musicians Michael Kiley and James Sugg. Laughing and taunting Alice, they are fools and jesters. They too speak in riddles, intentionally confusing Alice. Sugg says, “Do something!” and then snickers before repeating, “Try something!” Alice plucks the strings. They mock her, suggesting she’s doing the wrong thing, or worse, her decisions are boring and trite. They send a red bucket down through the window, shouting the whole time “Coming down! Pass it over. The one in the red!” and demand “All the pages, just the pages, all the pages”. Alice reluctantly complies and puts the

pages she had just retrieved in the bucket. They pull the bucket back up through the window and proceed to read Alice's pages still teasing and laughing and making quite a racket. Alice is visibly embarrassed and tries to leave. "Don't!" they shout. She returns. They continue, "Cut the Strings!" As Sugg continues to shout "Don't!" Kiley taunts Alice to "Cut the strings." The repetition and increasing urgency of their calls confuses and stresses Alice, who anxiously and inevitably cuts the strings as Kiley and Sugg continue shouting and begin banging on drums.

A curtain is pulled open to reveal an ensemble of dancers (our guides), long strings tied to their fingers trailing as they engage in a serpentine canon of movement, swirling about like the notebook pages scattered earlier in the staircase. The room is warmly lit in shades of orange, red and pink. As the dancers continue to weave their path, Kiley and Sugg quietly enter the space, Kiley taking a seat at the piano, Sugg with a clarinet providing melodic accompaniment to the ambient sound that has already been playing. Twirling, spinning and waving the strings, the canon continues, punctuated with still moments wherein the dancers line up, standing, crouching or on the floor. Alice tries to join their dance but they always leave her behind. As Alice looks around the space in wonder, the guides approach the audience still on the platform and lead them into the space by offering ends of the string. Again, they speak in riddles and repetition, "Are you running out of time? Are you running out of time said my tongue to my teeth to my lips to your mouth. Are you running out of time?"

Once all the audience members are dispersed in the space, the music stops and the dancers freeze. A new piece of music begins, Kiley with a guitar and Sugg still with

clarinet. The guides fall away from the engagement with the audience and begin a new dance while each telling a different fable. Alice wanders through the space taking the ends of each of their strings, effectively gathering up the guides, yet as she does so, their pleading stories become overwhelmingly directed at her. She finally takes the ends and places them in the hand of an audience member. The dancers stop talking and pull away so their strings are taught. Alice plucks at the strings. Each dancer says a different word (“dream,” “rose,” “to,” “a”) with a pluck. After playing for a while, attempting to compose a sentence with her plucking, Alice takes the strings back and drops them, causing the dancers to return to their own agendas. They disappear from the room, leaving dancer Christina Zani alone with her dangling string speaking to us, “Alice awoke amidst a mess. Something amiss ING notebook. She climbed out of the wrong side of the bed. Folded white sheets. Stared blankly. Blank. The day. No list, no recipe. Nothing to do but find the book. Where had it fluttered off to?”

As Zani leads Alice out of the room and up the stairs, the audience follows and we hear a chorus of voices continuing to narrate the story of Alice searching for her notebook:

No choice but to wander and wonder. But what if you never find it? Who will you be then? She wondered as she wandered down streets and passed through crowds of strangers eyeing them for strange square-ish bulges beneath their shirts the size of a worn spiral bound steno notebook and every bit of trash caught her eye. Every dancing piece of garbage was at first glance lined blue with black words. Her words. And then she glimpsed a silvery slippery fish poking its nose into her inner most thoughts and ship-like her marooned words sailed through a gutter and into a river flowing inexorably out to sea.

Up another flight of stairs and behind another set of doors, our guides disappear. Alice continues up to the doors to dancer Meg Foley holding a black umbrella lit from underneath. As the audience follows her in, we are all handed a small flashlight with tinfoil wired on to create a miniature lit umbrella. We use these flashlights as torches, lighting our way as we encircle the dancers in the center of the space. There are four overlapping squares of differently colored light on the floor and dancers Scott McPheeters and Makoto Hirano are already dancing a gentle duet in the space jumping from square to square. Foley and Canuso/Alice lead us around until we encircle the lit space. Alice's guide gives her a little push into the space. As she enters the square lit blue we hear the sounds of a rainstorm. As she crosses into the orange, the sound changes to salsa music; in the green square, it's birds chirping. Delighted with the discovery that her own body can change the music, Alice plays with moving between the orange and green squares altering her speed and sometimes accentuating her arrival into a different square with a small "tada" gesture. In the green square, Alice is joined by McPheeters and Hirano, still dancing the same repeating duet, but this time, as McPheeters swings his leg into the fourth purple square we hear a splice of choral hymn. The rules have changed and as Alice discovers that it is no longer only her own body that can control the music, she joins McPheeters and Hirano and the duet becomes a trio. Dancer Bethany Formica joins in and the dance becomes an even more elaborate quartet. The catch and release breathiness of their movement is punctuated with rhythmic stillnesses as the dancers take a moment to notice the effect they have on the sound: a layered and ever-changing symphony of environmental and musical sonic scape. Foley enters the space. With a fifth

dancer there are now more dancers than squares of light. Amidst the birds chirping and choral chant, we hear a cow mooing. The quality of the dancing maintains its soft release inspired quality with curious stillnesses as the sounds continue to change and the sonic rules vis-à-vis the movement and light are no longer clear. New musical styles and environmental sounds emerge. Dancers begin exiting the lit space, gently taking the flashlights from the audience and leaving them in a ring around the floor. The audience is then led out of this space with only Alice still dancing in the light, repeating the same sequence of movement, but no longer having any effect on the music. Kiley and Sugg enter the square stopping Canuso/Alice and tie a long strip of red fabric around her waist. They gently yet insistently lead her out along with the few remaining audience members.

We are led into a new space and invited to explore. The floors creak. The air feels musty. There are passageways, stairways and balconies, riddles scribbled on walls, rope and of course more notebook pages. There are spaces to read notebook pages and write new ones. Some audience members are engaged in a duet with a dancer in front of a video screen. After watching this for a while, I conclude that there is a prerecorded video of each dancer interacting with the man in yellow projected onto the screen on a loop. The dancers guiding each audience member move in precise mirror unison with their projected selves. The effect is that when a dancer finally spins an audience member such that they are facing the screen, they see themselves *as* the man in yellow, eliciting a startled, curious and delighted response from many audience members who experience this duet. Wandering through this space made to look like an old ship, with Alice on a balcony steering the wheel, we eventually find our way into a small room where the man

in yellow is sitting on a table next to what appears to be a shadow of Alice. We have seen this man before yet only briefly. There are several rows of chairs set up and through the gentle encouragement of the guides, the audience settles in to discover what we can about the man in yellow. As Alice discovers the room herself and stumbles in, she notices her shadow, takes a seat next to the man in yellow and the shadow melts away. With mutual curiosity, Alice and the man in yellow engage in a duet, testing and feeling each other out with careful, sometimes apprehensive yet intimate contact and lifts. When one of the guides steps in, the duet is interrupted and Alice is led out of the room.

Shortly after Alice disappears, a video image, presumably of where Alice has gone, appears projected onto the man in yellow himself and a second duet emerges. As audience, we do not know where Alice has gone. What we see is the projected image of Alice on the man in yellow. He literally becomes the space in which Alice is dancing, as she is left to investigate and discover the rules of this new environment. They dance together. The man in yellow moves and virtual Alice is thrown off balance, she falls against the back wall and the man stumbles backward. She runs to a staircase and the man extends his arm. She runs up the staircase on his arm and across his chest. The man lifts his hand to his chest creating a barrier. As Alice pushes her way through, the man in yellow's hand gives way. Alice kicks her leg back and the man in yellow turns, reacting to this motion. She continues kicking and then running, making the man spin faster and faster until finally she stops, the dizzying movement reverberating through their bodies. Then, the man in yellow moves closer and closer to the audience, the image of Alice takes up more space on his body until both bodies merge. Alice appears to be speaking,

but rather that hearing what she is saying, we see the effect of her projected performing self inhabiting the man: with her face layered on his, his expressions become a jumble of twitches, mouthings and shaking as he simultaneously becomes Alice and attempts to speak back.

The projection disappears abruptly and the chanting emerges once again from outside the room. The man in yellow leads us out a door where we see the guides walking slowly in a large circle around the dark room, only their bodies lit. Again the guides are curious yet purposeful. As the guides continue their movement and the remainder of the audience files in, they begin to incorporate intimate moments of contact into the dancing, lightly placing a hand on another's shoulder or resting their heads against each other. But the light and intimate quality of the movement intensifies. Soon they swirl and gallop as they lead the audience into the center of the space. Their movement around us continues as they assemble closer to each other; still moving around us, they become a rhythmic frenzied swirl of bodies. In the center I am unable to focus on one body at a time. In the dim light, they feel like ghostly apparitions, stirring and summoning the enchanting energy in the space. As they run out the doors, we are led again out and back down the staircase.

The dancers are scattered above and below us. Again voices fill the vertical space as sonic and kinesthetic action saturates the four stories of the stairwell. Notebook pages blanket the steps and landings become slippery surfaces for emerging dances as one dancer positioned at the top drops even more pages, allowing them to fall, float and catch the air. The pages graze our skin as they descend and audience members (myself

included) reach out in an attempt to grab the pages. Alice has reappeared and even as she still attempts to gather the pages of her notebook, she appears clearly enchanted by the guides, seduced by their world. As the other dancers still chant, alternating between two tones that echo up and down the staircase, the dancer at the top sings over them, “Is it unclear how you got here?” At this point in the piece, and despite my familiarity with the space, I have become so disoriented that I answer silently to myself “yes, it is unclear!”.

Alice, rolling, swimming, almost bathing in the notebook pages, repeatedly gathering fistfuls and then dropping them, eventually notices an opened doorway, stands up and begins to walk through. The guides lead us the rest of the way down the staircase, indicating that we are to follow Alice into this room as well. There are sheets hung on a clothesline. With this room still dimly lit, there are shadows everywhere. The guides pull the sheets aside as the lights become brighter. Alice and the man in yellow stand facing each other, making strong eye contact. The musicians reappear and begin singing, “At six sixty nine million miles an hour, my watch will tick differently. Then yours will stay rooted like a flower, so time for you is different for me.”

The scattered dancers kneeling throughout the space, perform a unison phrase, carving circles with their arms, scooting playfully and suggesting alternate realities with arcing gazes, while Alice and the man in yellow dance a duet made of similar sweeping gestures punctuated by anxious and insistent drops, steps and jerks.

As the precise unison breaks down, dancers leave the movement phrase and gently move an audience member to a new vantage point before rejoining the phrase. With the audience scattered more uniformly throughout the space, the unison re-emerges

with all the dancers in direct relation to other another. Yet this unison serves to fully integrate Alice into the alternate reality of this enchanting world inside Christ Church Neighborhood House: she performs the same scoots and rolls and curious pauses as everyone else. Alice realizes she is being allowed into this other world and as her image appears on the same screen where we earlier saw the man in yellow, she moves towards it. The image on the screen mirrors Alice's movements as she turns to look back at the audience. The curtains close slowly on Alice and her image, and she slowly disappears into the interior logic of this world. The dancers roll away, through a door and out of sight.

As the audience we are curious as to whether or not this is the end of the piece and with no clues as to what to do next we look around and realize that the man in yellow and the musicians, Sugg and Kiley at the piano, are still in the space with us. As the musicians begin to play, the man in yellow begins to sing. The mood instantly shifts from mysterious curiosity to playful joy. As the dancers poke back out from under the curtain, including Alice, a full group musical sing-along takes shape:

Write your wishes down on ribbon.
Fold them, tie them up with pain.
Light them on fire, throw them over
to fall forever like the rain.
Will you forget in time?
Will you forget in time?

I find a smile creeping up around the edges of my mouth: this is both genuinely sweet and joyful and also kind of goofy. It's a pop song. It seems both out of place and the only possible way to end this piece. Towards the end of the song, the ensemble backs away again behind the curtain. They are waving. And the audience waves back. I am reminded

of the penultimate scene of *The Wizard of Oz*, floating away on a hot air balloon and waving at everyone who's left behind. This time, the end is clear. Alice has fully entered their world. They disappear back into the walls they first slipped out of and the audience is left wishing we could follow.

A Tale of Two Alices in Christ Church's Haunted House

Christ Church and its Neighborhood House are full spaces; sometimes I think that it is the history of these buildings that scratches and tears at its bricks and mortar, rather than wind, rain and the pollution of a heavily populated urban environment. It is not so much that they are full of *stuff* (though they are), it is that they are full of 300 years of Philadelphia. Over the course of those years, so many people - wealthy, (in)famous, poor, enslaved, tourist, artist, parishioner – have left *something* of themselves behind. As a site for Canuso's *Wandering Alice*, the Christ Church Neighborhood House then asserts a weighty historical influence on the choreographic spatiality created during the moments of performance.

Drawing from Andreas Huyssen's notion of the urban palimpsest elaborated in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003), I explore in this section the historicity of the site as a foundation for establishing *Wandering Alice*'s choreographic spatiality and its performative implications. Like many historical sites loaded with the weight of American colonial and revolutionary history, there are dominant written narratives and untold, perhaps ghostly histories that seems to survive through oral and kinesthetic modes of transmission and as Priya Srinivasan argues, these

kinesthetic traces can be “..uncovered by searching for movement in the written record and in the live encounter between bodies” (2012: 17). The performance of *Wandering Alice* as intertextual contemporary foil to this history asks for a modality of understanding the space that takes this multiplicity of uses, understandings and meanings into account. Huyssen provides a useful model in his concept of the urban palimpsest. He writes:

“After the waning of modernist fantasies about *creation ex nihilo* and of the desire for purity of new beginnings we have come to read cities and buildings as palimpsests of space, monuments of time. Of course, the majority of buildings are not palimpsests at all. As Freud once remarked, the same space cannot possibly have two different contents. But an urban imaginary in its temporal reach may well put different things in one place: memories of what there was before, imagined alternatives to what there is” (2003: 7).

This urban imaginary contains the histories and social and cultural memories of the site forming the already palimpsestual foundation onto which Canuso writes *Wandering Alice* as well as her enchanting literary inspirations from Lewis Carroll and Haruki Murakami.

Historian Deborah Mathias Gough’s *Christ Church, Philadelphia: The Nation’s Church in a Changing City* (1995) does a fairly thorough job of tracing the Church’s colonial and American significance. In 1695, when the church was founded, Philadelphia and surrounding regions were largely Quaker dominated. Still, the small group of Anglican colonists who founded the church sought a place to practice and worship as they did in England. Fittingly, Gough demonstrates that through the church’s more than 300-year history, it has adapted and evolved as the city of Philadelphia transformed from small colony and seat of American independence to modern urban metropolis (Gough 1995).

In 1695 Philadelphia had a population of about 1500 and the site of the church stood as the center of the city. There is very little documentation of what the original structure looked like when it was built in 1696, but it became a center of Philadelphia politics and business. While the legislature and judicial system at the time were dominated by Quakers, and while there was indeed conflict amongst religious groups, eventually Christ Church's Anglicans accepted the Quaker political and religious majority (Gough 1995: 9-18).

Following a growth in membership and the establishment of a stable ministry through the first half of the 18th century, construction began on a new larger building. Completed in 1744 with a brick tower and steeple added by 1754, the new Christ Church became the famous and familiar landmark that still stands just north of 2nd and Market streets (see figure 5). Architecturally, Gough emphasizes that the grand Palladian style in which the Church was built "stood in great contrast to the plain style that characterized so many buildings in the Quaker city" (1995: 49).

This contrast speaks to the Church members' desire to differentiate themselves culturally and politically from the Quaker majority. And, while the ornate architecture of the church might suggest a wealthy congregation, Gough's analysis of church records indicates a diverse socio-economic membership that expanded its ministry to black Philadelphians - mostly slaves - through the 1740s and 50s (1995: 68). It is also important to note that by 1740, Philadelphia - the Quaker city - was the most religiously diverse city in the British Empire. With Benjamin Franklin already its most famous member, through the revolutionary years, the church welcomed John Adams and George

Washington. The revolution also served as an important turning point in the church's history. As an Anglican church, the clergy had all taken oaths to support King George III, yet they ministered to the militia and varied considerably in their support of independence. Seven signers of the declaration of independence are buried in Christ Church's burial grounds, including Benjamin Franklin.



Figure 5 View of Christ Church from the northwest corner of Market and 2nd. Streets. 2013 Photo by Laura Vriend

By 1779, the church's new vestry created laws separating Christ Church from London's rule and eventually established Christ Church as the "mother church" of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the US (Gough 1995:127 - 146).

In the years leading up to the Civil War, Philadelphia saw a massive population expansion, and with the church determined to stay out of the ideological debates over slavery, its membership was made up primarily of middle to upper class Episcopalians (Gough 1995: 209-253). The period of post-Civil War industrialization saw the spatial differentiation of the city, with the old city becoming the center of manufacturing with a largely Irish Catholic population. Christ Church, to ensure its financial survival, capitalized on its historical significance and engaged its immigrant community through social outreach. It was this initiative that led to the construction of the Neighborhood House, begun in 1911 and completed in 1922 (Gough 1995: 251-294) (see figure 6).

In this particular history of Christ Church that Gough lays out, we can see Christ Church's precarious role as both ministry to members of the continental congress *and* official allies to King George, as well as its significance as the center of Philadelphia's built environment in the colonial and revolutionary periods. Just several blocks from Independence Hall and the liberty bell, Christ Church both contains and is enveloped by old city Philadelphia's aura of American independence. While this history pervades and capitalizes on tourist allure, equally if not more important than this history are the histories not easily accessible through written documentation.



Figure 6. View of Christ Church Neighborhood House from Church Street. The edge of the Church can be seen on the right. 2013 Photo by Laura Vriend

My first encounter with Christ Church was as an audience member, attending a performance in the Neighborhood House in the 2002 fringe festival. Since then, I have been to multiple dance performances, contact improvisation classes and choreography workshops that used the expansive spaces of both the 2nd floor great hall and the 4th floor gymnasium. While *Wandering Alice* used the Christ Church Neighborhood House in an unconventional and experimental way, the fact of a dance performance occurring at the site was not novel in and of itself. The Neighborhood House underwent renovation beginning in 2010, and the 4th floor was converted into a more formal theater space.

In further unpacking the layers of historical meaning embedded in the walls of both Christ Church and the Neighborhood House, I discovered that Canuso's Alice was not the first to inhabit Christ Church. About six months after *Wandering Alice* was performed, a portrait was hung in the reception hall of the Christ Church Neighborhood house. This portrait, painted by artist Al Gury, is of Alice of Dunk's Ferry (<http://www.episcopal-life.org/search>, 26 September 2013). Born in or around 1686 in Philadelphia as the daughter of two slaves, "Alice of Dunk's Ferry" attended and was a member of Christ Church in Philadelphia and is generally recognized by historians and archivists as Christ Church's first oral historian, as the source of much of Philadelphia's early history (Christchurch.org, 26 September 2013). While I came to know of this historical Alice through oral transmission (the tour guides at Christ Church like to talk about her), and while it might seem fitting that the stories about an oral historian be passed down orally, she is not mentioned even once in Gough's history of Christ Church.

The actual material traces of Alice of Dunk's Ferry are slim. Her performative traces are much more abundant. There is a page devoted to her in *Notable Black American Women: Book 2* (1996) edited by Jessie Carney Smith, describing her as an oral historian, slave, and ferry toll collector. She is mentioned briefly in *Philadelphia 1639-2000* Black America series (2000) by Charles L. Blockson, who posits that her family arrived from the West Indies, as most slaves in Pennsylvania did, through the port of Philadelphia (currently Penn's landing). Perhaps more significantly, she is present in contemporary oral historical accounts of Christ Church, those of parishioners and tour guides. While all sources indicate that she was alive between 1686 and 1802, and

emphasize that she lived an unusually long life, it is not clear if she actually lived to be 116 or if the records of her birth and death are uncertain, as they very well could have been for a slave at that time. Nevertheless, these same sources recall stories of her galloping on horseback to Christ Church even in old age. They also emphasize that she herself was an oral historian, a collector and keeper of stories about Philadelphia and the Church. These sources refer to her ongoing performative presence in the official fabric of Philadelphia and Christ Church history.

Alice of Dunk's Ferry is extolled as an often forgotten yet crucially important figure to the history of Philadelphia and Christ Church, as a source of a massive wealth of oral historical knowledge. And while the painting, sermons, short blurbs and tour guide stories do plainly state that she was indeed a slave, they seem like a cursory attempt to account for the racial histories that form a crucial layer in the palimpsestual history of this site. Furthermore, the published sources that do exist do nothing to illuminate her life as a slave, they do not name her masters nor do they mention any details of her life that might be accorded to the white men so praised in the tourist exhibits of old city Philadelphia landmarks. For instance, historian Susan Klepp's research indicates that by the age of five, Alice worked at a tavern owned by William Penn located at what would now be Chestnut Street between 5th and 6th. Klepp also points out that ironically, this is now the site of Independence Hall (Klepp: 2012).

While Alice of Dunk's Ferry never saw the building of the Neighborhood House, she remains linked to the site through her position as oral historian of Christ Church, through the association of her image with the house through Gury's portrait, and through

her rhetorical invocation by Canuso's alternate Alice. Furthermore, Christ Church's archives are located in the basement of the Neighborhood House, meaning that most material traces of historical Alice are in fact at home in this haunted house. In her essay "Unspeakable Things Unspoken", Toni Morrison mines the African American presence in American literature asking, "Are there ghosts in the machine? Active but unsummoned presences that can distort the workings of the machine and can also *make* it work?" (1989: 13). This understanding of historical Alice's presence as "ghost in the machine" of Christ Church is crucial in establishing a full picture of the historical imagination shaping the site. In conversation with a contemporary urban site-specific dance, Alice's ghost also reminds us of the invisibilized African American aesthetic influences on American modern and postmodern dance - elaborated most notably in Brenda Dixon-Gottschild's *Digging the African Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (1996) - that surely shaped Canuso and her company as performers and choreographers. After learning of Gury's painting and reading about Alice of Dunk's Ferry, I had the spine-tingling sense that her ghost must have been present in the performance, a recognition of who was haunting me during the performance of *Wandering Alice*. I wondered what forgotten Philadelphians might have also been present. When I met Canuso for coffee in the spring of 2010, I told her this tale of two Alices. She had not previously heard of the ghostly historical Alice, but communicated to me the strong sense she had while creating *Wandering Alice* that the piece *had to* be performed at Christ Church, that there was no other space it could happen. We wondered if this foundational Alice had anything to do with Canuso's certainty of her site, if she was trying to assert

her presence through the spatial palimpsest of Christ Church itself. As these layers of intertextual meaning in Christ Church speak to one another, Alice of Dunk's Ferry emerges as a ghostly presence haunting the master narratives of America's founding. In attending to the spatiality established through the choreography of *Wandering Alice*, the spatial as both historical and racial are crucial to Christ Church as palimpsest – as the container of the tale of two Alices.

Structures of Enchantment

When I reluctantly leave the transformed environment of the Neighborhood House, I cannot help but notice that I have a wide smile across my face, my skin tingling with goose bumps. I leave with the knowledge that I intend to write about this experience, and for the remainder of the festival, I find it impossible to articulate what the work is “about” to anyone that asks. When I bring up the memory of the piece in my mind, the sensation of my whole body smiling still overtakes me. I remember the delight in absurdity, the engulfing multisensory spectatorial experience, the sensation of discovering the secrets held deep within the plaster and masonry of the Neighborhood House, the transformation of the mundane into the magical – I can only characterize my experience as audience for *Wandering Alice* as one of enchantment.

This section stems from the intersection of my own kinesthetic experience of enchantment in the work as spectator/participant, and theoretical and historical discourses of enchantment. More specifically, this discussion arises out of a provocation Henri Lefebvre makes in “Right the to the City”, a work that primarily asserts a Marxist critique

of the modern city in a revolutionary post-war Paris context. Towards the end of the text Lefebvre writes, “To put art at the service of the urban does not mean to prettify urban space with works of artLeaving aside representation, ornamentation and decoration, art can become *praxis* and *poiesis* on a social scale” (1996: 173). Lefebvre continues on to suggest that “art can create ‘structures of enchantment.’” This passage suggests that artistic practice can potentially transform the urban, and it is striking in the midst of his call for urban revolution in “Right to the City”. Where does this suggestion of “enchantment” come from amidst the more materialist tone of the work in its totality and what did he mean in its use?

In this section I first speculate on and situate how I interpret Lefebvre’s notion of enchantment, allowing what can be inferred from his text to drive a further discussion of enchantment in critical discourse. Second, drawing from Jane Bennett’s work in *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (2001), I suggest that through its choreographic and corporeal production of enchantment, *Wandering Alice* enters into a Lefebvrian discourse that interrogates and elaborates his “structures of enchantment”, suggesting the intersection of the everyday, the magical and the artistic as an approach to urbanism. I situate *Wandering Alice* in its entirety within a critical discourse of modernity and enchantment such that the work emerges as a performative discourse on the potentiality of such an urbanism. I conceptualize the notion of enchantment to later generate a reading of *Wandering Alice* in relation to its spatial discourse and analyze specific choreographic structures that produce enchantment.

From the passage above in “Right to the City”, it is clear that Lefebvre believes that artistic practice is crucial to his own ideology of urbanism, yet he never fully articulates how. When Lefebvre mentions “structures of enchantment” he does not explain what he means by either the term “structures” or the term “enchantment”. In the original French text *le droit a la ville* (1968), the precise words used by Lefebvre are “structures d’enchantement”. This phrase is rightly translated as “structures of enchantment”, but in French, “enchantement” may also translate as “delight” or even refer to the casting of spells. It is likely that in this passage, Lefebvre is referring to the disenchantment of everyday life brought about by modernity, industry and capitalism. Perhaps what is most intriguing about the lens of “structures of enchantment” intersecting with a choreographic work of art in particular, is that the phrase itself gives us clues of where to locate enchantment – in choreographic *structures*.

It is this set of terms –structures, enchantment, delight - that I seek to interrogate in relation to *Wandering Alice*. What does it mean to enchant or to be enchanted? How and where does one locate enchantment in urban space? How does enchantment function in spaces “haunted” by layers of historical narrative like Christ Church? I am interested in interrogating these “structures of enchantment” suggested but never explained in depth by Lefebvre in “Right to the City” in light of actual artistic practice.

Like Mikhael Bahktin¹⁷, Lefebvre identified festival and carnival spaces as spaces of inversion where everyday life disrupted institutionally conceived structures of urban space. Lefebvre’s view of the kind of performances that might occur during a festival

¹⁷ see Mikhael Bahktin, *Rabelais and His World*. Helene Iswolsky trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009

included the possibility of preparation and rehearsal and therefore suggests that the kind of spontaneity advocated by Lefebvre was more about events initiated by “the people” rather than pure spontaneous action (Lefebvre 1996). But the “festival” in the case of *Wandering Alice* is the internationally recognized, highly funded, and institutionalized Philadelphia Live Arts Festival. I therefore recognize a problematic slippage between everyday life, artistic practice and institutional ideology in my Lefebvrian analysis of *Wandering Alice*. With the festival itself as an institutional structure, art as interruption cannot be so easily posited.

Lefebvre advocates a type of artistic practice located in everyday life – something more spontaneous that arises out of the people’s everyday interaction with their cities and with each other; a practice that would emphasize the use value of city spaces rather than their institutional aestheticization (via advertising or spaces built to attract tourists for example) in service of the exchange value they might have for a capitalist core (Lefebvre 1996, Merrifield 2006, Schmidt 2008).

With regard to Lefebvre’s “Right to the City”, Andy Merrifield explains

This isn’t any pseudo-right...no simple visiting right...‘this right can only be formulated’ he says, ‘as a transformed and renewed right to urban life’...there can be no city without centrality, no urbanity, he believes, without a dynamic core, without a vibrant, open public forum full of lived moments and ‘enchanted’ encounters, disengaged from exchange value (2006: 71).

These ‘dynamic’ and ‘vibrant’ moments in city life are where enchantment is found.

While Lefebvre locates artistic practice within the realm of everyday life, his formulation must be seen as specific to the type of praxis in which life itself was seen as a work of art and contextualized within radical social movements in Paris of the 1960s.

While Lefebvre's conceptualization may not be *fully* reconcilable with a contemporary performance event such as *Wandering Alice*, his choice of the word "structures" seems to leave room for the potentiality of enchantment within an organized context. The audience's physical encounters with the performers create fundamentally unpredictable moments throughout the course of the performance; these moments unfold for the audience to discover, creating a sensation of spontaneity for the audience. Furthermore, Lefebvre's theorization of "moments" in relation to Guy Debord's constructed "situations"¹⁸ betrays Lefebvre's own ambivalence concerning the strictness of spontaneity emphasizing his prescriptions in "Right to the City" as theory *in process*. His emphasis on the realms of the everyday, therefore, continues to offer a potent point of intersection for analyzing enchantment within a contemporary urban American context fifty years and an ocean away from Lefebvre's radical Paris. *Wandering Alice* as a set of structures creates situations in which enchantment can be produced choreographically and performatively. In this process, *Wandering Alice* illuminates modalities of approaching urban spaces wherein everyday spaces become renewed with magical encounters and spontaneous intimacy. *Wandering Alice* asks us to participate actively in such a renewal by shifting how we attend to the realm of the everyday.

But still, what exactly *is* meant by enchantment? How does one recognize the experience of enchantment? Bennett offers that "To be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday" (2001: 4).

¹⁸ see Merrifield, Andy. "Lefebvre and Debord: A Faustian Fusion" in *Space, Difference and Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* Eds. Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom and Christian Schmid (New York: Routledge, 2008) 176-189

Here “the everyday” is identified as a generative site of enchantment, linking Bennett’s work to Lefebvre’s emphasis of everyday life as central to urban revolution. Bennett’s continued elucidation of her concept of enchantment seems at times bodily and choreographic in nature. She writes, “*Enchantment* entails a state of wonder, and one of the distinctions of this state is the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement. To be enchanted, then, is to participate in a momentary immobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound” (2001: 5). Here Bennett puts words to the enchanting experience of *Wandering Alice* that I struggled to describe.

Bennett’s analysis is also useful to a critical analysis of the choreographic structures of enchantment of *Wandering Alice* for two primary reasons. The first is because she emphasizes the sensory and somatic characteristics of enchantment: “Enchantment includes, then, a condition of exhilaration or acute sensory activity. To be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense, to be both caught up and carried away – enchantment is marked by this odd combination of somatic effects” (2001: 5). The second reason rests in the assertion that “acute sensory activity” can intentionally be brought about, or choreographed. At first her descriptions of being “struck or shaken” make it seem as though enchantment happens spontaneously, but for Bennett this is not the case:

Enchantment is something that we encounter, that hits us, but it is also a comportment that can be fostered through deliberate strategies. One of those strategies might be to give greater expression to the sense of play, another to hone sensory receptivity to the marvelous specificity of things. Yet another way to enhance the enchantment effect is to resist the story of the disenchantment of modernity” (2001:4).

The very notion of enchantment is neither a simple nor unproblematic term to contend with. It is suggestive of multiple notions of magic and spirituality. It can suggest something hidden or mysterious. Magic and related terms can be found in sound bites from dance reviews in ways that ignore and mask complex processes of performative praxis and effect. For example Carolyn Huckabay's review of *Wandering Alice* in Philadelphia's *City Paper* describes the piece as "winsome", "magical" and "exquisite" (<http://archives.citypaper.net/fringe/2008/show.php/id/104/>, 26 September 2013), but does not give any indication of how these qualities are achieved choreographically and performed by real material bodies. Yet magic is also critically wrapped up in discourses of art, religion, modernity, capital, and experience.

In this discussion of *Wandering Alice*, the problem of how to talk about and theorize the idea of "enchantment" drives my analysis. As Avery Gordon has stated, the language and vocabulary of the humanities and social sciences "provide few tools for understanding how social institutions and people are haunted, for capturing enchantment in a disenchanted world," (Gordon 1997: 8). Theoretical work on enchantment often positions itself in relation to Max Weber's assertion that modernity could be characterized by an overall sense of disenchantment in the world. (Landy and Saler 2009, Bennett 2001, Graham 2007, Weber 1948/2004). Joshua Landy and Michael Saler's volume entitled *The Re-enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (2009) seeks to counter Weber's notion of disenchantment by presenting a collection of essays investigating the ways in which art, literature and various social practices re-establish enchantment as a vital and meaningful experience in our contemporary world.

In Pre-reformation and pre-enlightenment Europe, religion was a major source of enchantment and magic primarily through Catholicism's animation of objects in its rituals and practices. Religious studies scholar David Morgan notes that after the reformation, Protestantism transposed the enchantment previously found in religious practice onto salvation in the afterlife. Thus even as religion is a source of enchantment, the history of Christianity in Europe and the Americas also played a role in the disenchantment of modern life insofar as enlightenment emphasized religion as practical rather than magical (Morgan 2009:3-22).

Philosopher/theologian Gordon Graham emphasizes that modernity and the European enlightenment's reclassification of science, religion and art into distinct realms disrupted and destabilized both art and religion as sources of enchantment. In his book *The Re-enchantment of the World: Art versus Religion* (2007) he focuses on the ways in which modernity spurred a desire and attempt to replace religion, which for so long had been the primary paradigm for understanding in the western world, with science. Art remained the primary modality through which enchantment could be brought about in secular life. Graham writes

This is not just a matter of filling a vacuum left by religion. Given the efforts artists made over a long period to disentangle their activities from the cultural history that gave rise to them, and this secure autonomy from the theological doctrines and religious practices that hitherto these activities had served, it is hardly surprising that many artists came to view Art as a new source of spiritual value for a world increasingly uncertain of its religious inheritance. The *spiritual* value of art is central to its having any significant value *as art*. (2007:48)

For Graham, Landy and Saler, one of the effects of art – and indeed one of its purposes – is to restore enchantment to an increasingly secularized world. Enchantment is suggested

as something that must be returned to life, something that was lost. A sense of nostalgia infuses their work and frames their analyses of enchantment as always a *re*-enchantment.

The most obvious critique of the account of enchantment and modernity offered by Graham, Landy and Saler is that their continued reliance on the categories of art and religion as sources of enchantment ignores the potential enchanting abilities of the spectacle of high capitalism; they ignore the potential enchantment that modernity itself produces. Bennett's rejection of the narrative of disenchantment itself includes the enchantment of the commodity, chiefly by locating "the enchantment effect primarily in the aesthetic or theatrical dimension of commodities and in the way that commodities function as tangible and public elaborations of, and experimentations with, personal and collective identities" (2001: 114). Can we re-introduce enchantment into scholarly discourse in a way that accounts for the materiality, histories and politics of the body?

Bennett further argues that the story of modernity as a master narrative is a disenchanting force that has precluded the possibility of locating, defining, experiencing and theorizing the very notion of enchantment. She argues that enchantment has not so much been lost in everyday life, but lost in modern scholarly discourse. In her work, Bennett takes enchantment seriously, simultaneously elucidating phenomenologically and somatically based formulations of enchantment. Even as Bennett argues against narratives that cast modernity as disenchanted, she recognizes several assumptions regarding the traces of enchantment in modernity. Bennett argues that common narratives would have us believe that in modern life, enchantment can only to be found in one of two realms: transcendent religious experiences, or aesthetic/sensuous experiences that are

assumed to be unconcerned with questions of political economy, cultural specificity or ethics: that enchantment belongs to the realm of the uncritical. Bennett's critical elaboration of enchantment offers both entry points into reading *Wandering Alice*'s specific choreographic strategies as productive of enchantment *and* into examining how these structures produce an enchanted spatiality and approach to urbanism that contests the narrative of disenchantment while critically engaging the haunted layers of meaning embedded in the site itself.

Choreographic Structures and Strategies of Enchantment

Wandering Alice creates an immersive, multisensorial environment that locates magic in the "mundane details of daily life", making use of its spatial home at Christ Church Neighborhood House to create an experience of discovery and travel for the audience. To create a sense of enchantment is clearly one effect of the choreography of the work. *Wandering Alice* melds movement, sound and sensation to engulf the audience, intensifying and saturating our experience as we discover the piece.

The choreographic engagement with the historicity of the space, the suggestion of interiority through the use of video, sound, and movement in relation to the specificity of the space, and the material and conceptual transformation of this familiar space emerge as Canuso's strategies or structures for producing enchantment. Canuso continually choreographs the practical and material aspects of the building in ways that suggest the creation of spaces of enchantment within everyday spatial practice. The piece's spatiality can be characterized by its prioritizing of discovery and encounter as well as its

conceptual creation of imagined interior spaces. *Wandering Alice* names and thereby asserts its own critical linkage to wonder or enchantment through its invocation/citation of *Alice in Wonderland*. It locates wonder in the practice of wandering. Wandering then emerges as the epistemological grounding for a choreography of enchantment and suggests a particular spatiality: discovery, happening upon, and encounter. The audience is positioned, like Alice, to discover the space as the piece unfolds. The ensemble of dancers serves as a group of guides leading us through the space with their thorough knowledge of all the nooks, crannies and corners. They position the audience in one location so that they might disappear from view and then reappear from some previously unnoticed opening. The rhythmic balance between motion and stillness on the part of the audience creates moments of meditative stillness, wherein the audience's experience of the choreography allows for an active re-imagining of the relationship between the site and the bodies of audience and performer. The technological moments that play with the audience's perception of images and materiality are startling and awe-inducing.

While the previous section sought to interrogate enchantment itself as it arose from my spectatorial experience of *Wandering Alice*, this section explores the precise choreographic strategies that emerge to produce a meaningful sense of enchantment as *Wandering Alice* unfolds throughout its site. Building from and intersecting with Bennett's analysis of enchantment, and following Lefebvre's suggestions of "structures of enchantment" I locate particular structures of enchantment in the choreography, design and performance of *Wandering Alice*. These choreographic structures in relationship with the extant architecture of the Neighborhood House produce specific spatialities that in

turn also contribute to the experience of enchantment and reveal how *Wandering Alice* performs its resistance to modernity's story of disenchantment. These structures locate magic in everyday spatial practice and act as a performative claim for the potentiality of magical transformation: the piece proposes that the experience of magic is not itself magic, but an approach to perceiving materiality, sensation, and memory in everyday urban spaces.

One choreographic and sonic structure deployed in *Wandering Alice*, and identified by Bennett as a formal modality for producing enchantment is repetition. Bennett notes that enchantment through repetitive sound and action is often part of what imbues religious and ritual practices with their sense of magic. She writes, “*enchantment* is a particular kind of mood, often induced by sound (the *chant* in enchantment). To be enchanted is to be both charmed and disturbed: charmed by a fascinating repetition of sounds or images, disturbed to find that, although your sense-perception has become intensified, your background sense of order has flown out the door” (2001: 34). In *Wandering Alice*, this occurs both through the sound design and the choreography. Early in the piece, when the audience first leaves the staircase we hear a chorus of voices chanting “will you forget in time” as we enter the dark room behind Alice. The line repeats over and over as a sped up repetition of the phrase layers in. It is difficult to determine where all the voices are coming from as they bounce off myriad surfaces. My own perception is that they are coming from all around me, surrounding me and despite being familiar with this building, it is at this moment that I begin to lose track of where exactly I am. Later, when the dancers lead the audience through the space with the strings

tied to their fingers they speak to us in rhythmic, repeated riddles (“are you running out of time said my tongue to my teeth to my lips to you mouth”).

Rhythmic repetition also emerges as a significant choreographic structure in several major sections of the piece. After Alice has cut all the strings and a curtain opens on the ensemble of dancers as they swirl in and out of line, repeating in canon, each phrase of movement. Like the repeated vocalizations, the establishing of movement rhythms through repetition by the chorus of dancers serves as a bodily chanting. In the section wherein the audience is led to the center of the space and the ensemble dances around us, they establish a repetitive rhythm to their steps. The rhythm of their steps as they run (one, pause, two, pause, one, two, three, four) serves as a continuous underlying beat to the movement encircling the audience upon which the dancers layer additional duets that punctuate the rhythm with stillness. These sections where sound and movement are repeated and layered result in intensified sense perception that both delights and disorients.

Furthermore, the chanting hidden voices are also an integral part of the spatiality choreographed and constructed by the piece: interiority. The primary spatial means by which *Wandering Alice* enchants is by creating another world interior to the material actuality of the Christ Church Neighborhood House. The choreography of performers and audience exploits the realities of the space to create this interior magical world. The staircase becomes a means of climbing into these other spaces and the doors, curtains and windows become portals offering the audience glimpses into spaces that seem to go beyond the brick walls. The central staircase and its dark wood banisters emphasize the

vertical geometry of the space and give the audience something against which to brace our bodies as we lean inward attempting to see what's happening above and below us. The audience is guided up and down the staircase such that we are never allowed to the very top or the very bottom. This careful choreography of the audience creates the effect of a never-ending staircase extending into an imagined infinite interior.

Each floor of the Neighborhood House has a large central space bordered by offices, hallways and various other small rooms and there are multiple entrances and exits to the large spaces. In addition to the extant architecture of the Christ Church Neighborhood House with its nooks and crannies, Canuso has additional set pieces: curtains, additional walls and doorways. With lighting, set pieces and props, the spaces transform even within the course of the performance. We are led through one passage to discover one secret, only to return to the same space from which we came to find it completely transformed. Lighting, set, props and movement, these have all been carefully choreographed to create a new and different scene within a familiar space. The overall effect is to create a performative world that is constantly transforming – as if through magic, and with each transformation, we are taken deeper into the interior of the space.

Practically, the intimacy of the space allows Canuso to direct the audience's attention to the experience of magic itself, generally masking the technical shifts that take place outside of audience view that help produce the magic. Logically the audience might infer what's going on, but we give ourselves over to the experience created for us. Like Alice in Wonderland, the world of daily life in this place exists in surreal riddles and

curiosities. When Kiley and Sugg appear through a small window taunting Alice with the direction “(don’t) cut the strings”, we can only imagine what is on the other side of that small opening. And this is not the only example: dancers disappear through unnoticed exits while our attention is focused elsewhere, we hear their chanting voices surrounding us, yet we cannot see from where these voices emanate.

Screen and projected images also aid in creating a spatiality of interiority. When the projected image of Alice appears on the man in yellow, it is logistically clear that this moment is a technological trick. We may even attempt to determine the precise mechanism of such a trick. But the actual effect is to create and emphasize a second interior conceptual space inside both the space of Christ Church and the body/space of the dancer where intimate and mysterious encounters become palpable multisensory experiences of enchantment. Technological magic transforms into conceptual magic. Despite being thoroughly enthralled by this moment in the choreography *and* being curious after the show about how such accurate timing was achieved between a live dancing body and an image projected onto this body, it was not until the fourth time I attended *Wandering Alice* that I saw the mirror mounted on the wall behind the audience and directly in front of van Reigersberg. These screens become windows into the interior world that we imagine these curious beings inhabiting – the conceptual space into which they disappear when we don’t see them. It is this technological trickery coupled with the actual space that creates a sense of interiority.

Bennett’s in depth consideration of enchantment suggests that while experiences of enchantment often occur spontaneously, “Such moments can be cultivated and

intensified by artful means. Enchantment, as I use the term, is an uneasy combination of artifice and spontaneity” (2001: 10). Bennett locates enchantment in several contemporary sites both material and conceptual by examining what she calls “crossings”: a straddling of realms of (sometimes drastically different) beings. These crossings might occur between cultures, technologies and even between species. Drawing from Franz Kafka’s literary figures, contemporary genetic science and the work of theorists Donna Haraway, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri, Bennett proposes a radical permeability of thresholds of being as a major site of enchantment in contemporary life (2001:17-55).

Applying this notion of crossing thresholds, Canuso choreographs a spatiality grounded in permeability and crossing. The material site of the Christ Church Neighborhood House becomes full of disappearing portals and screens giving its audience peaks into interior worlds beyond the walls. The audience is always positioned at the threshold, never fully allowed to cross into the interior space. Spatially, the choreographic positioning of the audience at the threshold allows us a full bodily apprehension of the performers who are able to cross into hidden realms. Their ability to “cross” between worlds is a source of enchantment. With wandering and wondering already established as interconnected modalities of perceiving this space, and with the space continually transforming, we are incited to wonder what’s happening in parts unknown of the Neighborhood House, while we wander through the pathway of events laid out for us. What else is happening in these interior spaces in the moments when we are not allowed a peek inside? Who are these beings and what do they do in this space?

As we are continually confronted with the question “ is it unclear how you got here”, despite my previous familiarity with this space, I find that yes, it is indeed unclear how I got here. While I can eventually trace my own steps, I continue to wonder how these beings that these dancers become got here and what roles they fulfill in the imagined interior world that led us here to this performance - and what they’ve been doing with all those notebook pages.

Haunting/Memory/Trace

Philadelphia photographer Jacques-Jean (JJ) Tiziou, well known in the dance community for his prolific photographic documentation of Philadelphia performance, as well as for his own projects, produced photographic documentation of a single performance of *Wandering Alice*, for the Live Arts Festival and Canuso. I am struck by the degree to which a single photograph taken by Tiziou is able to capture the tension between the materiality of the dancing body in the moment of action and the ghostly traces it leaves behind in memory (see Figure 7). In this photograph dancing bodies appear as a lingering energetic storm as they shift particles in space. The stillness of Tiziou’s body needed to maintain the extended exposure to create this image mimics the audience’s relative stillness in observing and experiencing the dance and the photograph itself is a powerful material trace of the kinesthetic sensations produced in *Wandering Alice*.



Figure 7 Dancers encircling the audience. 2008. © Jacques-Jean Tiziou / www.jjtiziou.net

The choreographed experience for the audience is one in which presence does not always materialize as fully visible. There is an almost constant whirl of action around the bodies of the audience, someone brushes up against me, I catch the trace of a body out of the corner of my eye, I turn around and it's gone, disappeared. The choreographic engagement of multiple modes of sensation and perception enhances the sensation that I know something happened that I did not see or fully apprehend at the moment it occurred. As audience member, I have come to terms with my experience as a *singular* experience. I will fully experience the materiality of some dancing bodies and not others. Others will haunt, I become aware of them as ghosts and some of my ghosts will be material for other audience members. I begin to become attuned to the existence of

invisible presence and comfortable with its existence, knowing that my full experience of the piece depends significantly on what whooshes by, unseen, or not quite seen.

The way in which the audience is choreographed in relation to the space and the ensemble of dancers creates a spatiality in which, at times I am fully aware of the material presence of these dancers, and at other times they are ghostly: I feel the energetic trace of them of them just having been there, and these haunting presences are just as vital to my kinesthetic experience of the piece as the material presences. As an audience member, I cultivate, during the course of the piece, an ease with experiencing these hauntings as a full experience of *this* performance. And, what is important here is how this causes me to react: moments where I myself whisk around in an attempt to catch the fleeting images of these ghosts – something behind me, I turn and it's gone, I turn back, I just missed something else. I am incited by the choreography to respond in a *haunted* way. Yet, for *Wandering Alice*, in the Christ Church Neighborhood House, the dancers' lingering presences are not the only ghosts that are conjured during the performance. Also present is the ghost of the historical Alice of Dunk's Ferry as well as the ghosts of other untold histories amidst the colonial and revolutionary histories of popular imagination.

This section explores the notion of haunting in social theory and how haunting emerges as the historical dimension of Canuso's structures of enchantment. The choreography of interiority makes corporeally present the palimpsestual histories mapped onto the site. Focusing in particular on the ghost of Alice of Dunk's Ferry, I examine how the performance of *Wandering Alice* activates a kinesthetic sensation of being haunted,

which in turn conjures the presence of a historical Alice. In the process the intertextuality of both Alices is revealed as the white Alice of 21st century experimental dance in Philadelphia is mapped onto a site where the enslaved black Alice of colonial Philadelphia has been a foundational layer in the racialized spatiality of Christ Church for over 300 years.

The spatiality of interiority is particularly important to *Wandering Alice* because in its production of enchantment, it aids in conceptualizing the site as urban palimpsest and in invoking specific histories that make up the layers of this palimpsest. If the piece creates, as argued above, an interior world beyond the walls and opens up performative portals, what is this world? Who lives in these other spaces? If the ensemble of dancers inviting Canuso's Alice in to discover their world are the space's archivists and custodians, they seep out of these portals carrying layers of history and memory with them. When I remember the physical sensations of *Wandering Alice*, I imagine Alice of Dunk's ferry as a ghostly presence. Maybe she was the one who brushed my leg and blew by my shoulder. Haunting is of course not an entirely comfortable experience. It can be scary and traumatic, startling and disconcerting, or exciting and playful. In *Wandering Alice*, haunting remains a crucial performative effect of the choreography of enchantment.

The notion of haunting has been theorized in several different ways in both social theory and performance theory. Developed both from theories of performativity and psychoanalysis, haunting serves as a mode of conceptualizing and accounting for something that is absent while still asserting its presence in some way. The idea of

“haunting” in general has been particularly germane to the theoretical problematic of performance’s supposedly ephemeral ontological status as an art form. This problematic emerges as the key underlying force in such seminal performance studies works as Peggy Phelan’s *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) and Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003).

Jacques Derrida coined the term “hauntology” in his work *Spectres of Marx* (1994) as a philosophical orientation towards historicity. Hauntology refers to the dual absence and presence of history, a state of both being and not being. Drawing from Derrida’s work, performance studies scholar Diana Taylor refers to “the hauntology of performance” (2003: 73) as a way of focusing on how a performance continues to act beyond the event of the performance itself. In *The Archive and the Repertoire* Taylor analyses the funeral of Princess Diana as a performance and examines the ways in which focusing on the “hauntology” of this particular performance helps us understand how Diana as ghostly figure continues to haunt popular consciousness. Taylor positions the “hauntology of performance” against what had previously been theorized by Peggy Phelan as the “ontology of performance”: its liveness and inevitable disappearance. In *Unmarked* Phelan writes, “Performance...becomes itself through disappearance” (1993: 146). The ghostly figure becomes invoked in performance as a process of memorializing. Phelan continues on to elaborate that “The disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered” (1993: 147).

Taylor's framework of haunting allows her to look at how a performance continues to act after the performance event itself is over. Taylor argues that the way in which this notion of hauntology functions

“stems from the way performances tap into public fantasies and leaves a trace, reproducing and at times altering cultural repertoires. Performance, then, involves more than an object (as in performance art), more than an accomplishment or a carrying through. It constitutes a (quasi-magical) invocational practice. It provokes emotions it claims only to represent, evokes memories and grief that belong to some other body. It conjures up and makes visible not just the live, but the powerful army of the always already living. “ (2003: 143).

Priya Srinivasan's approach to haunting in *Sweating Saris* emphasizes kinesthetic traces, locating them, for example, in the choreography of American modern dancer Ruth St. Denis. Srinivasan uncovers corporeal encounters between St. Denis and Indian dancers at Coney Island in 1904, revealing the ways in which these dancers haunt the history of American modern dance by leaving “traces through their dance practices despite having their bodies removed from the United States” (2012:66).

While I certainly agree that performance in general and *Wandering Alice* in particular conjures, haunts and leaves performative traces, Taylor's discussion in particular of Princess Diana comes to rely heavily on the circulation of mediatic images of the dead princess. To a large extent what is conjured is a narrative of Diana as mythological tragic figure and contemporary scenarios of fame, and what we are as audience told to feel in response. Princess Diana's funeral as a performance is *so* public, *so* mediatized as to become somewhat indistinguishable from the object-media that circulates post-funeral performance. The ghosts of Taylor's readings and analyses gain force through their reincarnation and circulation as image. They become objectified

through fetish and lose some of their ability to actually “haunt”. What about the ghosts that whisk by, brushing the skin, leaving goose bumps, only flashes that appear after corners turned? Since when were ghosts so in your face? In my view, media objects being essential elements of Diana’s ghost detract from considering what is actually *more* ghostly and *less* tangible about how a performance continues to “act” beyond the temporality circumscribed by liveness. I’d like to extend Taylor’s framework beyond the ghosts of the rich, famous and not so heavily publicized. I ask, where’s the trace when the trace is hard to find, when the ghost is sensation? Furthermore, if performance conjures the ghost, what does the ghost do during the performance itself? Like Srinivasan, I search for hauntings in the textual and embodied traces of corporeal encounter.

In *Wandering Alice*, the ghosts are both traces of the live performing bodies, like the wash of energy in Tiziou’s photograph *and* the material modality through which historical ghosts are activated. When Canuso as Alice “disappears” into Van Reigersberg’s body, his body becoming the interior “other” space, she is present and active, yet she is also somewhere else. Her ghostly presence incites action. At times he seems almost possessed by her as her absent body’s gestures affect his movement. The space of absent presence, and present absence, *already* intensified by this kind of choreography that plays with the presence of the performing body, where the materiality becomes at times indistinguishable from its traces, is where we as audience experience being haunted. It is this choreography of haunted space that activates further hauntings by social memory and multiple histories as choreography becomes both a process of

excavating the layers of memory in Christ Church while mapping the story of a new Alice onto the site.

In this tale of two Alice's, one of these Alices is a character created and performed by Nichole Canuso. The word I am using here, "character," implies fictional existence, unreality. But of the two Alices, she is the one I have experienced first hand, the one I could see, touch and perceive in a moment of mutual presence. The other Alice existed in a real historical moment to which I have little to no experiential access. A material object in memory of Alice of Dunk's Ferry now exists at the site of Christ Church Neighborhood House. The portrait as an object is a vehicle for the historical and cultural memory of a woman almost forgotten by official and popular narratives of American History in the city of Philadelphia. The painting of Alice represents a drive to resurrect via tangible material object, to memorialize. A hauntological approach to Alice as a ghostly presence opens up the possibility of being unsettled as well as the possibility of a more intimate memorial presence. As I continue to attend performances at this site, I always stop to look at the painting and I attend to the air around me, trying to sense the presence of both Alice's in the space. Yet, the painting's presence also calls attention to the absence of histories that account more fully for the involvement of enslaved black parishioners in the development of Christ Church as it stands today or in the history of old city architecture as metonym for the story of American Independence. Here, Taylor's theorizations apply most forcefully: "The way I see it, performance makes visible (for an instant, live, now) that which is always already there: the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life" (2003: 143).

Similarly to Taylor's framework, and drawing from Morrison's notion of the "ghost in the machine," Avery Gordon proposes the ghost as a social figure, haunting the present with what remains when the material disappears. Her focus is on the forgotten, and bringing forth what is normally in the margins of our consciousness: figures that official narratives of history have neglected. In her book *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008) Gordon writes, "Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (2008:8). Dance as a discursive modality has the ability to deploy a formal investigation, manipulation and organization of time and space as integral to the discourse it produces. The nature of this discourse allows it to be both fluid in its moment of creation while still able to circulate as dance/text in post-performance moments. Gordon suggests that "to write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories. To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects" (2008:17).

Indeed, materiality - the real live-ness of dancing bodies - complicates the figure of the ghost. If the ghost is an active historical subject that is also immaterial, how do we locate it amongst a constantly moving materiality of choreographed bodies? In the case of *Wandering Alice*, it is only in the movement of material bodies in the choreography of enchantment that we become kinesthetically aware of a ghostly presence. Following Taylor and Gordon, I see the work of *Wandering Alice* as an act of conjuring, not of

“capturing enchantment” but of producing enchantment, making it corporeal and experience-able.

Diana Taylor also attempts to account for tensions between material presence and absence, writing that

“performance rests on the notion of ghosting, that visualization that continues to act politically even as it exceeds the live. Like Phelan’s definition it hinges on the relationship between visibility and invisibility, or appearance and disappearance, but comes at it from a different angle. For Phelan, the defining feature of performance – that which separates it from all other phenomena – is that it is live and disappears without a trace.” (2003:143).

If, as Avery Gordon suggests, ghosts produce “material effects”, there are always traces.

In the case of *Wandering Alice*, Christ Church is haunted by the invisible presence of those absent from the official tourist-centered history. If Gordon might have us understand “conjuring” as a device through which to bring forth what disappears and is too soon forgotten, choreographic conjuring should be understood as a kind of ritual organizing of moving bodies in space to produce the effect of haunting, to stir presence, to raise hairs, to convene a confluence of presences with no clear origin. Haunting can then be thought of as the experience of disappearing presence. The performative effects of this performance rest in the affective corporeal memory incited in my body every time I enter, pass by or even think about Christ Church.

Through the choreographic manipulation of absence and presence in her skillful use of technology and the Neighborhood House’s architecture, Canuso accentuates performance as an already ghostly endeavor. Dancers whisk by, appearing and disappearing as if through the cracks and corners of the brick and mortar church. They manifest *as* ghostly because they create for the audience, the physical sensation of

invisible presence. By choreographing a space that *feels* haunted, *Wandering Alice* then creates portals through which historical ghosts are summoned: Alice of Dunk's Ferry and the ghosts of those as of yet not/never to be named peoples of colonial Philadelphia.

So, this remains a tale of two Alices: two mutually referential and interconnected presences whose apparitions intersect as a moment of enchantment in memory, history and performance. Nichole Canuso creates with *Wandering Alice* a space that is haunted. The ensemble performs the duality of the ethereal immaterial longing of past-ness: the ghosts that haunt Christ Church and the Neighborhood House. Yet they do this with the specificity of their performing presences in their material dancing bodies. Both these Alice's shape an understanding of what Christ Church means in the urban spatial fabric of Philadelphia and were shaped by – albeit very different- versions of Philadelphia. These two Alices, nevertheless, speak to two ghostly presences specific to Philadelphia, now haunting Christ Church.

Performing the Postmetropolis: Kate Watson-Wallace/Anonymous Bodies and Spaces of Dystopia

Introduction

Prior to experiencing Kate Watson-Wallace's *Car*, I knew very little about the piece. I had met Watson-Wallace previously as a dancer/performer but had never known her choreographic work. All I had to go on was the menacing yet authoritatively blunt provocation printed in the 2008 Live Arts Festival guide:

Buy a ticket. Go to the garage. Give the ticket to the parking attendant. Do as he says. You will be inside the car with three other passengers.

As it turns out, these five brusque instructions were a fitting preview to the anxious yet playful uncertainty that permeated my experience of *Car* in its totality.

Choreographer and dancer Kate Watson-Wallace first came to Philadelphia to study dance at Temple University. When she soon began performing with Philadelphia companies and choreographers including Group Motion, Myra Bazell and Headlong Dance Theater, she decided to leave University and develop her artistic work in practice. In the Philadelphia dance community she is often known affectionately as “Wawa”, Wawa also being a large chain of convenience stores along the east coast but with an oddly endearingly cultural importance to the Southeast Pennsylvania region. Even when working choreographically or on movement based projects, Watson-Wallace considers herself to be more of a visual artist, interested in installation-based work rather than work for the stage. In addition to her performance installation projects, Watson-Wallace, deeply interested in popular forms, community building and the accessibility of art, has also choreographed

music videos, flash mobs and collaborated with musicians and DJs to throw performance and installation based parties (Kate Watson-Wallace, personal interview, 18 May 2012). While working with Artists U, a professional development organization founded and run at the time by Andrew Simonet of Headlong Dance Theater, Watson-Wallace, at the suggestion of Simonet, decided to create a trilogy of works as a means of exploring her interests in site specificity and installation based dance. Her resulting *American Spaces Trilogy* was comprised of *House* (2006), *Car* (2008) and *Store* (2009). These three works were all performed as part of the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival under the company name Kate Watson-Wallace / Anonymous Bodies. In 2011, fellow choreographer/performer Jaamil Kosoko, who had already been performing and collaborating with Watson-Wallace as well as with Nichole Canuso Dance Company and Headlong Dance Theater, joined Watson-Wallace as co-director of Anonymous Bodies (Kate Watson-Wallace, personal interview, 18 May 2012).

While the three pieces of the *House/Car/Store* trilogy can and should be considered in the context of Watson-Wallace's assertion of these sites as American spaces as well in relation to the proposition - as suggested by her company name - of anonymous bodies, this chapter will focus on a close reading of the centerpiece of the trilogy, *Car*. I examine the ways in which its particular spatiality manifests ideas about the relationship between urban space and the cinematic and confronts the blurring of the real and virtual in the production of postmetropolitan urbanism.

In essence, each piece in the American Spaces trilogy names its site in the title of the piece. *Car* does indeed take place in and around a moving vehicle. Choreographed for

an audience of only four at a time, the audience experiences the majority of the piece while seated inside a car. However, the car is not the only site important to understanding the spatiality of the piece. The piece also takes place entirely in a parking garage. Both sites evoke a multitude of associations, which become essential to the experience of *Car's* choreographic world.

In this chapter I will emphasize two significant components of the production of space in *Car*: the car in relation to the parking garage/lot as emblem of American modernity and the role the cinematic plays in our experience of urban space. Beginning with a description of the piece based both on my own experience of it as audience/passenger and video documentation, I will move on to explore the cinematic aspects of *Car* in fleshing out its spatiality. Essentially, how does a live performance constitute its spatiality at least in part via the cinematic screen image? Using film noir images and tropes, I will demonstrate that by using particular physical and choreographic strategies to produce and tweak film noir sensibilities, Watson-Wallace choreographs a disorienting and cinematic space that foregrounds the danger and technological mediation in urban centers. I argue that *Car's* particular spatiality creates a performative environment that problematizes the role of the cinematic image in the construction and perception of urban space. In cutting against romantic notions of revolutionary and communitarian urbanism found in Lefebvre's writings, *Car* choreographically confronts the dangerous realities of the (post)modern city. By putting the audience in a world where the material/sensorial take on imagistic qualities and where physical sensation enables a filmic reading of the piece, *Car* underscores the reality of multisensorial perception in the

contemporary urban postmetropolis. *Car* foregrounds the cinematic city paradoxically through live and embodied performance and spectatorship, while the cinematic underscores its live-ness, drawing out the tensions between discourses on propinquity and body to body interaction and the highly mediated individualism of (post)modern urban life.

Finally, drawing from Jean Baudrillard's discussion of the hyperreal in his book *America* (1988), as well as Edward Soja's "Six Discourses on the Postmetropolis" (2000: 145-345), I argue that *Car*, through the medium of live performance, complicates any remaining perceived distinction between *real* urban space and cinematic representation of that space. Further, I examine the way in which, by calling attention to the postmetropolis' shifty confusion between real and virtual space and through its invocation of tropes and emblems of American modernity, *Car* establishes an essential relationship to the transformations of urban spaces through the decline of Fordist means of production, car culture and suburbanization, globalization and the so-called decay or decentering of the American city. Thus, through its choreographic spatiality *Car* positions itself in relation to and indeed participates in discourses of postmodern urban dystopia and postmetropolitan urbanism.

Choreography in Concrete

The actual execution of *Car* required a sort of marathon performance style as the piece was choreographed for an audience of only four at a time. To ensure the largest possible total audience, *Car* ran for fourteen of the sixteen days of the 2008 Live Arts

Festival. Running approximately 30-minutes in length, the piece was performed every half hour for three and a half to four hours: six or seven performances per evening.

Watson-Wallace ultimately employed two different casts so that three of the dancers from her original cast – Makoto Hirano, Jaamil Kosoko and Lorin Lyle – could also perform in *Wandering Alice*, which also premiered during the 2008 festival.¹⁹ The remainder of that cast included performers Megan Mazarick and Alex Holmes. The second cast also featured Philadelphia area performers Eun Jung Choi-Gonzalez, Miko Doi-Smith, Jodi Obeid, Guillermo Ortega, Brian Osborne, Jumatatu Poe and Michelle Tantoco. Watson-Wallace performed every night. The first cast performed on the evening I attended as well as in the video documentation provided to me by Watson-Wallace. My description of *Car* as my experience of it unfolded will, therefore, reflect the performances of the original cast (Philadelphia Live Arts and Fringe Festival Guide, 2008).

Car took place at the parking garage attached to the Fresh Grocer at 40th and Walnut streets. This parking lot is owned and operated by the University of Pennsylvania parking services.²⁰ I arrived at the parking lot about fifteen minutes prior to the 8:30 performance. The pedestrian entrance to the parking lot is actually in the lobby of the Fresh Grocer, where customers access the store from the lot via stairwell or elevator. A festival volunteer greets audience members as they arrive as this is still an operational grocery store and there are shoppers continually in and out. After milling about

¹⁹ See chapter 2 on *Wandering Alice*

²⁰ <http://cms.business-services.upenn.edu/parking/>, 1 April 2013

uncomfortably with my three fellow audience members, someone arrives to give us further direction.

We are instructed to take the elevator to level 5 and then take a right off the elevator and continue around the ramp to level 6. Halfway up the ramp we see a silver Volkswagen Jetta. We are to get inside the car and wait for our driver. This could potentially be somewhat confusing, but we are also given a map, so I'm fairly confident we'll make it to the right car. As we tentatively follow these directions, I become even more aware that the grocery store is still open and regular shoppers are using the parking garage. Will they see this? What will they think? Who will my driver be? Is he/or she licensed? Am I safe? In the concrete darkness and dim lights of the parking garage - already for me an anxiety-producing locale - I do as I am told, trusting the experience that has been choreographed for me. As we walk up the ramp in search of the Jetta, we see a set of high-heeled legs and the bottom of a red dress poking out from underneath the back end of a parked car. I know this must be part of the performance - it seems a familiar filmic and televisual image - especially for someone who watches a fair amount of crime dramas. Still, I hope nobody calls the police. We continue on, rounding the corner and we see the Jetta. Despite the explicit directions, there is still some concern on my part that I'm mistaken, and that it's possible that I'm getting into the wrong car. Soon after we pack into the car - three squished in the back seat and me in the front passenger seat - a man on a cell phone comes down a set of stairs and approaches the car. I eventually recognize him to be Makoto Hirano - a performer with whom I am familiar. I know he is in this show so this must be our driver. I secretly wish that I didn't know so

many performers in Philadelphia as my experience of the work is so clearly informed by my knowledge of who is performing and who is not. What would it be like if I didn't have this knowledge? Would I be more anxious? Cramming into this compact car with three other people I do not know is more like being in a small airplane than a proscenium theater. I have to accept that I'm more or less stuck here for the duration. I don't have the freedom to move about as seems frequent in other site-specific performance, yet the prospect of getting out and simply leaving, which is always an option in a theater, also feels foreclosed. I feel that I have made an unspoken agreement to do exactly as I am told and that it is potentially a matter of safety: I'm in an automobile and I do not know what is about to happen. The prospect of Makoto – someone I know – being the driver comforts me somewhat.

Makoto approaches us, confused and concerned. He pokes his head through the open driver's side window. Who are we and what are we doing in his car? We were told to get in, we explain. But clearly he needs his car. Frustrated with the situation, he eventually gets in the driver's seat, and drives slowly and steadily, as would seem appropriate for a parking garage. A pulsing and sometimes screeching sound score begins to play through the car speakers heightening my sense of physical anxiety. It feels somewhat disconcerting to be a passenger in this car under these circumstances. As we continue up the ramp, I see a female figure stumbling and staggering across parking levels, blonde in turquoise sequined skirt and leather jacket, possible intoxicated. I recognize her as Magan Mazarick. I'm not entirely sure where Makoto is driving us; even

at a relatively stable and modest speed, we seem to go up and down ramps randomly and I lose track of what level we're on.

As the car continues, I see the high-heeled legs and red dress I had seen under the car, this time clearly attached to an entire woman, walking purposefully up the stairway. And, we keep encountering Megan Mazarick's drunk party girl. On our third meeting with this character, she stumbles right into the front end of the car, at first bouncing off and away and then returning, climbing up the hood. With her face smashed against the glass, she keeps trying to curl up and rest on the car, and Makoto keeps tapping the glass trying to get her to move. She climbs even further up to the roof of the car and then slides down the windshield. Just when I think she might slide right off the car, and we might accidentally run over her, she stops herself jumping back to the roof of the car. I can no longer see her through any of the windows but I can definitely hear her on the hood. The car stops suddenly and she slides again down the windshield, this time off the car completely. Stumbling away her attention shifts dramatically as she transitions into a precise and jerky phrase of release infused movement. After her initial precision she slides in and out of her drunk-girl role, simultaneously stumbling and falling and executing precise gestures: swinging her leg around to a handstand and landing smoothly on her knees or from the ground, kicking her legs into a shoulder stand before rolling and spiraling skillfully to her feet.

The sound score begins to take on a siren quality. It is not loud and painfully disrupting as a siren is meant to be, yet the pulsing tone is still disturbing. The girl approaches the car once again leaning in an open window before continuing her detailed

yet spasmodic gesturing, scooting, rolling and jerking. She returns to the car one last time, attempting to get comfortable on the windshield before our driver honks and she finally leaves us alone, kicking and throwing her arms at us as we drive away.

As we continue we approach a couple. A man dressed in a dark suit and a woman in a white coat dance a duet of lifts and counterbalances, throwing their bodies and catching each other sharply and confidently. Behind them lined up side-by-side are seven figures in white jumpsuits walking towards us. They remind me of mechanics in their suits, but their uniformity and the sense I get that this parking lot is their turf is menacing. As they get closer and closer I hear them talking. Not talking; they are yelling, goading, taunting. They get right up close to the car, leaning in. They shout at us intensely for about five seconds before abruptly disappearing. What just happened? Three of them run out of view while the other four run and get into a car parked in front of us. They peel out of the spot and speed away. Our driver decides to follow.

We drive up another level and see a second car, guarded by the people in white jumpsuits as two figures in suits get out and come toward us. There seems to be some sort of scenario or transaction occurring here, a mystery to be solved by someone other than me. Shady figures conducting shady business. As they approach the driver's side, one dancer leans in saying "I'm going to have to ask you to get out of your car" but before she even finishes the request, she leans in, grabs Makoto, pulls him out through the window and tosses him on the ground. Uh oh. What am I witnessing here? As she gets in the driver seat, another man in a suit (Jaamil Kosoko) opens the passenger side and takes me and another passenger to the other car. Now I actually feel like I'm caught up in this,

like I've seen something I shouldn't have seen and I'm slightly concerned about what they intend to do with me.

In the other car, with the femme fatale women in the red dress – played by Watson-Wallace - in the driver's seat, we take off leaving two audience members behind. Now I'm worried about what might happen to them. As we drive circuitously around the garage, a screen on the dashboard plays video of a duet. My fellow audience member and I investigate our surroundings, looking out the windows, around and behind us and I realize that the video on the screen is of a trio happening behind the car I'm in. I assume, and it is later confirmed by Watson-Wallace, that there is a camera on the back of the car, filming the trio in real time. This dance begins to get closer to the car, invading and assaulting the supposed safety of this vehicular capsule in which I am riding. With the car still moving, they start climbing and jumping onto the car. There's a cacophony of banging and crashing as bodies land and at times bash themselves into the car. It becomes difficult to keep track of all three bodies and thus virtually impossible to predict when these bangs and crashes might occur. With all this action, I am no longer paying attention to the video screen, and consequently I do not remember whether or not it continued to play for the duration of this part of the piece. This section was, for me, the most surprising and physically startling. The sense of anxiety that I had been experiencing became noticeably physical in my body as I reacted to each impact between the dancers and the car. Eventually we leave them behind and I have a moment to calm down. At this moment, I also have time to wonder what the other two audience members are experiencing in the first car.

According to video documentation, in the Jetta, Alex and Jaamil in the front seat engage in a tender and playful duet that begins simply between hands and arms and builds until Jaamil is hanging out of the passenger side window, basking in the sensation of the night air. This duet continues until the car reaches the roof of the parking structure. The car stops abruptly and Alex bursts out the car rushing to what seems to be a very particular spot on the vast roof space. Jaamil joins her soon after and their duet continues, the two audience/passengers still observing from inside the car.

No longer trapped by the car, the duet is simultaneously expansive and jumpy, filled with both tender contact and more surprising counterbalances and lifts. One of the white jumpsuit dancers appears, closing the passenger side door and taking over as driver. As the duet stills somewhat, alternating between empathetic caresses and uncontrollable shaking, the car begins to circle them, giving the passengers a 360 degree view of this unsettling oscillation between spasm and embrace.

At this point, the two diverging cars meet once again as the car that I am in arrives on the roof and, like the Jetta already there, circles the duet between Alex and Jaamil. There is an overlapping moment when both cars are circling both the dancers and each other. The nighttime lights of the city skyline seem a stark contrast to the enclosed, concrete exhaust-filled garage. After this cinematic panorama, both cars back up to a flat part of the roof and face off, taunting each other. The original Volkswagen comes to a stop in the center of this space while the second car, which I am in, is parked a distance away. The chorus of white jumpsuit-clad mechanics reappears and escorts all

audience/passengers out of the cars and off to the side. Unlike the previous transfer of passengers, this time I'm fairly certain I know what is about to happen.

With the car in neutral, approximately twelve dancers, including Makoto, the original driver, push the car back and forth, testing the force and momentum of each push. They run, encircling the car ready at both ends to catch the car before any chance that it might crash. While the car is being pushed and caught back and forth, a dancer dives into an open window, into the backseat, opens the door and tumbles out. Other dancers jump up onto the car, standing on the window edges riding the movement of the car. Before the car comes to a complete stop, the dancer on the driver's side slides through the window, back into the driver's seat and backs the car out of the scene and out of view.

While the chorus runs off and over a railing, I am led by foot, along with the rest of the reunited audience, around to a ramp that looks to span the entire length of the garage. The chorus, spaced all the way down the ramp, performs a unison phrase swirling and sweeping their limbs, spiraling to the ground, and rolling back up to their feet. A moment to remember and absorb the movement of bodies without the car, they perform this movement with both a precise mechanism and the suspended, swinging quality of a pendulum. We are led through these bodies back to and left inside the second car. As Watson-Wallace drives us down the ramp, several members of the chorus slather the windows, including the sunroof with a white, soapy substance. It feels like going through a car wash, but I notice that the soap leaves the windows opaque transforming the front and rear windshields, sunroof, and all passenger windows into screens upon which

images are projected. I see Makoto's image, flying across the roof. This projected Makoto circles around the car sometimes floating and sometimes peaking back into the car. The driver turns on the windshield wipers and the images instantly disappear as we are driven back down to the elevator. With the credits projected onto the concrete rafters and pillars, I am finally released from this surreal journey. I notice some residual tension and anxiety in my chest, and re-entering the "real" world is eerily jarring. I adjust to the chaos of activity on the street. I'm trying to make sense of the performance as I revel in my non-seat-bound mobility. I walk back to the subway stop at 40th and Market St. It occurs to me that it would have been quite inconvenient to find parking, had I not taken the subway to see *Car*.

Car Culture: Driving and Parking

While the other works in Watson Wallace's *American Spaces* trilogy literally name their site, as in *House* and *Store*, *Car* is more complex in its siting in that there are actually two sites. The car itself serves as a mobile site within the larger site of the parking garage. As the effect of cars on the American landscape has been both monumental and total and the resulting scholarship, both celebratory and ominous, it is necessary to examine the culture and spaces of automobility before turning to *Car's* specific spatiality.

The car, as a fundamental symbol of modernity, prompted Roland Barthes to make the following provocation:

I think that cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals: I mean the supreme creation of an era, conceived with passion by

unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage by a whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object (1972: 88)

This passage speaks to the degree to which the entire architectural landscape of the US and beyond has transformed around the car as aesthetic, social, and cultural object. As a liminal space, the car as capsule has fundamentally transformed the ways in which Americans engage in the collective choreography of organizing their bodies in their living, working and social spaces. The remainder of this section will summarize some of the significant ways in which car culture manifested and has been expressed in the United States as well as the impact it has had on American spaces.

Writing on the historical development of car culture, particularly in the United States, tends to focus on either the car as symbol of freedom, mobility, accessibility and spaciousness or as harbinger of congestion, urban decay and danger (Wollen and Kerr 2002). Film scholar Peter Wollen's introduction to *Autopia: Cars and Culture* (2002) seeks to link movies and modernity with car culture through the obsession with and portrayal of cars and car culture in films such as *Bonnie and Clyde*, *American Graffiti*, and *Thelma and Louise* while drawing attention to the threat of the crash at the center of car culture's intersection with celebrity. Wollen juxtaposes Jack Kerouak's romantic mythologizing of the freedom to access the vastness of America on the open road with the "cult status of death-dealing celebrity car crashes" (2002a:7) like those of James Dean or Princess Diana. In the same volume, Wollen later tracks car culture's relationship to 20th century art, citing Andy Warhol's "car crash" series (2002b:33) as well as Diego Rivera's famous mural of Henry Ford's River Rouge factory as well as Rivera's

observation that the factory itself served as a monument to “the might, the power, the energy, the sadness, the glory, the youthfulness of our lands” (qtd in Wollen 2002b:30).

While popular film documented both the potential for individual mobility and bodily harm, architects, planners, geographers and politicians tracked the effect the car was having on the material landscape of the country and its urban spaces in particular. 20th century American culture seen through the lens of automobility links together histories of art, entertainment and celebrity, (post)modernity, and arguably most importantly, transformative shifts in labor and economy through the rise and fall of Fordist production. Peter Wollen notes that in Henry Ford’s 1922 autobiography *My Life and Work*, the chapter entitled “the terror of the machine” does not surprisingly deal with the danger and threat of crashing a car itself, but with the terror of the routinized labor perfected in his own factories (2002a:18).

In his famous *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1988) modernist theorist Marshall Berman poignantly describes the destruction of his Bronx neighborhood as it is razed to make room for Robert Moses’ Cross-Bronx Expressway. Berman’s account emphasizes the brutality and destruction of Moses modernist vision of automobility for New York, even as Berman himself marvels at the new Art Deco construction (1988: 290-296).

In her famous *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) urbanist Jane Jacobs rejected Robert Moses’ expressways as detrimental to urban life and instead advocated for multiplicity in cities in the form of dense population, pedestrian friendly streets, mixed use and mixed age buildings. Yet, under the guise of urban renewal, Moses-style freeways blasted their way right through cities all over the country cementing

suburbanization and America's dependence on the automobile. (Holtz Kay 2002)

European photographer Andrew Cross, inspired by Jean Baudrillard's *America* and seeking to experience the vastness of America by car, documents his own road-trip in his essay "Driving the American Landscape" (2002). Like Baudrillard, he remarks on the quaintness of diners and gas stations as he begins to realize how the interstate highway system allows him to completely bypass America's cities and towns, as he travels between monotonous hubs of motels, diners and gas stations at highway intersections (2002:249-258).

While this scholarship on the culture of automobility in the U.S. charts obsession with and dependence on cars, the architectural feature of car culture most significant to understanding *Car's* spatiality is, of course, the parking garage. While the "problem" of parking is often central to the critique of car culture's transformation of American urban spaces, there is a dearth of scholarship on the cultural and historical significance of parking lots and garages as intentional, designed, urban spaces and their role in how we produce – in the Lefebvrian sense – contemporary urban spaces. Most significantly, geographer-historians John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle's book *Lots of Parking: Land Use in a Car Culture* (2004) tackles parking lots and structures as distinct urban structures that arose as a direct matter of practicality, but whose histories and cultural impact are as significant as the car itself.

Jakle and Sculle describe how, with the advent of the automobile, dense urban environments experienced a rapid increase in vehicle congestion worsened by curbside only parking. By the early 20th century, buildings were cut back to widen streets and

others were razed completely to make room for parking lots. In downtown urban districts like central Philadelphia, warehouses, small factories and structures originally built to house horse-drawn transportation were converted to garage style automobile storage. Many if not all of these lots and garages were commercially owned and operated often as temporary investment in urban real estate. While American downtowns saw a rapid increase in urban parking sites, more cars and fewer bodies were actually occupying these districts. Jakle and Sculle offer a Philadelphia-specific statistic: “Between 1928 and 1938 there was an 11 percent drop in the number of people entering Philadelphia each day, but a 52 percent increase in the number of automobiles” (2004: 62). By the mid 20th century, municipal governments became involved in the parking problem to maintain commercial viability of downtown businesses and shopping districts competing with new suburban shopping malls that offered free at the door parking to regulate and ensure permanent parking solutions. Jakle and Sculle argue that the contemporary parking garage emerged as both permanent urban parking solution *and* answer to the urban voids created by vast lots: the garage as structure asserts both its objecthood and intentionality in urban design and renewal projects meant to reinvigorate downtown commerce, increasing the value of dense (and often old) urban spaces as desirable spaces even as the American landscape became increasingly suburbanized. Design strategies shifted as the objecthood of garages lent them an air of value and intention in an urban built environment. From the 1920s through the 1940s, the design of parking garage ramps maximized efficiency of entrance and egress helping to make garages a profitable private industry as well as a key necessity for any car-friendly urban center. In the latter half of the 20th century, parking

garages saw an increase in crime, particularly theft and violent crimes against women (Jackle & Sculle 2004).

It is both the maze-like design of parking garages made possible by ramp design and the association with danger and violence that attracted Watson-Wallace to the garage as site and setting. In addition to security concerns around personal safety, concerns met most frequently with guards and surveillance, parking structures were seen by critics of car culture like Jane Jacobs as emblems of the threat of decline that American cities were experiencing. Jackle and Sculle note that “American cities, especially when seen from the air, resembled the bombed out cities of Europe immediately after World War II” (2004:161). Parking lots and garages represented potentially dangerous changes to the fabric of American urban life.

While Jane Jacobs connects the problem of automobile traffic to the decay of street life and the emptying out of urban centers leaving spatial voids where vital public spaces could be instead, urban planner and designer Eran Ben-Joseph points out that later 20th and 21st century parking lots actually have become vital public spaces for hangouts, tailgating parties, protests, games and performance (2012). Dance scholar SanSan Kwan’s elaboration on shopping malls in *Kinesthetic City*, as centers for social connection and kinesthetic articulations of Chineseness in Los Angeles, makes clear how spaces of automobility blur distinctions between civic and commercial spaces. Kwan also rightly acknowledges that in a city like Los Angeles, car culture and the lack of efficient public transportation can limit mobility as only those with access to a vehicle can claim these spaces kinesthetically. Kwan argues that “Los Angeles is both

representative and superlative of the contemporary American, car-dependent city” (2013: 128) as it seems that Los Angeles also represents the *immobility* of car culture.

Philadelphia’s relationship to car culture is not unlike that of any other American city with congested highways serving as major arteries of travel between the city’s center and its suburban neighborhoods, many of which are not actually incorporated into the city itself. Yet, like New York, Philadelphia’s urban core is made up of many small neighborhoods while its grid structure and walkable scale are kinesthetically palpable. When I moved to Philadelphia after more than three years in Southern California, I felt liberated from my car. I recall numerous occasions driving the highways of Los Angeles, when I could see my destination from the traffic in which I was stuck, and longed to abandon my car and simply walk. In contrast, Philadelphia’s center city is easy to navigate on foot or by subway, bus or trolley. The density of city blocks, the expense of parking and the Philadelphia Parking Authority’s notorious enthusiasm for ticketing, make both public transportation and cycling desirable and realistic modes of transport within Philadelphia. The reality of driving in Philadelphia is a complex negotiation between cars navigating narrow one-way streets, often strictly enforced parking regulations, cyclists and pedestrians sharing the same urban spaces. The multistoried garage rather than expansive lot is a common feature in Philadelphia’s tightly packed center city and while I rarely drive into old city, the rumbling sound and jumpy, erratic, bouncing of the car as the road transitions from asphalt to cobblestone is unmistakable.

Cinematic Spatiality

Car's specific spatiality is produced through the dialectical relationship between urban space, cinematic space and choreographic space. This section explores the ways in which the choreographic spatiality produced and embodied in *Car* foregrounds the cinematic nature of the city – that is the ways in which filmic images of the city and the material formation of the city have come to produce each other and shape the modalities of perception through which we apprehend the city – both lived and in representation.

The relationship between urban space and cinematic space has been widely theorized most notably by Jean Baudrillard in *America* (1988) and *Simulation and Simulacra* (1995) building upon Walter Benjamin's observations on film and the camera in his now infamous "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1968). Drawing from these texts I investigate what it might mean for a cinematic space to be produced choreographically and the difference that the experiential framework of live performance and kinesthesia make in *Car*'s cinematic spatiality. Drawing from familiar filmic tropes, particularly from film noir and neo-noir, Watson-Wallace choreographs an immersive experience that is just as dependent on notions of the lens and the screen as it is on the audience's embodied participation. By blurring the lines between "real" urban space and movie set, and more importantly, playing with how we perceive them, Watson-Wallace enacts and complicates Baudrillard's simulacral city. I also demonstrate that the interplay between the cinematic and the material/kinesthetic help produce a sense of disorientation, which informs the overall spatial production of the piece.

In 1988, Jean Baudrillard wrote in *America*, “Where is the cinema? It is all around you outside, all over the city, that marvelous, continuous performance of films and scenarios” (56), spurring a proliferation of scholarship at the intersection of urban studies and film theory and analysis²¹. Building on the work of Baudrillard, Benjamin, as well as Lacanian film theory, these scholars suggest that the development of film cannot be thought through independently from the development of the modern and postmodern city from both the perspectives of image and representation and of industry and production. If, as Steven Shaviro puts in in *The Cinematic Body*, “Cinema is at once a form of perception and a material perceived” (1993:41), *Car*’s use of the cinematic demands that it may in part be apprehended as such.

In his introduction to *Noir Urbanisms: Dystopic Images of the Modern City*, historian Gyan Prakash explains the significance of Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” to the study of cinema and the city:

“He [Benjamin] pointed out that with such techniques as close-ups, enlargement, slow motion, and editing, cinema rearranged the cityscape and brought to light ‘entirely new structures of matter’ and ‘unknown aspects within them.’ This recomposed representation of urban experience by film was related to cultural transformation in perception in the modern city, ‘changes that are experienced on the scale of private existence by each passerby in big-city traffic.’ In this sense, cinema, according to Benjamin, was not restricted to images on-screen in the darkened theater but formed part of the larger apparatus of perception in the modern city. (2010:6)

Benjamin’s text is infused with the uncertainty of what these perceptual shifts, mapped onto modernity at large, might mean for artistic production as well as the

²¹ See Prakash, Gyan ed. *Noir Urbanisms: Dystopic Images of the Modern City*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010; Clarke David D. ed. *The Cinematic City*. London: Routledge, 1997; Shiel, Mark and Tony Fitzmaurice eds. *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001

aesthetics and experience of urban space. Baudrillard, on the other hand, is fascinated with his seeming certainty of a dystopic city of images and artifice. More even than a question of representation and perception, Baudrillard sees very little distinction between the city and the cinematic; they collapse into each other. Baudrillard famously writes, “The American city seems to have stepped right out of the movies. To grasp its secret, you should not then, begin with the city and move inwards to the screen, you should begin with the screen and move outwards to the city” (1988: 56). In the (post)modern city, Baudrillard’s hyperreal manifests as the loss of any ability to distinguish between reality and the representation of reality. The cinematic image merges so fully with the city that the production of city space seems to have yielded a homogenized, generic American city. Still, there is also a spatial logic proposed for apprehending the city: outwards from the screen to the city. Baudrillard’s concern is with the ways in which what we see on the screen manifests in the materiality of the (artificial) American city.

Baudrillard’s notion of the hyperreal is preceded by Benjamin’s argument that the development of film as a widely accessible medium coupled with the rapid shifts modernity brought about in the economies of images resulted in societal shifts in how we perceive our material world. Benjamin writes:

In the studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of a special procedure, namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted camera and the mounting of the shot together with other similar ones. The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology (1968: 233).

Sociologist Mark Shiel argues that while film studies has historically relied on textual reading in its methodology, film is ultimately a spatial medium and must be analyzed as such. Shiel writes,

Cinema operates best and is best understood in terms of the organization of space: both *space in films* – the space of the shot; the space of the narrative setting; the geographical relationship of various setting sin sequence in a film; the mapping of a lived environment on film; and *films in space* – the shaping of lived urban spaces by cinema as a cultural practice.... (2001: 5)

Watson-Wallace confronts these questions of cinematic perception head-on, while asking how the framework of live performance might complicate these modalities. She deploys several choreographic strategies in *Car* (in addition to the iconic film noir imagery discussed later) to create kinesthetic cinematic experiences for the audience. If cinematic visuality informs our visual perception of our urban spaces, *Car* offers a corporealized physical experience of the position of the camera. Familiar camera actions –close-ups and zoom-ins - are replicated in close-up as drunk girl climbs and drapes her body across the windshield or as the car moves through a sea of screaming dancers; bodies feel the momentum of zooming in and out, are dizzyed by the panoramic encircling of action. Rather than choreographing a straightforward performance installation wherein the audience might move freely amidst and around the performance action, containing the audience within the car allows Watson-Wallace to replace the camera as technological apparatus with the car, framing action through the windows and replicating camera movements while the audience remains seated.

At the penultimate moment of *Car*, the audience arrives at the very top of the garage and the dark cramped, enclosed interior of the garage opens to the expanse of the

city. Suddenly the lights and shapes of the Philadelphia skyline remind me that I am indeed in Philadelphia and not in some unspecified garage in an unnamed city. The image of the city skyline is not entirely unfamiliar to me, yet I am accustomed to experiencing the city at street level. In this moment, I become fully aware of the perceptual connection between the mediated view offered by the car and the mediated view offered in film. This far off view of the skyline, lights sparkling in the darkness of twilight is a view I generally only experience from my car, as I approach the city on I-76. Yet in film, it is a familiar kind of view. The skyline appears as backdrop, as image, like an establishing shot in a film whose purpose is to make me believe what I'm experiencing is happening in Philadelphia and not on a studio soundstage in Burbank (see figure 8).



Figure 8 View of Philadelphia skyline from top of Fresh Grocer garage. 2013 Photo by Laura Vriend

Later I attempt to inventory the types of spatial experiences that might also replicate this view: scenes from a film or driving on the freeway into the city spring to mind. But the view from the top of this garage happens during a spatially complex moment and there is additional action to attend to. In the foreground, two dancers take turns convulsing, coming to a point of exaggerated frenzy before being calmly stilled by the other dancer. I watch all this, still from the passenger seat of a car, through windows framing my visual field.

The car I'm in drives in a circle around this duet offering me a 360 degree view of the movement. At the same time, with windows rolled down, I feel the breeze of the city on my skin and I brace myself in response to the momentum of the continuous tight-radius turn. I oscillate between this kinesthetic sensation of motion and the sensation of myself watching the action from somewhere else. I sense myself in front of a screen, watching a drawn out 360 degree camera pan. At times I even have the sensation that I *am* a camera. The body of car and body of spectator (re)places the eye/I of the camera, bringing the mediation of camera back to the body while preserving the perceptual experience already created by the camera's gaze. This creates a sense of spatial confusion as the spectator is suspended in an unresolvable tension between technologically mediated perception and the embodiment of the apparatus of mediation. Through the liveness of performance, the spectator is offered a moment to attend to the corporeal experience of artifice.

If, as Steven Shapiro points out, cinema is both mode of perception and material to be perceived, live performance allows Watson-Wallace to play with this duality. She

draws from her own and her audience's training in both watching film and in watching live performance to disorient our spatial relationship to both forms. At times, the material to be perceived plays on our familiarity with filmic images and tropes – the woman in the red dress and high heels whose legs appear from underneath a car as female victim, later appears ascending the stairs seductively as femme fatale. Here, as Shaviro suggests, the image and mode of perception are both highly cinematic as the movement of the car replicates camera movement. Still, I am kinesthetically aware of myself in relation to this body in space. Cinematic and kinesthetic as distinct categories are both present in our apprehension, yet they cohere as distinct categories. These 'woman in the red dress' moments set up both the kinesthetic and cinematic for the spectator before proceeding to play with the boundaries of these distinctions. As in the roof scene above, Watson-Wallace uses live performance to play with the notion of cinema as both mode of perception and material to be perceived. Our understanding of film is both imagistic and narrative in nature: even in the films of David Lynch for example, we expect to be able to interpret a coherent linear narrative. The medium of choreography creates a situation wherein the spectator isn't mired in the expectation of cohesive narrative. This allows Watson-Wallace the space to create moments in which the modes of cinematic perception become unmoored from the material of film itself. The 360 degree pan around the repetitive movement of convulsing experimental dancers opened up a moment where I could experience my perceiving body *as* mediating apparatus.

Both an affirmation and complication of Baudrillard's simulacral city, Watson-Wallace plays with the notion that image in cinematic space has a kinesthetic dimension.

In one sense, the real city becomes indistinguishable from a movie set as we wonder which bodies are performers and which bodies are “real” people, as our familiar Philadelphia skyline appears as backdrop, as we watch a trio on a dashboard-mounted screen before realizing that the dance is happening behind and eventually all around us. *Car* establishes cinematic spatiality through the ways in which it frames the action for the passenger/audience. Rather than viewing the mechanical apparatus of camera as artifice, Watson-Wallace reveals the kinesthetic disorientation and perceptual complications of the postmetropolitan mediated city. If Baudrillard argues that to “grasp the city” we must “start with the screen”, *Car* is arguing that to apprehend the city, we must locate the body in the complex network of images, technological mediation and materiality that makes up the city and attend to the sensation of disorientation to tease out the multiplicity of modes of perception at play in the postmetropolitan cinematic city.

Choreographing Noir

Film noir, perhaps more than any other film genre, is concerned with a distinctly urban backdrop of dark, dangerous and often empty streets. Whether shot on a studio lot or on location, one of noir’s central concerns is the representation and manipulation of images of the city. In its historical context, film scholars generally agree that film noir explicitly took on the modern city as a representational modality of expressing American post-war anxieties around urbanization and modernity itself. (Dimendberg 2004, Hirsh 1981, Prakash 2010). Film noir historian Foster Hirsh notes that “The city in film noir is never merely neutral, never simply a shapeless background. In both studio and location

thrillers, it participates in the action, ‘comments’ on the character, supplies mood and tension” (1981:79). In *Car*, the city plays a similar role. The parking garage and car are not only the “site” for the work, but are central to the way in which the work enters into a cinematic discourse.

Car comes to its noir sensibilities intentionally through the work of neo-noir writer/director David Lynch. In an interview I conducted with Watson-Wallace, she described her interest in the abstract and circular narrative as well as the iconic imagery and characters deployed in Lynch’s work, adding that “the whole piece [*Car*] references David Lynch” (18 May 2012). Neo-noir, which film scholars generally associate with writer/directors David Lynch, Quentin Tarrantino and often Ridley Scott, is characterized by its postmodernity. It is self-referential, making self-conscious and ironic use of film noir icons. The city as backdrop in neo-noir is the post-metropolis, the city whose spatial production and been fully intertwined with a century of cinematic representation. It is the self-consciously simulacral city. In the remainder of this section, I outline some of the key styles, themes and concerns that historically emerged in film noir in relationship to post war American modernity. I then explore the ways in which Watson-Wallace creates a distinctly *noir* choreography whose spatial logic can be defined by its fragmented imagistic world and disorientingly dangerous physicality while maintaining a taut sense of sequence that manages to be both circular and linear through both its precision and continual looping.

Film historians generally locate film noir historically in the 1940s and 1950s (Dimendberg 2004, Hrisch 1981) with roots in both neo-realism and German

expressionism. In this post World War II cycle of crime thrillers, French audiences and critics saw “a loss of energy and confidence, and a growing disillusionment with traditional American ideals” (Hirsch 1981:9) which, between their dark subject matter and shadowy cinematography, led them to brand them as film *noir*.

The genre itself, offering varying representations of city spaces from the expressionistic, carefully staged and choreographed to the realism of the chaotic city, provides a historical nexus point for looking at both rapid economic and industrial changes in the landscape of postwar American modernity *and* its effect on the American cultural psyche (Krutnik 83).

Mark Shiel’s analysis of the economics of film noir industry in “A Regional Geography of Film Noir: Urban Dystopia On- and Offscreen” (2010) indicates that by the 1940s, location filming had become more common than filming on sound stages, and Los Angeles became both the setting and location for the majority of film noir. Thus, changes in the production of film noir chart the link between modernity and the city through the chaotic energy of rapid change in industry and technology, while the unsettling images created in the films register the impact of war on Americans, and social anxiety over urban modernity, its promise of criminality and threat to traditional middle class values. In his essay “Something More Than Night: Tales of the *Noir* City” (1997) Frank Krutnik argues that the increased representation of the city in film mirrored the increasing numbers of Americans moving into and living in cities in the early 20th century. Like the complexity of America’s changing landscape, Noir’s representation was also complex. Krutnik notes that “Although *film noir* locates the modern city as a threat to the

‘American community’, it refuses to sanction the small town as a redemptive alternative. Moreover, it is also more willing to acknowledge that the city of strangers may hold attractions barred from the restricted orbit of small-town America.” (1997:88). Indeed the dual figure of the stranger/detective is an enactment of Benjamin’s flâneur whose outside status enables his observations and narrations. The investigator as “private-eye” manifests modernity’s private “I”, modernity’s privatization of self. This character, whose mobility allows him to drift in and out of diverse social worlds embodies both the danger of the unknown and the protection of the self from potential danger. Film noir characters reveal deep ambivalence around the lure of city life.

The German expressionist influence on film noir in particular manifested via a disturbed and slightly distorted representation of the subject and with familiar yet highly stylized settings, characters and action. This warped reality also sometimes included dream or nightmare-like interludes of free-floating and hallucinatory images reflecting the uncertainty and panic of both the characters and the audience (Hirsch 1981). The dream or dream-like scene is certainly a recurring motif in Lynchian neo-noir, creating disorienting almost circular narrative forms and demented interruptions of the narrative. The noir environment is thus one that plays with and confuses expectations and understandings of real and imagined. Film historian Foster Hirsch notes that in contrast to straightforward crime thrillers of the 1930s, noir’s narrative style is “sinuous, oblique, often deliberately confusing” (1981:72). Spatial order is often undercut by the tensions between the linear and circular progression of narrative.

Hirsch further describes both an aesthetic of darkness and shadow and a sense of entrapment as additional expressionist tropes that seeped into noir's visual and psychological repertoire even as shooting moved out of studios and into actual city streets, asserting that "Expressionist motifs invaded location shooting, transforming the real city into moody echoes of the claustrophobic studio-created urban landscapes" (1981: 67). This replication of cramped studio spaces in real urban settings and vice versa is another mode through which film noir blurred expected boundaries between real and constructed as the representational spatiality of both shooting strategies seemed to co-produce each other.

In *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (2004), film scholar Edward Dimenbergh describes the anxious spatial and temporal qualities of film noir arguing,

The nonsynchronous character of film noir is best apprehended as a tension between a residual American culture and urbanism of the 1920s and 1930s and its liquidation by the technological and social innovations accompanying World War II, as well as the simultaneous dissolution of this new social compact of the 1940s and the 1950s by the society emerging in the 1960s, in which the simulacra and spectacles of the contemporary postmodern culture are clearly visible. (2004: 3)

At the same time that Dimenbergh identifies film noir's complex relationship to the American postwar period, the sense of looming uncertainty in the future, he prefigures neo-noir's more obvious postmodern moment in 1990s by locating postmodernity already in early film noir.

Ultimately what is central in film noir is the simultaneous celebration and critique of the American big city, its promises and betrayals and contradictory tensions between the nostalgic longing for a centered urban experience and the reality of its decay. What is

at stake is the spatial logic of American urbanism, a continual process of de-centering and the production of multiple, disjointed (post)(sub)urban centers.

So, how does *Car* reference and borrow from film noir tropes and techniques to create a distinctly noir choreography? The interaction between the specific design of the garage in conjunction with the car's windows as framing device allows for a visual spatiality that, at times, references the kinds of shots familiar to noir. The concrete beams and rafters, along with strategically placed lighting achieve the shadowy, high contrast cinematography that characterizes film noir's style, while the deep and jewel colored costumes of the femme fatale and drunk girl, emphasize the ranges of muted greys in the concrete maze. The audience's travel through the levels and ramps of the parking garage mimics oblique asymmetrical and tight camera angles often found in canonical noir (Hirsch 1981:89) and our close yet window-mediated encounters with several characters replicates the extreme often distressing close-ups of film noir's cast of characters. These characters, like the sleuth, the criminal and the femme fatale, appear as familiar iconic archetypes, and while *Car* is not explicitly narrative, the scenarios we come upon as audience/passengers aid in attributing character to particular performers. Our driver seems earnestly determined to figure out what's going on, while the drunk girl continues to get in his way. Threatening men in suits drag our driver out of the window, stealing his car while the alluring woman in the red dress mysteriously haunts every scene. Characters in noir often exhibit some kind of mental or physical unhealthiness. In *Car*, we see this manifest through the performance of intoxication and often convulsive movements.

As Hirsh argues, many of film noir's stylistic modalities of filmic meaning making serve to distance the audience from the protagonists, even as the protagonist often provides a first person narrative, so a sense of dis-ease and anxiety is created when what the audience sees diverges from what the audience is told. In *Car*, the driver as narrator leads the audience through the labyrinthine ramps and turns of the parking garage, but only particular fragments of action are ever revealed, never quite letting us in on their secrets. Watson-Wallace's surreal and fragmented choreographic logic emphasizes noir's fractured narratives. We know too little about any overall narrative for any performer to emerge as protagonist. Through the audience as participant, *Car* collapses the protagonist and the viewer into a single role, which we fulfill physically and psychologically. It becomes our existential awareness, our anxiety, our own complex negotiations of contemporary urban settings that launch us into the role of stranger sleuth. As audience, we take over the role of detective by simply trying to make sense of what's happening.

Perhaps the most experientially potent modality through which *Car* creates its noir sensibility is through its fully physicalized choreography of entrapment, alienation and danger. *Car* quite easily creates a physical sense of spatial entrapment for the audience by containing the audience members in the car itself without providing any indication of when or by what means we will be allowed out. We are literally trapped, locked into either viewing the dance through the fragmented frames created by the windows or attending to the driver and other in-car performers. But how does *Car* as a live performance with embodied audience participation achieve an effect of alienation?

Even as *Car* creates an immersive experience, it is one that is highly imagistic. Performance attention is not intimate, does not let the spectator into the experience of the performer. There is an energetic wall between the bodies of the performer and audience. The distancing of the audience from the protagonist with whom the audience is usually meant to identify discussed above by Hirsh is also associated with, even a manifestation of the flâneur, modernity's figure of the stranger who is "proximate in physical space, distant in social space" (Clarke 1997: 4). In *Car* the sense of distance and alienation is achieved through the specific performance attention adopted by the performers. Throughout the entire piece, the performers sustain a detached performance energy, a lack of eye contact with each other and the audience, generally ignoring the presence of the audience except to relocate them, which is done in a matter of fact way using almost aggressively imperative language. This is not the warm inviting performance attention used in HDT's *Explanatorium* or Nichole Canuso's *Wandering Alice*²². Furthermore it differs from the cool, disaffected, non-emotive postmodern attention of the Judson church dancers described by Sally Banes (1987). The classic postmodern gaze eschewed expressiveness in the face as a strategy of emphasizing the formalism of the choreographers' experiments. In *Car*, the performance attention is actually quite theatrical, yet the expressiveness of the performers creates a world amongst the performers from which the audience is excluded. Something is happening. The performers are participating emotionally in the fragments of narrative without inviting the audience in with their performance energy. We participate in that we are in the car, but

²² See Chapter 1 and 2 for discussion of *Explanatorium* and *Wandering Alice*.

mostly we observe and decipher. They perform the attention of “proximate in physical space, distant in social space”.

The choreography of danger is integral to Watson-Wallace’s Noir choreography, and while the work itself certainly makes use of and invokes iconic noir characters and shadowy lighting strategies characteristic to film noir, the primary modality through which danger is invoked and evoked is choreographic and physical in nature. More than the invocation of noir imagery and character, the choreography of physical sensations of danger and anxiety produce Watson-Wallace’s noir choreography and distinguish it as a distinct performative modality in *Car*.

As Mark Shiel remarks, film critic Seigfried referred to post WWII genre of film we now call film noir as “terror films”. In describing these films Seigfried wrote, “Apprehension is accumulated, threatening allusions and dreadful possibilities evoke a world in which everybody is afraid of everybody else, and no one knows when or where the ultimate and inevitable horror will arrive,” (Seigfried quoted in Shiel 2010: 93). The choreography of danger in *Car* allows Watson-Wallace to theorize a cinematic (noir) urbanism that includes corporeality and physicalizes the anxieties, dangers and terrors of the dystopic urban environment. Watson-Wallace explained her own concern with danger in making *Car*: “We live in a fear-based culture so I really played with physicalizing the fear that has seeped into us by living in America” (personal interview, 18 May 2012).

The choreography of the car can itself be physically disorienting for the passenger. The structure of the parking garage with its levels and ramps creates a labyrinthine jungle of cars and concrete. The driver maneuvers the car through the

garage's pathways as the passengers' attention is caught by the high heeled legs sticking out from under a parked vehicle, or the sequined clad stumbling drunk girl on the ramp just below. It becomes easy to lose track of where we are in space, both vertically and directionally in relation to the rest of the city until we reach the top level and can once again orient our bodies to more familiar Philadelphia landmarks. Watson-Wallace described, in our interview, several occasions in which audience members felt such strong sensation of panic that they had to temporarily stop the car to let them out.

The sense of danger is created from the first moments as we enter a stranger's car and first interact with the driver. This scene plays on the fear of having accidentally stumbled into a place you're not supposed to be. The threat of collision and/or violence is constant as dancers climb in and out of the car while audience members ride within. The sounds of bodies jumping and dropping onto the roof of the car are surprising and menacing. Will the driver lose control of the car? Will the dancers make a mistake and injure themselves? Could I be injured? During the only part of the piece when the audience watched from outside the car, dancers push and pull the car while it is in neutral while others jump through open windows, or balance on edges. My own experience of danger and risk led to me ask Watson-Wallace about what kind of insurance was required for a performance like *Car*. She responded with a narrative of the risk assessment specialist the Live Arts Festival sent to rehearsals so they could properly insure the piece for inclusion in the festival. Furthermore, the entire time that the performance is happening, the garage is still functioning as a garage. The opportunity exists for unintentional audience to stumble upon an alternate and potentially dangerous reality and

wonder what exactly is going on. For audience-passengers this opens up the unsettling question of what is real and what is performed.

Car interrogates further our relationship to danger and safety by reminding us that despite the dangerous potentialities of cars out of control, our everyday relationship to them is one often one of semi-privacy and protection from the world outside. Bodies drape themselves or even launch themselves at the moving car I occupy as audience, creating moments of high anxiety, yet the glass of the windows keeps us at least partially safe. When the “drunk girl” character does manage to invade the car’s interior, it is frightening, the way strangers can be. My concern that I might miss something allows me to overcome my instinct to ignore the performer and adopt the armor of closed off disinterest that I frequently wear while walking down the crowded streets of center city. The car serves as a safe space, allowing us the ability to traverse potentially dangerous terrain with some degree of protection. Yet I am also less able to maneuver my own body in negotiating potential danger. The pretense of protection from the stranger that I assume from my position in the car is itself threatened by the more realistic danger posed by the possibility of the car crashing.

Watson-Wallace explains that in her approach to *Car* she “tried to create an experience that was disorienting” in order to create the dystopic sense that we were “lost in this underworld or netherworld” not unlike the fragmented urban worlds of film noir (personal interview, 18 May 2012). Historian Gyan Prakash explains that the appropriation of *noir* as both an aesthetic and social signifier has occurred in a variety of humanistic disciplines. He writes, “While films scholars use the term to identify specific

cinematic techniques, the practitioners in other disciplines deploy it metaphorically to refer to a grim dystopic reality” (Prakash 2010:2). Watson-Wallace brings this extended theorization of noir into the choreographic realm by creating both an imagistic and physicalized, visceral performance of urban fear and danger. As Foster Hirsh reminds us, “In its most provocative and absorbing film *noir* inhabits a twilight zone shakily suspended between reality and nightmare.” (1981:67). The physical choreography of danger in *Car* does just that.

Performing Postmetropolis: Urban Dystopia

With the culture of the car as foundation and its choreographic interpretation of cinematic and film noir dystopian disorientation, *Car* mimics the destabilizing kinetic confusion brought about by globalization’s spatial (de)(re)territorializations.

While discourses on city space rely heavily on the contribution of mid 20th century urban writers like Henri Lefebvre and Walter Benjamin, prominent urbanist associated with the Los Angeles school of urban studies Edward Soja proposed the term postmetropolis to describe the rapid changes our cities have been undergoing since the decline of a Fordist economy. With the globalization of city space comes a massive de- and recentralization characterized by shifts in transportation, housing and financial markets, and labor as well as design, media and representation and the aesthetics of the urban imaginary (Harvey 1990, Soja 2000). For Soja, what it key is that the postmetropolis, amidst the linguistic trench of “posts”, is most definitely not post-industrial, post-capitalist or post-urban

(2000:147). The choreographic world of *Car* performs the spatial and bodily tensions that arise from Soja's postmetropolis.

Car's spatiality is constituted through its participation in and complication of several discourses that emerge in the overlapping of urban space, cinematic space, and choreographic space and that intersect most clearly around notions of utopia and dystopia, around the unstable and chaotic urban imaginary described by Soja. *Car* places itself in the midst of changing discourses on the postmodern, global city. Philadelphia as historic European-esque walking city of cobblestone streets, brick row houses, Victorian and neo-classical architecture is in tension with the American postmetropolitan landscape of cars and networks of expressways. Interstate 76 and the Vine Street expressway allow drivers to move through and over these old neighborhoods bypassing any interaction at all with Philadelphia's urban pastness. This tension is accentuated in *Car* rather than simply critiqued or lauded.

In urban theory describing the changes modernity brought to the formation of the city, the notion of propinquity is a frequent motif in a nostalgic approach that laments the loss of close community interaction and sees bustling vibrant walkable city streets as the preferable urban condition, wherein physical propinquity leads to caring intimate and ethical relationships between members of a community. While urban planners like Jane Jacobs wrote scathing critiques of American wholesale submission to the architects of the modern car-dependent city, the reality is that automobility has been a profound kinesthetic component in the production of 20th century urban spatiality.

SanSan Kwan's kinesthetic analyses of driving in Los Angeles emphasizes that complexity of the relationship between cars and human bodies, as the car becomes a technology through which one's bodily relationship to space is mediated (2013). Not only do motorists cultivate a driving knowledge of a city space – which lanes to be in, which streets are one way, which freeway entrances and exits to use - that is fundamentally different from a walking knowledge of a city, but as Kwan describes, the driver's proprioceptive sense of self comes to include the car in what, urban theorists Mimi Sheller and John Urry conceptualize as the “car-driver” body (2013:129). Yet rather than focus on the sense of kinesthetic numbness that Kwan describes, Watson-Wallace choreographs the potentially dangerous encounters between bodies and cars, emphasizing the physicality of anxiety, dislocation, and disorientation.

Furthermore, by emphasizing the discomfort of propinquity, *Car* establishes the significance of anonymity as strategic modality in urban life. At the same time that living in close physical proximity can strengthen bonds between city dwellers, the ideals of privacy and individualism embedded in the social, legal and political fabric of the United States engenders embodied tensions for urban dwellers. As city dwellers, we are just as likely to ignore physical propinquity and charge through a crowd with intentional obliviousness to other bodies as we might be to have meaningful spontaneous interactions. The romantic spatial politics at the heart of urban theory lamenting the loss of walkable cities and close communities is also embedded in the politics of genealogies of performance and site-specificity – the narrative of 1960s Greenwich Village as community of experimentation (Banes 1993), the discourses of site-specificity as strategy

for engaging tropes of community (Kwon 2002) and the role of audience participation in attempts to create more intimate encounters between art and its audience (Bishop 2006, Bourillaud 2002).

Watson-Wallace's choreographic rendering of the spatiality of cinema in general and film noir specifically draws out these tensions of bodily encounter in the contemporary postmetropolis. These encounters, as Soja argues are fundamentally informed by the globalization of city space, the disorientation of constant re-spatialization and an urban consciousness manipulated by the proliferation of hyperreal images (2000: 145-348). Unlike the site-based choreographies performed in Philadelphia during the same 2-year period, like HDT's Explanatorium and Canuso's *Wandering Alice* whose audience participation serves to enhance the sensation of intimacy and bodily or physical connection between the audience and performer, *Car* maintains a distant performative mood, even as it puts performers and audiences together in the compact sedan space of a Volkswagen Jetta. Rather than choreographing specific corporeal interactions with specific historical Philadelphian sites, *Car* gives us the anonymous environment of the parking garage. The view of the city skyline does, in the midst of postmodern disorientation, give us a moment to physically map our orientation to the city and remind ourselves that we are indeed locally situated. Still in this moment, the skyline stands as powerful symbol of global capital and power, as the tallest and most visible buildings include the 57-story Comcast Center and One and Two Liberty Place occupied by luxury condominiums, a shopping mall and the Westin Hotel. Other familiar buildings in Philadelphia's skyline include the two towers of Commerce Square and the BNY Mellon

Center which house a variety of banks, financial institutions, and multinational corporations (<http://www.emporis.com/city/philadelphia>, 23 October 2013). These architectural displays of power and wealth are juxtaposed with the danger and decay of life at ground level.

The image of the city as a dangerous, festering dystopia is one that recurred in film noir as an index of generalized social fears and anxieties. The promise of modern life in the city and its associated technologies of rapid chaotic change were embedded with a sense of terror (Prakash 2012). *Car's* recuperation of this image as potentiality for creativity situates the piece in relation to social discourses on the relevance of both noir sensibilities and dystopic images in the production of the contemporary city's spatial logic. Dimenberg points out that even while "socialization in the modern city entails learning to ignore other people and developing a calculated indifference to the bodies with which one shares public transportation and the street" (2004: 22), the kinds of presence adopted for maneuvering through the (post)modern also require the cultivation of abilities to notice, for detection and surveillance. Watson-Wallace successfully choreographs these tensions in presence, pushing her audience to inhabit this oscillation between seeing/noticing and distancing/ignoring.

In Soja's postmodern city, the urban imaginary factors into the actual production of city space to produce a "metaphysical reality" of the postmetropolis. The decidedly postmodern cinematic dream-scape pastiche of David Lynch (particularly in *Mulholland Drive*) and Ridley Scott's oft-cited *Blade Runner* with its time-space compressed images of a dystopian yet cosmopolitan Los Angeles are prime examples of film scholar Colin

McArthur's suggestion that the representation of the city remains essential to neo-noir films representation of the urban (1997: 32). Films most exemplary of neo-noir since 1980 often include a variety of science fiction titles, as the fear of rapid transformation of urban spaces collapses with the twin fear of unbridled technological innovation. Science fiction is also the cinematic realm where the collapse between reality and virtuality is most explicitly explored.

M. Christine Boyer writes in *CyberCities*,

“From the moment William Gibson announced in his dystopian science-fiction account *Neuromancer* (1984) that the informational network or computer matrix called cyberspace looks like Los Angeles seen from five thousand feet up in the air, there had been a predilection for drawing a parallel between the virtual space of computer networks and post-urban places of disorder and decay.” (Boyer 1996: 14)

Further she argues that virtual cyber worlds reflect the postmetropolitan aesthetic of fragmentation, disorder, disorientation and dislocation as well as the preoccupation with safety and surveillance. No longer distinguishable from its imagistic representations, the city has become full hyperreality. While David Harvey describes “the post modern penchant for jumbling together all manner of references to past styles” to the point that “reality, it seems, is being shaped to mimic media images” (1990: 85), *Car* produces a disorienting confusion between reality and cinematic virtuality by playing with images of the (dis)(u)topian simulacral city and participating bodily in a dystopian discourse of (post)modern global city space.

The utopian mythology of car culture has been replaced by the reality of global traffic and the economies and politics driving this traffic. Specific urban spatialities are then produced dialectically in part through a city's individual locational identity, its

histories, neighborhoods and quirks and its relationship to the spatial logic of global traffic as well as the spatiality of cinematic image production. The parking structure as familiar urban feature of the global city, as well *Car's* portability in its site, its ability to be staged in multiple parking lots, situates Philadelphia as one global site among many. Any images that might help us identify a specific location become unreliable in their cinematic rendering. *Car* suggests that the utopian aspiration embedded in the globalization of city space begets a dystopian fear of no longer knowing where you are. Embedded in this dystopia is the utopian dream of it no longer mattering.

Car embraces a fragmented postmodern city and emphasizes the de-historicizing of Philadelphia's specific spatiality by presenting it as anonymous/homogenous American city space. In establishing a noir infused locational identity for *Car* in the space of a parking garage, Watson-Wallace de-localizes her site, constructing it as specific but not special, singular or particularly specific to Philadelphia. In contrast to *Car's* choreography of immersive detachment and fragmented urbanism *Wandering Alice* advances a sensuous and ghostly encounter with Philadelphia's pastness through bodily memory in kinesthetic traces of daily life and *Explanitorium* plays with the fluidity of community while romanticizing and advocating intimacy as a vital approach to urban life.

Car, *Wandering Alice* and *Explanitorium* should be seen as urbanist choreographies that are in dialogue through the choreographers' overlapping creative concerns and through the notions of urbanism they perform through their spatialities. In dialogue with each other and with critical theory, these works advance different modes of

urbanism that engage differently with Philadelphia's histori(city). These works - while similar as as site-engaged, participation-based, immersive dance journeys – imagine, enact and "plan" urban space in multiple ways. In addition to theorizing urban space as it is in all its complexity, HDT, Canuso and Watson-Wallace as urbanists also advance arguments for how cities should and could be, choreographing performative layers onto the urban imaginary, and proposing choreography itself as mode of urban planning.

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