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Reproducible Dances: Reconstructing the "Ephemeral" With Funding From the National Endowment for the Arts' "American Masterpieces: Dance" Program

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Reproducible Dances: Reconstructing the “Ephemeral” With Funding From the National  
Endowment for the Arts’ “American Masterpieces: Dance” Program

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Critical Dance Studies

by

Asheley Burns Smith

December 2014

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Anthea Kraut, Chairperson

Dr. SanSan Kwan

Dr. Marta Savigliano

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2014

The Dissertation of Asheley Burns Smith is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Reproducible Dances: Reconstructing the “Ephemeral” With Funding From the National Endowment for the Arts’ “American Masterpieces: Dance” Program

by

Asheley Burns Smith

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Critical Dance Studies  
University of California, Riverside, December 2014  
Dr. Anthea Kraut, Chairperson

This dissertation examines how the American Masterpieces: Dance initiative (2007-2010) of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) conceptualized dance. The funding program provided grants to reconstruct and restage dances for touring around the United States. The NEA initiative is the case study through which this dissertation investigates the ways in which funding mechanisms, including the federal government, make claims about dance and choreography. The American Masterpieces: Dance program contributed to the widely held belief that dance disappears even though the grant supported reconstruction and bringing choreography back to be performed live. While American Masterpieces endorsed the ephemerality of dance, this theorization is at odds with the reconstructions the initiative supported, since the existence and possibility of these reconstructions prove that dance does not, in fact, disappear. The American Masterpieces grants awarded to reconstruct the work of Jane Comfort, David Gordon, Pat

Graney, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, and Alwin Nikolais exemplify some of the different ways that the reproduction of dance through this program contributes to debates in dance studies about canonization, archives, and how dance can work in multiple ways at once. The grants that reconstructed Nikolais's work during his centenary both furthered the choreographer's inclusion as part of the canon of American modern dance and destabilized this same canon. The National Performance Network (NPN) distributed American Masterpieces funds to Comfort, Graney, and Joseph and these artists' reconstructions exhibit the multiple, overlapping methods through which choreography can be archived and preserved. The American Masterpieces program attempted to bring back and revive masterworks by creating surrogates through reconstruction without acknowledging either the imperfection inherent in the reconstruction process or the presence of multiple performance surrogates existing in the past and Gordon calls attention to this through his reconstruction. Choreography's reproducibility, rather than repeatability, enables it to subvert the programming goals of governmental grant programs through signaling on more than one level simultaneously, critiquing the status quo in some ways, while consolidating it in others.

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Funding structures, including the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) "American Masterpieces: Dance" program, theorize dance. The American Masterpieces: Dance initiative supported the reconstruction and touring of significant American dances in 2007, 2009, and 2010. These funding structures not only provide money, but also do a kind of conceptual work, participating in debates about dance's status. In this dissertation, I take the American Masterpieces program as a case study through which I can perceive the ways in which funding mechanisms, including the federal government, make claims about dance and choreography. The NEA initiative assumed that dance is ephemeral and needs to be preserved, which is important for the art form's legacy and history. The American Masterpieces: Dance initiative contributed to the widely held belief that dance disappears even though the grant supported reconstruction and bringing choreography back to be performed live. I argue that while the American Masterpieces program endorses the ephemerality of dance, this theorization is at odds with the reconstructions the initiative supported, since the existence and possibility of these reconstructions prove that dance does not, in fact, disappear. I investigate some of the different ways that the reproduction of dance through the American Masterpieces program contributes to debates in dance studies about canonization, archives, and how dance can work in multiple ways at once. The specific grants awarded via the American Masterpieces initiative that I look at also show how dance behaves and functions in ways that both do and do not support the concepts that may be underwriting it.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the material included in this introduction was originally published by Dance Heritage Coalition as part of the "America's Irreplaceable Dance Treasures" project; it is

My project focusing on the American Masterpieces reconstructions will maintain that dance neither disappears nor is repeatable. Though never the same twice, dance is endlessly reproducible and exists within an economy of reproduction. I draw a distinction between reproducibility and repeatability; to repeat is to duplicate or be the same again, while to reproduce is to make again and in the making again, the product, in this study, the dance, that results is necessarily different. Dance always operates in relation to something that has occurred before as well as something that will occur after—this is the case when performing or rehearsing choreography for the first time or for the hundredth or thousandth time. The American Masterpieces program is a fruitful case study through which to analyze the reproduction of dance since the initiative set out to reconstruct dances. Despite the language about preserving an ephemeral art, American Masterpieces situated dance firmly within an economy of reproduction—specifically, a government-funded economy. Reconstructions do not claim to repeat past performances. However, embedded within the drive for reconstruction is a desire to render performance unchanging and un-lost. It is important for our dance heritage, and, by extension, our national cultural heritage—this is the *American Masterpieces*, awarded by the *National Endowment for the Arts*, after all—that masterworks are locked down in some way. The economy of reproduction within which this choreography exists means that a previous performance cannot be replicated and funding the reconstruction of a “masterpiece” does not guarantee the identity of what gets performed. Because dance choreography is never performed the same way twice, there is space for the dance to take on new, perhaps unintended, meanings. Choreography’s reproducibility, rather than repeatability, enables

it to subvert the programming goals of governmental grant programs through signaling on more than one level simultaneously, critiquing the status quo in some ways, while consolidating it in others.

In this introductory chapter, I will first provide background information on the NEA and the American Masterpieces initiative followed by a brief overview of federal support for the arts in the twentieth century. Then, I will define how the NEA uses the term “dance,” which already presents a theorization of the form. Next, I will outline some of the varying conceptualizations of reproducibility in dance and performance studies as well as reconstructions that provide the theoretical groundwork on which I build my argument. Following that, I will outline the methods I employ in this dissertation. Finally, I will give a brief overview of each of my chapters.

### **The NEA and American Masterpieces: Dance**

In 1965, the National Foundation in the Arts and Humanities Act was signed by President Lyndon Johnson, establishing the NEA. This legislation put into practice President John F. Kennedy’s belief that the arts comprised an important piece of national heritage. On the occasion of the Act’s signing, “Johnson spoke of the arts as an institution for the people but also a hallmark of American culture. ‘Art is our nation’s most precious heritage,’ he asserted, ‘[for] it is in our works of art that we reveal to ourselves and to others the inner vision which guides us as a nation. And where there is no vision, people

perish.”<sup>2</sup> The passage of this legislation finally deemed support of the arts as an appropriate matter of concern for the federal government.<sup>3</sup> The Arts Endowment does not operate like a ministry of culture, a centralized government agency that oversees arts and cultural policy, products, and activities; therefore, the NEA does not impose its will on arts and artists in the United States. At the same time, while it has never provided even a near majority of financial support for the arts in the United States, the NEA serves as an important standard-bearer for philanthropic communities. A grant from the NEA legitimizes a new organization and validates an existing one, attracting additional support. Every dollar granted by the NEA typically generates “seven to eight times more money in terms of matching grants, further donations, and earned revenue. A \$100,000 grant, therefore, deliver[s] \$800,000 in eventual funds to an organization.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, a grant from the NEA to a dance company or presenting organization has a powerful multiplying effect.

The NEA is the largest annual national funder for the arts in the United States.<sup>5</sup> The Arts Endowment strives to benefit individuals and communities through supporting artistic excellence, creativity, and innovation. In addition to partnering with state and

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<sup>2</sup> Donna M. Binkiewicz, *Federalizing the Muse: United States Arts Policy and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1965-1980* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 89.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Van Dyke, *Modern Dance in a Postmodern World: An Analysis of Federal Arts Funding and its Impact on the Field of Dance* (Reston: American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 1992), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Dana Gioia, “Preface,” *How the United States Funds the Arts*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2007), vii. <http://nea.gov/pub/how.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *How the United States Funds the Arts*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2012), 3. <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/how-the-us-funds-the-arts.pdf>.

regional arts councils, the NEA collaborates with other federal agencies and leaders in the philanthropic sector in order to improve cultural life and heritage in the United States. The President appoints a Chairman of the NEA to a four-year term; the Chairman is advised by the National Council on the Arts, which is comprised of six ex-officio, non-voting members of Congress and fourteen experts in the field who are also appointed by the President.<sup>6</sup> Grants available from the NEA are situated within disciplines such as “Dance,” “Folk & Traditional Arts,” “Opera,” and “Artist Communities.” Within each discipline there are a number of different grant categories to which one can apply. Due to the nature of the arts, a dance company might find that its work could benefit from more than one grant within the dance discipline, but also might be eligible for funding from, and perhaps more competitive in, the “Folk & Traditional Arts” or the “Media Arts” discipline. A panel of peers within each discipline reviews grant applications; individuals within the dance discipline review grant applications from dance artists.

There is a public mandate that the NEA support all of the arts in addition to arts education in all fifty states along with six U.S. territories.<sup>7</sup> Upon the Endowment’s founding, arts councils existed in less than half of the states, but within a few years, almost all fifty states established arts councils.<sup>8</sup> Today, forty percent of the NEA’s budget is required by law to go to state and regional arts councils for disbursement.<sup>9</sup> This emphasis on regions ensures that federal dollars are not just going to cities and regions already known for their cultural output, and it allows artists who might not be recognized

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 5.

on a national scale, but are well known in and representative of their region, to receive funding. Through the granting of a significant portion of the NEA's budget to state and regional arts councils, the Arts Endowment ensures that the multitude of artistic voices present in the United States is heard.

The first funding ever given by the Arts Endowment was a \$100,000 matching grant for emergency support of the American Ballet Theatre (ABT). As proudly reported in the 1966 annual report of the NEA, “[o]n December 20, 1965, Vice President Hubert Humphrey presented the first check issued by the Federal Government in direct support of the arts to the President of a ballet theatre foundation, assuring the continued operation of one of the country's best existing full-scale dance companies.”<sup>10</sup> The same year, the NEA also committed an additional \$250,000 to ABT for the company to go on a national tour. Along with the \$350,000 given to ABT in the first year of operation, the NEA gave a \$142,250 grant to the Martha Graham Company to go on a national tour,<sup>11</sup> and individual choreographer grants to Alvin Ailey, Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, José Limón, Alwin Nikolais, Anna Sokolow, Paul Taylor, and Antony Tudor, totaling \$103,000 all together.<sup>12</sup> In addition, during the first year, grants of \$5,000 each were given to the Capitol Ballet Guild and a National Dance Conference at which the

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<sup>10</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Annual Report 1966* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 1967), 39-40. <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/NEA-Annual-Report-1966.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 47-48.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 42-44.

Association of American Dance Companies was established, a predecessor of Dance/USA.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1970s, the NEA's budget grew exponentially. President Richard Nixon greatly supported the NEA and the Endowment increased "1400 percent, from \$8,250,000 in 1970 to \$123,850,000 in 1978."<sup>14</sup> Applications for grants also increased at a tremendous rate during this time, as more artists and arts organizations became aware of the federal money available. In addition to the new federal money for the arts, the establishment of the NEA encouraged other funding agencies to increase their budgets. The 1970s thus became a time of incredible expansion for the all the arts, including dance with many new companies founded during this time period. One reason for the formation of new companies was the increasing visibility of existing companies. From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, the NEA's Dance Touring Program enabled dance companies to not only perform throughout the country, but also conduct teaching residencies at dance presenters in cities nationwide.

President Ronald Reagan appointed a presidential task force at the beginning of his time in office to investigate whether or not to continue supporting the NEA and the National Endowment for the Humanities.<sup>15</sup> Though the NEA continued to exist, it also saw the first budget cut of its history in 1982. By the end of Reagan's second term, the NEA's budget had regained lost ground and rose above 1981 levels. In the last years of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 44-46.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Wesley Zeigler, *Arts in Crisis: The National Endowment for the Arts versus America* (Chicago: A Cappella Books, 1994), 26.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Bauerlein with Ellen Grantham, eds., *National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965-2008* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2008), 71. <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea-history-1965-2008.pdf>.

the decade the culture wars surrounding federal funding of the arts began heating up along with increased social and political polarization. Controversy around the Arts Endowment began following a touring exhibition featuring Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987) and a separate Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition, *The Perfect Moment* (1989). Protesters viewed Serrano's work, a photograph of a crucifix submerged in urine, as a desecration of Christ and derided Mapplethorpe's exhibition because it included images of homosexual sadomasochism. The NEA appropriation bill in 1990 included an amendment by Senator Jesse Helms stating that the Endowment should not fund anything deemed "obscene or indecent." Chairman John Frohnmayer vetoed four grants to performance artists with politically oriented work, Karen Finley, Tim Miller, John Fleck and Holly Hughes, known collectively as "the NEA Four," after they had been approved through the peer review process. The artists sued the NEA, won their case and were awarded funds equal to the grant amounts for which they applied. (The case eventually ended up in the Supreme Court where the Court upheld the Congressional amendment surrounding standards of decency and respect.)<sup>16</sup> A lasting impact on the NEA following the culture wars was massive budget cuts and a Congressional mandate in 1996 to eliminate grants to individual artists.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, one of the biggest losses to dance in recent history has been the disappearance of the Choreographers Fellowship category as part of these sweeping changes.

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<sup>16</sup> For more information about the Culture Wars, see Brian Wallis, Marianne Weems, and Philip Yenawine, eds., *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) and Richard Bolton, ed., *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts* (New York: New Press, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Bauerlein with Grantham, eds., *National Endowment for the Arts*, 119.

In 2004, an election year, just prior to the fortieth anniversary year of the NEA, First Lady Laura Bush announced the largest increase in funds for the NEA in two decades—\$18 million.<sup>18</sup> All but \$3 million of this increase was to go to a new initiative of the NEA, “American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius.” Launched in 2005, the total budget increase was reduced from \$18 million to \$2 million and American Masterpieces grants went only to visual arts in the first year.<sup>19</sup> This initiative, according to the NEA’s website, was to “acquaint Americans with the best of their cultural and artistic legacy.”<sup>20</sup> American Masterpieces categories included: visual arts (available in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010), choral music (available in 2006 and 2007), chamber music (available in 2008, 2009, and 2010), musical theater (available in 2006 and 2007), presenting (available in 2008, 2009, and 2010), and dance (available in 2007 (via New England Foundation for the Arts), 2009, and 2010). The literature component of American Masterpieces is known as the Big Read and is the only grant that has been ongoing since its launch in 2006. Grants were available to dancemakers in 2007, 2009, and 2010 for a total of \$1.5 million, \$1.5 million, and \$2.33 million, respectively, for the “[r]econstruction or restaging of works that are artistically, historically, and culturally

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<sup>18</sup> “The Gift Horse,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/31/opinion/the-gift-horse.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Jacqueline Trescott, “Promised Arts Effort Trimmed: Congress Allots NEA \$2 Million Of Bush’s \$18 Million Request,” *Washington Post*, December 1, 2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A23688-2004Nov30.html>. Visual arts grants in 2005 totaled \$1.2 million. “Grant Search,” National Endowment for the Arts, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://apps.nea.gov/GrantSearch/>. Grant search conducted using “2005 to 2005” as award year range and selecting “American Masterpieces” under grant categories.

<sup>20</sup> “National Initiatives: American Masterpieces,” National Endowment for the Arts, accessed March 5, 2009, <http://www.nea.gov/national/masterpieces/about.html>.

significant,” the touring of these works, and recreation and documentation of significant works by university dance departments.<sup>21</sup> In the introduction of a 2007 issue of *NEA Arts*—the quarterly magazine of the NEA—devoted to the American Masterpieces grant program, Douglas Sonntag, the NEA’s director of national initiatives at that time and director of dance since 1997, wrote, “[i]n dance, American Masterpieces helps professional dance companies to revive, perform, and tour works by such important American choreographers as José Limón. Grants also are awarded to college and university dance departments to allow student performers access to their often-unavailable dance heritage.”<sup>22</sup> In the dissertation that follows, I question the premise on which the American Masterpieces: Dance grants rests, since dance heritage is available due to dance’s reproducible nature.

### **Federal Support for Dance in the United States**

The federal government became a patron of the arts in 1965 with the establishment of the NEA, though it had previously patronized the arts, notably during the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and with the President’s Emergency Fund for International Affairs. Ellen Graff’s *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (1997) analyzed Communist and leftist influences in modern dance. For leftist dancers, dance and politics were one and the same. Dance presented by the leftist Workers Dance League, later the New Dance League, had a political message and text

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> “Douglas Sonntag, “Celebrating American’s Artistic Legacy: American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius,” *NEA Arts* 2 (2007): 2.  
[http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea\\_arts/neaARTS\\_2007\\_V2\\_0.pdf](http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea_arts/neaARTS_2007_V2_0.pdf).

was frequently used within the choreography in order to clearly get this revolutionary message across. While the Workers Cultural Federation was supportive of the arts throughout the decade, the federal government's WPA came into play in 1935. Dance fell under the purview of the Federal Theater Project (FTP), but a separate Federal Dance Project (FDP) was later established. First and foremost, the project of FDP was to provide jobs for dancers. Many of these dancers employed by the federal government were leftist dancers who had been performing with the New Dance League, thus there was a subtle shift in choreography to align with the government's hopes for more universally appealing art. In *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (2002), Mark Franko addresses the professionalization of dance during the 1930s through the employment of dancers via the FDP. Federal and even state governments backed dance as labor and as a profession. Furthermore, dance workers had the ability to strike.

In 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower requested a \$5 million budget appropriation for the President's Emergency Fund for International Affairs to demonstrate abroad the superiority of American cultural products and values. In an attempt to position the United States as culturally superior to the USSR, the government advocated dance and artistic achievement as one way to sell American culture to international audiences. The State Department strategically determined locations for touring and the Emergency Fund contributed, hopefully positively, to the perception of the United States and of Americans for international audiences. Dance historian Naima Prevots argued in *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (1998) that it was dance aesthetic politics, more so than Cold War politics, that influenced what groups

were patronized with exportation and funding. She emphasized the benefit to the artists of governmental patronage over the benefit to the government of representing Americanness abroad. American studies scholar Rebekah J. Kowal, also writing about this program in *How to do Things with Dance: Performing Change in Postwar America* (2010), observed how national identity politics played out in the selection of dance artists. For instance, Black choreographers Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus along with Jewish-American choreographer Anna Sokolow were unable to secure funding through the Emergency Fund. The organizational structure including peer review panels of the Emergency Fund became the model for the NEA upon its establishment.

### **Conceptualizations of “dance”**

The NEA’s theorization of dance takes place even with its use of the term “dance.” When the NEA simply refers to “dance,” there is an implicit definition for the term in place. Theatrical concert dance is primarily the type of dance that is supported by the NEA and via its American Masterpieces: Dance program, so that is the type of dance I am concerned with for my project.<sup>23</sup> Objectively, theatrical concert dance is the dance or choreography that occurs in a theater or at a concert. Typically, this means on a proscenium stage with a paying audience. Though not choreographed in a conventional sense, I treat such forms as contact improvisation as concert dance. While the

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<sup>23</sup> Though, there were at least some American Masterpieces grants awarded to support indigenous dance forms, such as the 2007 grant for Hokulani Holt to reconstruct the hula drama *Kahekili*. “American Masterpieces: Dance; Preserving Classics of an Ephemeral Art,” *NEA Arts 2* (2007): 11.  
[http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea\\_arts/neaARTS\\_2007\\_V2\\_0.pdf](http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea_arts/neaARTS_2007_V2_0.pdf).

performance of contact improv changes by its very nature, performers enact certain rules—a choreographic structure—that remain constant.<sup>24</sup> While exhibition dancing and cabaret shows also fit into this category of paying audiences, proscenium-stage format, and typically set choreography, funders have not historically treated these for-profit genres as theatrical concert dance. Not all funders require that applications for grants are submitted via a not-for-profit entity, however, in most cases (and in the case of American Masterpieces: Dance funding), the NEA only accepts applications from from “nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3), U.S. organizations; units of state or local government; or federally recognized tribal communities or tribes.”<sup>25</sup> Additionally, exhibition and cabaret formats are presumed to trade heavily on bodily display rather than “art,” however that is defined by middle as well as upper class white/mainstream definers of theatrical dance. Social and folk dance forms are excluded from the theatrical dance categorization unless quoted as part of the theatrical dance vocabulary. Within the NEA’s funding structure, the discipline of “dance” awards grants mostly for theatrical concert dance. However, in not setting apart this type of dance as “theatrical dance” or “concert dance,” the NEA normalizes this genre as simply “dance” at the same time that it effectively marks alternate forms as “other.” Funding through the NEA has been available for dance artists through a “Folk Arts” discipline as well as an “Inter-arts” discipline. The fact that these

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<sup>24</sup> Contact improv is not a static practice; it does change over time. Change over time does not, however, evacuate the point that at a given time or occasion, for particular communities of practitioners, there is a framework or shared conception of how contact improv tries to operate.

<sup>25</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, “American Masterpieces: Dance, FY 2010,” CFDA No. 45.024, 2010NEA01AMD, 7334800, OMB No. 3135-0112 (June 2009), 2. Available via Freedom of Information Act request to the National Endowment for the Arts.

are listed as separate disciplines from “dance” is telling. Grant categories within the “dance” discipline are constantly changing, ranging from touring to commissions and arts management. Initiatives within the NEA last for varied periods of time, such as the Dance Touring Program, running from 1967-1983, and American Masterpieces, from 2005-2010, and the Choreographer Fellowship, from 1965 to 1996. The Art Works I and Art Works II initiatives of the NEA with funding available for dance began in 2012.

Twentieth century historiography of dance in the United States has long maintained a divide between theatrical concert dance and other types of dance. Although the historiographical emphasis is now changing in the academy, academic conceptualizations line up with government funding conceptualizations. Indeed, universities are another institutional structure that engage in theorizing dance. Concert dance is an implicitly classed and raced label. Many scholars have looked at classing and racing in dance, including Susan Manning (*Modern Dance, Negro Dance*, 2004), Thomas DeFranz (*Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey’s Embodiment of African American Culture*, 2004), Yutian Wong (*Choreographing Asian America*, 2010), and Ellen Graff (*Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942*, 1997). Grant guidelines continue to construe and define dance, requiring dance artists and companies to fit themselves into a category. And, just as grant guidelines use the term “dance” in a number of ways, I also use the word with different meanings at different times throughout this project. I use dance to mean both choreography in general and to cite a specific piece of choreography. Choreographers and dancers, as well as physical conditions, all bear on changes that occur to dancing and dances.

## Theories of Reproducibility

In 1972, dance critic Marcia B. Siegel famously wrote in her introduction of *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance*, “[d]ance exists at a perpetual vanishing point. At the moment of its creation it is gone...[it is] an event that disappears in the very act of its materializing.”<sup>26</sup> This quotation is often cited by dance scholars when arguing, or simply making the observation—since many observers both within and outside of the dance world do not view Siegel’s statement as up for debate—that dance is ephemeral. In line with Siegel’s notion, performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan posited in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1996) that performance is an art form that inherently occurs in the present and therefore, only becomes itself through disappearance.<sup>27</sup> Phelan stated that live performances cannot be reproduced or represented; performance is ontologically nonreproductive. This supposed resistance to reproduction, according to Phelan, is the greatest strength of performance; its disappearance is its source of power since it exists outside of circulations of finance and an economy of reproduction.<sup>28</sup>

In *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999), on the other hand, performance critic Philip Auslander questioned the resistance made possible through performance’s inherent ontology of disappearance, since the disappearance of

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<sup>26</sup> Marcia B. Siegel, *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 146.

<sup>28</sup> Phelan, *Unmarked*, 149.

performance is only made possible by the political and cultural discourses that performance supposedly resists.<sup>29</sup> Though Phelan argued that live performance's becoming itself through disappearance makes it a unique genre, Auslander cited numerous performances of mediatization, such as television, film, videotape, and audiotape recordings, that likewise become themselves through disappearance. For example, television is an evanescent medium. The images are there for the viewer momentarily before ceasing to exist. In addition, Auslander discussed the possibility and occurrences of mass reproduction of live performances,<sup>30</sup> something Phelan deemed an impossibility. Because technological mediation has long been a part of live performance—since at least the time of the ancient Greeks, when actors used masks to amplify their voices in plays—the main point of debate among scholars within mediatization is reproduction.<sup>31</sup> Of course, Auslander argued, live performance can only exist within an economy of reproduction.<sup>32</sup> Within the present U.S. cultural economy dominated by reproduction, in order to copyright a performance, it must be in a fixed medium that can be copied.<sup>33</sup> Due to this fact, Auslander argued that live performance defies ownership. A work does not exist legally—that is, for purposes of attribution and compensation claims—in the United States unless it can be repeated through reproduction.

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<sup>29</sup> Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 39-40.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>33</sup> Auslander, *Liveness*, 131. Title 17 of the United States Code, or the 1976 Copyright Act, maintains that a work is created when it is fixed in a copy. According to this law, a work legally exists only when it is replicated.

In *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), performance studies scholar Diana Taylor proposed that embodied practices and knowledge, including performances, exist as the repertoire. The repertoire is juxtaposed with the archive, which includes texts and other supposedly enduring materials such as documents, bones, and performances held in a fixed medium required for copyright. Taylor noted a rift at the turn of the twenty-first century between the archive and repertoire due, in part, to the political nature of debates about performance's "ephemerality." Knowledge via the written language has been privileged over embodied knowledge for centuries, she argued, because of the power inherent in the unidirectionality of meaning making and communication through writing, whereas nonrepeatable embodied practices can have multiple meanings and interpretations.<sup>34</sup> Taylor observed that Western epistemology rests upon the idea that writing is equivalent to memory and knowledge. Thus, Taylor posited, it only makes sense that any sort of textual status that performance can achieve, through repeatability, rigorous analysis by performance studies scholars, or otherwise, would also bring a welcome increase of power to performance as a system capable of knowing and transmitting knowledge.<sup>35</sup>

Seen through the prism of the above scholars' analyses, ephemerality, nonrepeatability, and nonreproducibility might all seem to be the same or versions of the same thing. To be sure, not all dance scholars share this viewpoint. My research promises to elucidate how they are, in fact, different. And, the distinctions among these terms are

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<sup>34</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

quite important for dance studies. To say that dance is ephemeral means that dance is transitory, fleeting, and momentary, and that it exists only during the time in which it is performed, and disappears immediately after. To observe that dance is nonrepeatable means that dance is not capable of being danced again in the same way, that a copy or replication of the dance cannot be made. And, nonrepeatability is different still from nonreproducibility. To reproduce dance is not to replicate or duplicate; to reproduce dance is to present it again. Such presenting again can even take the form of mechanical reproductions using film, videotape, or digital media. Ephemerality implies both nonrepeatability and nonreproducibility. It also excludes the opportunity for kinesthetic traces to register and the existence of bodily archives. While choreography may not ever be repeated in the same way twice, it certainly can be reproduced. Choreography is filmed and reproduced in a mediatized form—this has been done since at least the advent of film and then affordable videotape technology in the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S. An instructor demonstrates a dance step and the step is reproduced on the bodies of her students. A dancer at a club reproduces a move she saw someone else do. A dance company receives a grant to reconstruct a piece of choreography so it is reproduced for contemporary audiences. The same piece of choreography tours from city to city, reproduced night after night, nationally or internationally. I argue with this project that dance is not transitory, fleeting, or momentary; it can be, and frequently is, presented again. The federal government specifically provided money to present again, or reconstruct, dance work through American Masterpieces.

That's not to say that when dance is presented again it is always recognizable as

an iteration of the same dance. Indeed, choreographed work is oftentimes reproduced successfully without acknowledging alternate iterations or source material to the audience. Dance studies scholar Priya Srinivasan investigated this in choreographer Ruth St. Denis's *Radha* (1906) in *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (2011). Though St. Denis did not publicly cite Nautch dancers performing on Coney Island as an influence, many of their movements were reproduced, albeit in a slightly altered manner, on stage by the choreographer in *Radha* and throughout her career. Thus, Srinivasan argued, the kinesthetic legacy of the Nautch dancers permeated the choreographic work of St. Denis and, consequently, this legacy is part of the history of modern dance in the United States. Due to this history, elements of the Nautch dancers' performance continue to be reproduced today in American modern dance since kinesthetic traces of Nautch dancing were passed on to other dancing bodies by St. Denis through her pedagogical methods and dance technique.

Anthropologist Sally Ness offered another perspective on dance's reproducibility in "The Inscription of Gesture: Inward Migrations in Dance" (2008). She investigated how dance techniques or gestures can be read as inscription, as something that inscribes and, as a result, transforms and has permanence. Focusing on twentieth century dancing bodies rigorously trained in a technique such as ballet or bharata natyam, Ness analyzed the dancer's body as the medium that is acted upon when inscribing gesture. These inscribing gestures make more of a mark, she maintained, and are, perhaps, more consciously part of the bodily archive than kinesthetic traces. The process of embodiment over time of a particular technique physically alters the dancer's body similar to linguistic

inscription. The dancer's body acts as a living monument of the technique it is trained in and passes on this inscription to other bodies through training in a particular technique. By reversing the notion of dance expressing something from the inside out, to that of expressing something that happens from the outside in, acting on the dancer's body, Ness challenged the notion of dance as ephemeral, that is, dance's existence only for a moment. The dancer's body becomes a durable host for the choreography and technique in which it is trained. Classical dance training permanently alters the skeletal and muscular composition of dancers' bodies, thus making the dancers' bodies bodily archives and sites of reproducibility.<sup>36</sup>

Yet another stance about dance's reproducibility is posited by dance studies scholar Anthea Kraut in "Stealing Steps' and Signature Moves: Embodied Theories of Dance as Intellectual Property" (2010). Kraut located an economy of reproduction in the early twentieth century United States, in which many dancers were not concerned with the borrowing of their choreography so long as credit was given in program notes. The performers' attitude toward "borrowing" illuminates the value they placed on cultural capital, rather than the exclusive rights that might be gained through copyright.

Problematizing the notion of dance as ephemeral, Kraut pointed out the lengths Black artists went to in order to make their dances nonreproducible within the capitalist

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<sup>36</sup> Sally Ann Ness, "The Inscription of Gesture: Inward Migrations in Dance," in *Migrations of Gesture*, ed. Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1-30. Ness's theorization is quite fruitful, though there are some areas that still need to be worked out. Her choice of classical dance is logical as these forms have the most highly codified techniques and, consequently likely result in the most permanent impact on a dancer's body. However, this seems to privilege these classical forms over social dance forms or those with less rigorous training as these less technical forms presumably leave a less durable inscription on the dancer's body.

economy. Dancers corporeally staked claims on their choreography by relying on their unique styles of performance, so that despite the imitation of steps, the dance was not replicable or repeatable in the same way on other bodies.<sup>37</sup> Certain Black artists such as Earl “Snake Hips” Tucker and Josephine Baker were known for their signature moves and corporeal autographs so that even when another dancer reproduced their steps, the dance was not corporeally presented in the same way—the steps were reproduced, yet not repeated in the same way. Dance steps do not disappear, as Phelan would like to believe; rather, as Kraut stated, they rematerialize on someone else’s body.<sup>38</sup> Kraut cited both Phelan’s ontology of performance about dance’s ephemerality, and Auslander’s belief that performance escapes ownership since its copyright requires the assistance of another fixable form, to illustrate the generally held belief that dance exists outside of the capitalist economy. Yet, Kraut’s argument about “stealing steps” situates dance as very much part of the capitalist economy: if dance steps are inherently imitable, then they certainly are reproducible in a capitalist economy.

## **Reconstructions**

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<sup>37</sup> Anthea Kraut, “‘Stealing Steps’ and Signature Moves: Embodies Theories of Dance as Intellectual Property,” *Theatre Journal* 62, no. 2 (May 2010): 173-189. Kraut noted that the dancer’s body serves as a site for adjudication in alternate systems of claiming property ownership, maintaining that Western ideas of singular, original authorship, inherent in copyright law, do not necessarily apply to Black vernacular dance where “stealing” constitutes a primary mode of learning and innovating. Within Black vernacular dance, an informal, embodied system of copyright exists stressing physical presence and the policing of performances by observers. The enforcement of this copyright system requires a person to witness both the bodily signature and the corporeal forgery. It also requires this witness to say or do something about the copying.

<sup>38</sup> Kraut, “‘Stealing Steps’ and Signature Moves,” 180.

“What dances will we choose to pass along to dancers and audiences in the next century that will speak of the American experience and tell the whole story?”<sup>39</sup> This compelling question concluded then director of the NEA’s dance program, Sali Ann Kriegsman’s, keynote speech of the “Dance ReConstructed: Modern Dance Art Past, Present, and Future” conference co-sponsored by Rutgers University and the Society of Dance History Scholars in 1992. Though it would be another fifteen years until the NEA funded dance reconstructions through the American Masterpieces initiative, Kriegsman called out the empowering ability of reconstructions, preservation of work, and its influence on cultural heritage. As moderator during the keynote panel of this same conference, Roger Copeland questioned the increased level of interest in reconstruction, in addition to documentation and preservation, of theatrical dance: “Can it be attributed in part to the twin ravages of Age and AIDS, the devastating—and unprecedented—loss of two generations of choreographers simultaneously?”<sup>40</sup> There was a trend in the 1980s and 1990s, as evidenced by the conference organized around the topic, to reconstruct dance work. Most of these reconstructions consisted of pieces from the early modernist era and pre-classic dance, quite different than the American Masterpieces reconstructions I analyze in this dissertation.

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<sup>39</sup> Sali Ann Kriegsman, “Keynote,” in *Proceedings of the conference Dance ReConstructed, co-sponsored by the Department of Dance, Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, and the Society of Dance History Scholars, October 16-17, 1992*, ed. Barbara Palfy with Claudia Gitelman and Patricia Mayer (New Brunswick: Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1993), 10.

<sup>40</sup> Roger Copeland, “Perspectives in Reconstruction,” in *Proceedings of the conference Dance ReConstructed, co-sponsored by the Department of Dance, Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, and the Society of Dance History Scholars, October 16-17, 1992*, ed. Barbara Palfy with Claudia Gitelman and Patricia Mayer (New Brunswick: Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1993), 11.

In 1989, dance studies scholar Mark Franko noted in “Repeatability, Reconstruction and Beyond” that the drive for reconstruction stems from a desire to render performance unchanging. Repeatability and reproduction are recurrent themes in Western theatrical history. Writing in the early nineteenth century, Heinrich von Kleist in “On the Marionette Theatre” discussed and theorized Western people striving for repeatable perfection in performance.<sup>41</sup> Von Kleist observed that perfect movements can only occur in those who are unselfconscious—children and animals—or accidentally by adults; however, this unselfconscious or accidental perfection cannot be repeated. The marionette, von Kleist determined, is an ideal site for perfect repetition while human bodies, and I argue by extension, dancers, will never be able to achieve this repeatable perfection. Repeatability is desirable because it allows performance the powerful status as almost-text.<sup>42</sup> Franko acknowledged that repeatability in dance is a myth, so instead proposed that dance reconstruction should strive to see the new in the old, a tactic labeled “reinvention.” Dance history can be actively theorized through reinvention and Franko argued that cultural critique and dance theorization via reinvention should replace the drive for reconstruction.

Helen Thomas summarized much of the debate surrounding dance reconstructions in *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory* (2003), including whether the term “reconstruction” is an accurate descriptor of what takes place since it implies replication

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<sup>41</sup> Heinrich von Kleist, “On the Marionette Theatre,” *The Drama Review: TDR* 16, no. 3 (September 1972): 22-26.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Franko, “Repeatability, Reconstruction and Beyond,” *Theatre Journal* 41, no. 1 (March 1989): 73.

of an original.<sup>43</sup> Reconstructions exist on a scale between “authentic” and “interpretive.” An “authentic” reconstruction strives to present the choreography “*as it was*” when the dance was first performed, while an “interpretive” reconstruction works to capture the spirit of the work “*as it is*” in the present, speaking to contemporary audiences. The location of authenticity when reconstructing a notated dance *as it was* is called into question with the notator and reconstructor operating in positions of authority, since the majority of dancers and choreographers are notation illiterate and cannot read a score. A recording similarly privileges a particular viewpoint of the dance, in addition to situating the recorded performance as the authentic “original.” Recreating a dance *as it is* positions the reconstructor as a co-author or collaborator with the choreographer and dancers, past and present. Thomas observed that, “[a]lthough most reconstructors now recognise that there is at least some interpretation involved in the process, the concern for authenticity and making ‘real’ the work of the choreographer remains dominant.”<sup>44</sup> The lack of mentioning either authenticity or interpretation in the American Masterpieces grant description, along with the inclusion of “artistic genius” in the subtitle of the grant title leads me to believe that the NEA was interested in *as it was* reconstructions that presented the “real” work of the choreographer/artistic genius.

A different tack regarding the authority of the choreographer is explored in Allana C. Lindgren and Amy Bowring’s article “The Choreographer’s Trust: Negotiating Authority in Peggy Baker’s Archival Project” (2011), included in an issue of *Dance*

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<sup>43</sup> Helen Thomas, *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 123.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

*Chronicle* devoted to “Preserving Dance as a Living Legacy.” Baker, primarily a solo choreographer, archived six solos she selected in a project called “The Choreographer’s Trust.” After choosing dancers, each piece was staged and recorded with two different performers. In addition,

Baker invited a choreologist, a dance writer, a visual artist, a DVD production team, and a website designer to work with her to produce multimedia records of the rehearsals and performances. The resulting documentation has been collected in packages that include DVDs and booklets...[that] contain excerpts from the dance writer’s journals and essays by Baker that explain her theories about dance and performance.<sup>45</sup>

Baker views choreography and interpretation as separate and does not want her performances of her choreography to be viewed as authoritative, advocating for multiple readings.<sup>46</sup> Upon licensing one of Baker’s dances, the reconstructor is free to alter costumes and lighting design, but the steps cannot be changed. While the work remains open to multiple interpretations, Baker views her choreography as stable; however, Lindgren and Bowring noted how, “despite Baker’s attempts to ‘preserve’ them,” the archival project reveals that steps are not fixed.<sup>47</sup> As Baker was directly involved in selecting the works and performers to appear in her archive, The Choreographer’s Trust reinforces the authority of the creator.

The American Masterpieces: Dance grants totaling more than \$5 million required a specific type of reproduction: reconstruction. Reconstruction is the reproduction of dance pieces across time, since grant recipients reproduced choreography that had not

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<sup>45</sup> Allana C. Lindgren and Amy Bowring, “The Choreographer’s Trust: Negotiating Authority in Peggy Baker’s Archival Project,” *Dance Chronicle* 31, no. 1 (2011): 77-78.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

been viewed live in recent memory. An American Masterpiece grant brought attention to the absence of a work through the commissioning of a surrogate. Surrogate choreography rematerializes in a different way from choreography that remains in repertory. The change from the last version to the new version can be drastic after the choreography has lain fallow for a sustained amount of time. As performance studies scholar Joseph Roach notes in *Cities of the Dead* (1996), memory serves as a surrogate for the actual events that took place.<sup>48</sup> Thus, a certain amount of forgetting, creative remembering, and trials and errors come to stand as part of collective memory. The American Masterpieces program acted as a curation of bodily archives at the same time that it created new bodily archives. This corporeal archival project documented certain kinesthetic legacies while it further invisibilized others.

## **Chapter Overview**

I selected four American Masterpieces grants to serve as case studies to analyze different aspects of dance's reproducibility brought to the fore by the NEA program. In chapter one, I look at how the American Masterpieces program worked to canonize Alwin Nikolais and argue that this canonization was an attempt to bring fixity to dance, an art formed viewed by the NEA as ephemeral. (The supposed fixity of canonization is further complicated by the fact that canons are always shifting and changing.) The chapter focuses on how Nikolais's dance technique and the place of dance in the university serve as some of the ways dance is reproduced and assist in its canonization.

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<sup>48</sup> Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

Nine grants were awarded to reconstruct Nikolais's choreography in 2009 and 2010 to commemorate the choreographer's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. I also investigate how two of these grants reproduced Nikolais's work differently—one awarded to Marymount Manhattan College to reconstruct *Crucible* (1985) on its college students as an educational project and one awarded to the Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance to reconstruct *Kaleidoscope Suite* (1956) on the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, to bring back the choreography to be part of a professional company's repertory, again.

Chapter two brings to light some of the multiple archives that preserve choreography as exemplified by the American Masterpieces grant to the National Performance Network (NPN). These NPN cases invite a reconsideration of ideas about reproducibility through the lens of theories of archiving. I take on the role of bodily archivist in this chapter as I look at how Marc Bamuthi Joseph's *Word Becomes Flesh* (2003 and 2010) "choreopoem" choreographically grapples with written and embodied archives. And, in modifying the autobiographical solo into a quintet in which Joseph did not perform for the American Masterpieces reconstruction, Joseph exemplifies how reproduction and reconstruction can happen differently, while still serving to archive the performance. Jane Comfort's collaborative process in creating *Faith Healing* (1993 and 2010) brings attention to multiple archival sources, including both the choreographer and dancers. Pat Graney's *Faith* (1991 and 2010) showcases multiple ways of archiving, tapping into bodily archives, reconstructing the work with members of the first and second casts, and utilizing OntheBoards.tv's new on demand streaming technology to archive the piece.

I analyze the American Masterpieces reproductions through David Gordon's *Trying Times (remembered)* (2008) in chapter three. The complexity of the dance maker's history rejecting his categorization and his habit of reconstructing the work of other artists makes him a particularly rich case study. Gordon's *Trying Times (remembered)* calls attention to the never perfect processes of reconstruction and surrogation through using a video projection of the "original" *Trying Times* (1982). In so doing, Gordon challenges the audience to question the authority of both the masterpiece label as well as ideas about originality and authenticity in dance. At the same time, *Trying Times (remembered)* also serves to solidify Gordon's place in the canon (through deeming his 1982 self as worthy of reconstruction) and creates an aura of authenticity surrounding the "original" piece visible in the 1982 projection. In addition, *Trying Times* originally reproduced George Balanchine's *Apollo* (1928), a piece that brings into relief the ongoing surrogation process at play when choreography remains in repertory. Gordon's work forces attention to the seams of surrogation.

As a whole, my project engages with debates in the field of dance studies in a number of ways. Current debates on dance, ephemerality, and reproduction intersect with my research and I will be able to add to this debate through looking at reproducibility in concert dance reconstructions. My work will counter previous emphases on ephemerality and repeatability, in favor of emphasizing reproducibility and circulation. It will thereby consolidate claims that dance does, indeed, take part in capitalist economies. I will dig into the voiced reasons for which the NEA supported reconstructions and reproductions as well as endeavor to theorize unacknowledged, and perhaps unknown, reasons.

Through analyzing some of the reconstructions that actively dismissed the notion of dance as ephemeral or ignored this supposed characteristic of the form, I will show how choreographers can and do theorize dance in differing, sometimes opposing, ways than the funding structures supporting them.

## **Methodology**

In writing this dissertation, I employ a range of methodologies. Since the American Masterpieces program reconstructed dances from the past, I present historical information about the choreographers alongside the critical reception of the work when it was first presented. I attempt to describe changes that occurred in the choreography between the dances' premieres to their more recent reconstructions through a close reading of the choreography, when viewing both an earlier performance and its reconstruction was possible. Before I knew that I would be writing about the American Masterpieces initiative, I was an audience member for two of the reconstructions that I write about—David Gordon's *Trying Times (remembered)* and Pat Graney's *Faith*—so I draw from my personal memory of viewing these performances in writing about the choreography. I was only able to compare full-length recordings of an “original” performance and a performance of a reconstruction for Graney's *Faith*. While I saw Gordon's *Trying Times (remembered)* live, only clips of the updated piece are available online. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts houses recordings of *Trying Times* from 1982, as well as *Faith* and Jane Comfort's *Faith Healing*. The library was also a resource for recordings of a panel discussion on the work of Alwin Nikolais

and numerous performances of Nikolais's work, though none that were made possible via the American Masterpieces grants. Some full-length recordings were available online, including Graney's *Faith Triptych* via OntheBoards.tv and Joseph's *Word Becomes Flesh* via Vimeo.

My research began with the NEA's website, searching the descriptions of the American Masterpieces grants awarded to discover the dances that were reconstructed with the support of this project. I submitted Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the NEA in order to access grant applications, final reports, and the calls for proposals for funding. These materials are available, with certain information, such as budget details, redacted, through FOIA requests since the federal government awarded the grants. I conducted interviews with a variety of individuals involved in some of the reconstructions, a grant writer, a choreographer, dancers involved with the reconstructions, and the co-artistic director of the Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance who reconstructs all of Nikolais's work since the choreographer's death. In some cases, I chose to use the choreographers' voices from already existing interviews, artistic statements, reviews, and articles. I also use my personal experience as a researcher in the NPN chapter to present another type of embodied archive to the reader.

The American Masterpieces: Dance program presents conflicting theories about dance and many of the reconstructions that I write about are rife with contradictions. The NEA brings important visibility to the arts and to dance, but this visibility also comes along with certain assumptions and implications that are passed along to the general public without comment, most of the time. The American Masterpieces grants that I write

about in this dissertation acknowledge dance's reproducibility and use it to challenge or upset the structure of the grant in some way. The slippery nature of dance provides the form the space and opportunity to subvert theorizations from outside funding structures at the same time as it can slide into reinforcing ideas about canons, archives, authenticity, and originality.

## CHAPTER 1

### **The American Masterpieces Canon: Alwin Nikolais's Canonization through Reconstruction**

On April 15 and 16, 2011, college dance students from across the country had the unique opportunity to come together to perform in a concert featuring Alwin Nikolais's choreography at the Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College in New York City. Students also participated in Nikolais technique classes and heard from several generations of Nikolais dancers over the weekend. This conference, "Sharing the Legacy: Dance Masterworks of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century" hosted by the Hunter College Dance Program, was made possible, in part, through funding from the American Masterpieces initiative. Students from nine colleges performed reconstructions of Nikolais's work; the American Masterpieces program additionally supported five of those pieces—*Aviary* (1978) performed by Hunter students, *Gallery* (1978) performed by University of North Carolina School of the Arts students, *Imago* (1963) performed by Southern Utah University students, *Temple* (1974) performed by Tulane University's Newcomb Dance Company, and *Tensile Involvement* (1955) performed by DeSales University students. Marymount Manhattan College students performed excerpts from *Mechanical Organ* (1978) in the "Sharing the Legacy" concert, which did not receive NEA funding. However, many of these student performers did benefit from the American Masterpieces program, with a reconstruction of *Crucible* (1985) during the same school year. These Marymount Manhattan students were able to see their peers from Muhlenberg College, located in Allentown, Pennsylvania, stage *Crucible* as part of the "Sharing the Legacy" performance, choreography that they themselves would be performing two weeks later as part of the Spring Dance Repertoire

concert.<sup>1</sup> Speaking about the experience, former Marymount Manhattan student Holly Jones recalled, “it was actually really nice seeing [the *Crucible* choreography] on another set of dancers, seeing the different choices that they made with the same movement vocabulary we were given.”<sup>2</sup> Jones went on to say how watching Muhlenberg students perform the piece was rewarding and that she “almost wanted to cheer them on when they hit [specific movements on musical cues] because [she] knew how hard it was to make those moments really magical.”<sup>3</sup> The American Masterpieces initiative made possible the shared kinesthetic experience of dancers trained in Nikolais technique, but also this specific instance of dance students watching other dancers perform choreography that was known to them, a rare occurrence in concert dance.

In this chapter, I argue that the American Masterpieces reconstructions became a mechanism through which canonization occurred. This exclusionary canonization also served to solve the, as presented by the American Masterpieces program, ephemerality problem of dance through bringing supposed fixity to the form. This chapter examines grants awarded to reconstruct Nikolais’s choreography to show how the creation of a canon is a contradictory and multifaceted process. First, I will explain why Nikolais is a good case study for analyzing the canonization that took place as a result of the American Masterpieces initiative. Then, I will demonstrate how the American Masterpieces

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<sup>1</sup> Muhlenberg College did not receive an American Masterpieces grant to reconstruct *Crucible*. Marymount Manhattan College’s Spring Dance Repertoire performances occurred at the Theresa Lang Theater over two weekends April 28-30, 2011 and May 5-7, 2011. Meghan Quinlan, “Celebrating the Life and Work of Alwin Nikolais,” *Artfusion News* no. 6 (Fall 2010): 51.

<http://www.mmm.edu/departments/art/artfusion/artfusionnews-fall2010.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Holly Jones, in discussion with the author, March 19, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, discussion.

program provided canonicity to the pieces reconstructed. Next, I will show how dance's reproduction as technique, including Nikolais's technique, is used to further the canon in educational institutions. Finally, I will review how two of the American Masterpieces grants awarded to reconstruct pieces in honor of Nikolais's centenary in 2009 and 2010 both furthered Nikolais's inclusion as part of the canon of American modern dance and destabilized this same canon.

### **Nikolais's place in dance history and scholarship**

No examination of the American Masterpieces program would be complete without looking at Nikolais, given the number of grants that were awarded to reconstruct his choreography. The NEA awarded nine American Masterpieces grants, seven in 2009 and two in 2010, to help commemorate Nikolais's birth. In an interview, Alberto "Tito" del Saz, co-artistic director of the Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance, recalled that the number of grants awarded for the Nikolais centenary "was unheard of, that one same choreographer would get so many awards...but I think the NEA thought that this was a once in a lifetime opportunity and so they were supportive."<sup>4</sup> Del Saz viewed the remembrance of Nikolais's birth coinciding with the opportunity of funding reconstructions as a unique chance to celebrate the choreographer. There was also an additional American Masterpieces grant awarded in 2007 to reconstruct a Nikolais work, bringing the total number of grants supporting Nikolais's choreography to ten—the most of any choreographer whose work was reconstructed through this program.

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<sup>4</sup> Alberto del Saz (co-artistic director, Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance), in discussion with the author, April 17, 2014.

Nikolais, of Russian-German descent, was born on November 25, 1910 in Southington, Connecticut. He saw German expressionist choreographer Mary Wigman perform while she was on tour in the United States and was intrigued by her dancing and use of music.<sup>5</sup> Following this inspiration, Nikolais studied with Truda Kaschmann, one of Wigman's students, in Hartford, Connecticut and then took classes at the first summer institute at Bennington College with Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman.<sup>6</sup> After serving in World War II, Nikolais settled in New York to take classes with Holm, since he connected most with her style.<sup>7</sup> While serving as Holm's assistant in 1949 for a summer program at Colorado College, Nikolais met Murray Louis, who became his artistic and life partner.<sup>8</sup> The year prior, Holm recommended that Nikolais be appointed director of Henry Street Playhouse on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.<sup>9</sup> It was at Henry Street that Nikolais developed his technique and first formed his dance company.<sup>10</sup> The choreographer created multimedia dance works until his death in 1993. Nikolais occupies an interesting position in American dance history as a

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<sup>5</sup> Alwin Nikolais and Murray Louis, *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique: A Philosophy and Method of Modern Dance* (New York: Routledge, 2005), ix. (Printed in lighter font, indicating written by Louis.)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, x.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Anderson, "Alwin Nikolais, Versatile Pioneer Of Modern Dance, Is Dead at 82," *New York Times*, May 10, 1993. <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/05/10/obituaries/alwin-nikolais-versatile-pioneer-of-modern-dance-is-dead-at-82.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Claudia Gitleman and Randy Martin, "Editors' Preface," in *The Returns of Alwin Nikolais: Bodies, Boundaries and the Dance Canon*, ed. Claudia Gitleman and Randy Martin (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), vii.

<sup>10</sup> Nikolais and Louis, *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*, x. (Printed in lighter font, indicating written by Louis.)

choreographer perennially just outside of the mainstream of American modern dance, since some critics viewed his work as closer to puppetry than dance.

Scholarship in the twentieth century largely sidelined Nikolais, but there has been some academic interest in the choreographer over the past decade. *The Unique Gesture*, Nikolais's own writing on his philosophy of dance, remained unpublished during his lifetime. Louis published this manuscript in an annotated and expanded version in 2005 as *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique: A Philosophy and Method of Modern Dance*. This book distinguished Louis's writing from Nikolais's manuscript by utilizing a bold typeface for the sections Nikolais wrote as *The Unique Gesture*. The book provided insight into the thinking behind Nikolais's goal in dance performance. Nikolais strived for what he viewed as "[t]he most distinctive aspect of American modern dance," the "unique gesture," which, as something that was one-of-a-kind, was not based on movement techniques that aimed for reproducibility, rather the unique gesture could only "be accomplished by an analysis of human motion as an art and by a practiced study of the aesthetic potentials of that medium."<sup>11</sup> *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique* also served as a manual for teachers of Nikolais/Louis dance technique. The second section of the book outlined twenty-five weeks of lesson plans for five days a week of technique classes, improvisation, and composition exercises.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Nikolais and Louis, *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*, 7. (Printed in bold font, indicating written by Nikolais from *The Unique Gesture* manuscript.)

<sup>12</sup> Also included with the book is a DVD of five films that comprise the "Dance as an Art Form" series. Rather than review possible exercises for a Nikolais technique class as one might expect, the footage showcases students from Nikolais and Louis residencies as they exemplify different elements of the art of dance: motion, space, time, shape, and "The Dancer's Instrument—the Body."

Only two years after the publication of *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*, the anthology *The Returns of Alwin Nikolais: Bodies, Boundaries and the Dance Canon* (2007) was published. In his introduction, dance studies scholar Randy Martin noted that though the choreographer was the subject of a number of dissertations between 1967 and 1993, none were published.<sup>13</sup> Editor, dance educator and former Nikolais dancer Claudia Gitelman and Martin intended the collection of essays “to fill a lacunae in dance history, to both document some of Nikolais’ work and his approaches to creating it,” in addition to reflecting on ongoing revisions to dance history and the dance canon and “to intervene in current thinking on the status of the body in performance, the politics of silence and invisibility, and the uses of art to imagine social possibilities.”<sup>14</sup> The volume presented Nikolais as an important figure in American modern dance who operated at the intersection of many disciplines, leading critics to constantly grapple with how to define his artistic output.

Nikolais’s critical reception and the relative lack of scholarship about him left his status as part of the canon up for question, despite the accolades he received during his lifetime. He received one of the first grants distributed by the NEA to individual choreographers in 1966 and was a recipient in 1987 of both Kennedy Center Honors, recognizing significant contributions to American culture through the performing arts over a lifetime, and a National Medal of Arts, the highest award given to artists by the

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<sup>13</sup> Randy Martin, “Nikolais Returns,” in *The Returns of Alwin Nikolais: Bodies, Boundaries and the Dance Canon*, ed. Claudia Gitelman and Randy Martin (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Gitelman and Martin, “Editors’ Preface,” viii.

United States government.<sup>15</sup> But still, the choreographer often conjured articles with titles such as Clive Barnes's 1974 *New York Times* review, "Dramatic But Is It Dance?"<sup>16</sup> Martin wrote that Nikolais's "career success was shadowed by critical doubt that generated questions that recurred over five decades;" at the heart of these questions was the definition of "dance."<sup>17</sup> Nikolais's work almost always employed elements outside of the choreography itself that were quite important to the overall reception of the work, including elaborate costumes, props, lighting design, and sound scores, and these additional elements were usually created by Nikolais. He had a propensity to "dehumanize" his dancers, treating them more like props than humans.<sup>18</sup> Despite this, Jack Anderson's *New York Times* obituary of Nikolais noted that the choreographer "also had articulate defenders. Writing in the magazine *Dance Observer* in 1957, the esthetician George Beiswanger conceded that Mr. Nikolais made 'the props dance and the dancers prop.' But he added: 'Now one may take this in two ways, as dehumanizing the dancer or

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<sup>15</sup> Anderson, "Alwin Nikolais" and National Endowment for the Arts, *Annual Report 1966* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 1967). <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/NEA-Annual-Report-1966.pdf>. Nikolais received a grant "designed to enable the artists to create new works and prepare outstanding repertory works for performance. The funds were used to pay the salaries of dancers in the companies, the musicians involved, and to increase rehearsal time," along with Alvin Ailey, Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, Jose Limon, Anna Sokolow, Paul Taylor, and Anthony Tudor (NEA, *Annual Report 1966*, 42). While Graham received a grant of \$40,000, Nikolais only received \$5,000 (NEA, *Annual Report 1966*, 95).

<sup>16</sup> Clive Barnes, "Dramatic But Is It Dance?," *New York Times*, March 3, 1974.

<sup>17</sup> Martin, "Nikolais Returns," 1.

<sup>18</sup> For a queer reading of why Nikolais might have "dehumanized" dancers, see Rebekah Kowal, "Alwin Nikolais' Queer Objectivity," in *The Returns of Alwin Nikolais: Bodies, Boundaries and the Dance Canon*, ed. Claudia Gitleman and Randy Martin (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 82-106.

as animizing the thing. I am inclined, perhaps perversely, to the latter view.”<sup>19</sup> This debate over Nikolais’s work both during his lifetime and since his death in 1993 left the choreographer’s canonical status in question until recently.

Nikolais was particularly well suited to be canonized via the American Masterpieces program due to the infrastructure surrounding his choreography. Though the choreographer died in 1993, his company continued to perform until 1999 as the joint Nikolais and Louis Dance Company after merging with Murray Louis’s company in 1989.<sup>20</sup> Due to financial reasons, Louis disbanded the company in 1999. However, before the company closed, Louis also considered both his legacy and the legacy of his partner. Most of the repertory had been videotaped and Louis negotiated a repository for the archives at Ohio University’s Alden Library Archives and Special Collections, where a former Nikolais dancer, Gladys Bailin, helped to establish the dance department.<sup>21</sup> Then, Louis set to work documenting the Nikolais technique in what would become *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique* book. “But,” Louis wrote, “concert repertoire is meant to be a living thing. The fact that all Nik’s works were filmed and videotaped meant

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<sup>19</sup> Anderson, “Alwin Nikolais.”

<sup>20</sup> Diane Solway wrote in the *New York Times*: “The choreographers decided to merge the Nikolais Dance Theater and the Murray Louis Dance Company nearly a year ago, when both had become frustrated by the financial and administrative burdens of running separate ensembles. To insure financial stability, their companies had been touring abroad at least 20 weeks a year, leaving little time to make new dances.” Diane Solway, “Old Friends Give New Meaning to ‘Pas de Deux,’” *New York Times*, October 15, 1989. <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/15/arts/dance-old-friends-give-new-meaning-to-pas-de-deux.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Murray Louis, “The Nikolais Legacy,” *Dance Magazine* 77, no. 9 (September 2003): 32 and Anna Kisselgoff, “Savoring the Steps Behind His Dance,” *New York Times*, December 17, 2005. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/17/arts/dance/17loui.html>.

nothing in terms of perpetuating the excitement of a live performance.”<sup>22</sup> In order to keep Nikolais’s work in repertory, rather than form a new dance company, a partnership with Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company began in 2003. Seven pieces were initially selected for performance by Ririe-Woodbury and then, every year or so as funding becomes available, additional Nikolais pieces are selected and reconstructed with the company.<sup>23</sup> The American Masterpieces program afforded the Foundation the opportunity to add two additional Nikolais pieces to the company’s repertoire that were then available for touring during the centenary; *Tent* was reconstructed with a grant to Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company in 2007 and *Kaleidoscope* with a grant to Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance in 2009. Del Saz remains active as co-artistic director of the Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance, teaching Nikolais technique, reconstructing pieces, and licensing choreography available for performance. Outside of the years surrounding the Nikolais centenary, del Saz typically participates in residencies to reconstruct three to seven pieces, but the centenary and available funding via American Masterpieces meant that he reconstructed work at twelve universities in 2010.<sup>24</sup>

Nikolais’s canonization and the “masterpiece” status of his choreography did not precede the American Masterpieces grants, but actually coincided with them—or, perhaps more precisely, was enabled by them. And, this prompts us to consider how canonization, reproduction, and reconstruction are interrelated. In the final article

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<sup>22</sup> Louis, “The Nikolais Legacy,” 32.

<sup>23</sup> Del Saz, discussion. The first pieces reconstructed for Ririe-Woodbury were *Noumenon*, *Mobilus*, *Tensile Involvement*, “Lythic” from *Prism*, *Mechanical Organ*, “Finale” from *Liturgies*, *Crucible*, and *Blank on Blank*. Louis, “The Nikolais Legacy,” 32.

<sup>24</sup> Del Saz, discussion.

included in the Nikolais anthology, “Period Plots, Canonical Stages, and Post-Metanarrative in American Modern Dance” (2007), dance studies scholar Mark Franko considered the stakes of the reevaluation of Nikolais that the book prompted, since Nikolais was previously not part of the canon formed with the aid of the discourse of modernism. Franko noted that while debates were ongoing in other fields about canonization, a similar debate was not happening in dance studies.<sup>25</sup> This was perhaps because at the time, dance was busy trying to establish itself as a field, and part of that was fleshing out a previously lightly documented history and establishing a canon. Only after a canon was created, could there be a disruption of the canon. Franko observed that most modern dance companies founded in the early to mid-twentieth century generally performed the choreography of their founder and “operate from within their own choreographic and dance-technical ‘archive.’”<sup>26</sup> This is contrasted with ballet companies’ propensity to perform work from a wide range of choreographers, which Franko attributed to the “status of technique,” which, for ballet, is international versus modern dance’s differentiated and specialized techniques.<sup>27</sup> There was an expectation that modern dance choreographers “invent” a technique that could be used to reproduce and

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Franko, “Period Plots, Canonical Stages, and Post-Metanarrative in American Modern Dance,” in *The Returns of Alwin Nikolais: Bodies, Boundaries and the Dance Canon*, ed. Claudia Gitleman and Randy Martin (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 171.

<sup>26</sup> Franko, “Period Plots,” 172. It is interesting to note here the recent announcements from the Paul Taylor Dance Company and Stephen Petronio Company that they will begin performing pieces by other choreographers as part of their repertory. Brian Seibert, “New Members for a Dance ‘Family’: Petronio Company to Perform Other Choreographers’ Works,” *New York Times*, August 20, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/arts/dance/petronio-company-to-perform-other-choreographers-works.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Franko, “Period Plots,” 172.

pass on their unique artistic styles. And, the discourse of modernism included the “rejection of a predecessor act[ing] as the warrant for the visibility of the successor.”<sup>28</sup> According to Franko, the cycloid of Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and Merce Cunningham serves as the basis for the American modern dance canon in the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> Nikolais does not easily fit into this narrative of canon formation as promoted via a discourse of modernism since he built off of, rather than rejected, his mentor Hanya Holm. Though Nikolais did create a technique, as I will discuss later, he viewed the technique as a “*basic technique*” that could be applicable to all dance forms.<sup>30</sup> The Nikolais technique also emphasized improvisation. While the canon formed through the discourse of modernism held Nikolais on the sidelines, the American Masterpieces program brought the choreographer to the fore.

### **American Masterpieces as Canonization**

The “American Masterpiece” label awarded by the NEA to reconstruct choreography implied a certain canonicity. Harold Bloom’s *The Western Canon* (1994) defended the notion of canon formation and viewed canonical works as those that are authoritative in our culture. In using the term “masterpiece,” the NEA indicated the authoritative nature of those works selected. The 2009 grant description stated that the American Masterpieces: Dance program would enable “Americans in communities across the nation” to experience “reconstructions and restagings of *significant work of the*

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>30</sup> Nikolais and Louis, *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*, 1. (Printed in lighter font, indicating written by Louis.)

*highest quality*” (italics mine).<sup>31</sup> Using the terms “significant” and “highest quality,” the NEA emphasized that run-of-the-mill or average and below average choreography would not be covered under this program. The pieces to be reconstructed as American Masterpieces would be important and worthy of inclusion into an American dance canon.

Due to dance’s reproducible, though never static, nature, the American Masterpieces program attempted to capture choreography through reconstructions and documentation of these restagings. In “The Origin of the Concept of a Canon and Its Application to the Greek and Latin Classics” (2001), George A. Kennedy wrote, “[c]anon formation is a natural human instinct, an attempt to impose order on multiplicity, to judge what is best out of many options, and to preserve traditional knowledge and values against the erosion of time and influences from outside the culture.”<sup>32</sup> This preservation impulse and protection of the work from the “erosion of time” is particularly important when looking at the American Masterpieces: Dance program. A 2007 issue of *NEA Arts* was dedicated to American Masterpieces, and the article on the dance program, entitled “Preserving Classics of an Ephemeral Art,” noted that “the project serves a vital role in preserving the art form’s rich history.”<sup>33</sup> The *NEA Arts* issue framed dance as an art form particularly vulnerable to being lost and not in touch with its history, while the articles on other arts genres—choral music, musical theater, and visual arts—emphasize the

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<sup>31</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, “American Masterpieces: Dance, FY 2009,” CFDA No. 45.024, 2009NEA01AMD, 7334800, OMB No. 3135-0112 (June 2008), 1. Available via Freedom of Information Act request to the National Endowment for the Arts.

<sup>32</sup> George A. Kennedy, “The Origin of the Concept of a Canon and Its Application to the Greek and Latin Classics,” in *Canon vs. Culture: Reflections on the Current Debate*, ed. Jan Gorak (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 2001), 105.

<sup>33</sup> “American Masterpieces: Dance; Preserving Classics of an Ephemeral Art,” *NEA Arts* 2 (2007): 12. [http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea\\_arts/neaARTS\\_2007\\_V2\\_0.pdf](http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea_arts/neaARTS_2007_V2_0.pdf).

diversity and range of material the American Masterpieces grants allow. The article on the American Masterpieces: Visual Arts program noted that, far from the unfamiliarity of dance, some of the art on tour might even be familiar to viewers from common reproductions of these famous works.<sup>34</sup> This *NEA Arts* issue took the ephemerality of dance as a given. The article on the dance program framed the “limited notation of dance works” as a problem and warned readers that professional companies often lack “the artistic or financial resources to support reconstructions.”<sup>35</sup> The author intimated that these problems and potential crises for dance are solved with the help of American Masterpieces funding.

The concern for preservation extended beyond the NEA to at least some of the American Masterpieces grantees. University of Washington received a 2009 American Masterpieces College Component grant of \$15,000 for Alberto del Saz to set Nikolais’s *Pond* (1982) on the university’s Chamber Dance Company. The final report for this grant noted that this “concert continued Chamber Dance Company’s work to stage and preserve classics from the modern dance canon. Given the potential for such works to be lost, this work remains crucial.”<sup>36</sup> This statement highlights the tenuous status of dance and positions the University of Washington’s Chamber Dance Company as a savior and archivist of important choreographic work. The final report added that “[s]tudents and

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<sup>34</sup> “American Masterpieces: Visual Arts; Sharing the Depth and Richness of American Art,” *NEA Arts* 2 (2007): 8.

[http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea\\_arts/neaARTS\\_2007\\_V2\\_0.pdf](http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea_arts/neaARTS_2007_V2_0.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> “American Masterpieces: Dance; Preserving Classics of an Ephemeral Art,” 12.

<sup>36</sup> University of Washington, “Final Descriptive Report,” award no. 09-3348-7211 (January 2011), 1. Available via Freedom of Information Act request to the National Endowment for the Arts.

dance enthusiasts continue to learn and be amazed at the breadth and depth of modern dance history and gain a more complete understanding of the trajectory of the art form.”<sup>37</sup> This suggests both that dance students and “enthusiasts” are ignorant about the form’s history and that through experiencing reconstructions that preserve works from the past, viewers will gain more knowledge about and appreciation for dance. The American Masterpieces grant covered costs associated with recording the concert to be preserved on the university campus.<sup>38</sup> The piece was presented at an October 2010 concert meant to contextualize the work of Nikolais, performed alongside the work of Lar Lubovich, Oskar Schlemmer, Tandy Beal, and Llory Wilson.<sup>39</sup>

Since the American Masterpieces initiative sought to reconstruct pieces, the program brought back choreography previously out of circulation, enabling the consumption of the work, a crucial element to canonization. Additionally, the American Masterpieces College Component grants helped to legitimize the canonization of pieces selected for reconstruction with college dance students. For Greek and Latin students, Kennedy noted the important role played by the availability of new translations in the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> University of Washington, “Grant Application,” application no. 09-900392 (October 2008), 5. Available via Freedom of Information Act request to the National Endowment for the Arts.

<sup>39</sup> The grant proposal did not include Lar Lubovich, rather Loie Fuller and Mary Wigman. Gear Up (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) funding for arts programming was cut, though the program continued with math and science curriculum. Middle school students who participate in University of Washington’s Gear Up summer program were able to watch a studio run-through of the entire concert before participating in a week-long workshop in Nikolais technique. This workshop was taught by a former Nikolais company member who was a graduate student in education at UW, Stephanie Scopelitis. The Gear Up students also saw the final produced performance. University of Washington, “Grant Application” and University of Washington, “Final Descriptive Report.”

canonization of literature, since in order to study “classics,” the work needs to be available for contemporary audiences.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, dance students need to be able to consume pieces, ideally through viewing the choreography rather than via other available ephemera (newspaper reviews, still photographs, programs, etc.) for inclusion in the canon. Reconstructions via the American Masterpieces grants and the video documentation of these reconstructions so often included as part of the project were one way that pieces became available for consumption by contemporary audiences. Further, dance students involved in the reconstructions themselves kinesthetically consumed the work and their bodies became repositories of the canon. Marymount Manhattan student Holly Jones said, “speaking as a kinesthetic learner, anything that I can do or experience myself is going to stick with me a lot longer than watching a video or live performance...anything I’ve done a reconstruction for has been so valuable in informing my knowledge about the choreographer [and] the style of movement.”<sup>41</sup> Though a reconstruction, the work is given new life as part of the bodily archives of the dancers. (I discuss bodily archives more in depth in chapter two.)

In “Period Plots, Canonical Stages, and Post-Metanarrative in American Modern Dance,” Franko pointed out that choreographic work achieves and sustains visibility through both the self-promotion of the choreographer and discourse surrounding the work. Franko stated, “[y]ou don’t exist unless people talk about you, and they don’t talk about you unless your work continues to be performed.”<sup>42</sup> One way that choreography

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<sup>40</sup> Kennedy, “The Origin and Concept of a Canon,” 115.

<sup>41</sup> Jones, discussion.

<sup>42</sup> Franko, “Period Plots,” 170.

continues to be performed is if it remains in the repertory of a company. A reconstruction is another way that a piece of choreography is brought back to the fore and into discourse, available for consumption and teaching. Canons are then legitimized through educational institutions. Since the canon relies upon its reinscription as such to exist, teaching canonical works means that these works will continue to be viewed as part of the canon. This reinscription occurs, in part, due to an observation Kennedy made, writing that “[c]anonization has a way of selecting those who will protect the canon.”<sup>43</sup> The American Masterpieces program reconstructed works of choreography, performed them for contemporary audiences, contributed the “masterpiece” title to the discourse surrounding these works, and taught this choreography to a new generation of dance students who carry the work as part of their bodily archives.

While canons are never closed and are always undergoing shifts and changes, there are many obstacles blocking acceptance into the canon and, likewise, there were obstacles to receiving American Masterpieces funding. Jens Richard Giersdorf astutely observed in “*Trio A Canonical*” (2009) that “[e]ven though it has been repeatedly argued, canons are not based only on aesthetic merits, nor are they divorced from political structures.”<sup>44</sup> The very nature of how the American Masterpieces program was set up limited the pieces that were available for reconstruction. The Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance offers approximately ten to twelve pieces as available for reconstruction,<sup>45</sup> comprising the Nikolais canon, even though the choreographer created 118 works over

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<sup>43</sup> Kennedy, “The Origin and Concept of a Canon,” 115.

<sup>44</sup> Jens Richard Giersdorf, “*Trio A Canonical*,” *Dance Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 20.

<sup>45</sup> Del Saz, discussion.

the course of his lifetime.<sup>46</sup> In describing how this list was settled upon, del Saz said “it’s a combination of what represents Nik’s work and the diversity of his work and...the variety of the content of the pieces.”<sup>47</sup> While representing Nikolais’s range, del Saz acknowledged the available pieces also include what del Saz referred to as Nikolais’s “masterworks,” his most famous and arguably best choreography, including *Tensile Involvement* (1955), *Crucible* (1985), and *Imago* (1963).<sup>48</sup> American Masterpieces grants, however, were not necessarily awarded to reconstruct “the best” American choreography—there was an application process, so a piece would only be reconstructed if an application naming the piece was submitted. Further, individuals cannot apply for grants from the NEA (after a change made in 1996 following the culture wars), so applications had to come from non-profit organizations. Only organizations with the appropriate infrastructure to apply and steward support from the NEA were successful in receiving the grants.

### **Technique and Reproduction**

The modern dance canon is supported and reinscribed by various dance techniques and training methods that continue to be taught at the university level. Modern dance in the United States was institutionalized, in part, thanks to the establishment of dance in higher education following Margaret H’Doubler’s creation of a dance major at

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<sup>46</sup> Gitelman and Martin, “Editors’ Preface,” vii.

<sup>47</sup> Del Saz, discussion.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

the University of Wisconsin in 1926.<sup>49</sup> Modern dance pedagogy was taught via techniques developed by choreographers working at the time. Franko observed that the discourse of modernism that contributed to the canonization of twentieth century theatrical dance emphasized the importance of technical innovation for creative accomplishment, thus most modern dance choreographers working through the 1950s, including Nikolais, created their own techniques from which their choreography emerged.<sup>50</sup> In “Sense Your Mass Increasing with Your Velocity: Alwin Nikolais’ Pedagogy of Unified Decentralization” (2007), Claudia Gitelman, a former Nikolais dancer and dance scholar, compared Nikolais with George Balanchine who famously declared, “but first, a school,” since Nikolais developed a training program to serve as the foundation for his dance company.<sup>51</sup> In order to properly execute his choreography, dancers were trained in his technique.

Nikolais viewed his technique as different from other modern dance techniques that developed during the twentieth century. In *The Unique Gesture*, Nikolais’s descriptions of his technique are often implicitly, sometimes explicitly, framed in comparison to other theatrical dance forms. Nikolais thought most modern dance “techniques” were more personal styles than systems of movement, with American

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<sup>49</sup> For more about dance in higher education in the United States, see Janice Ross, *Moving Lessons: Margaret H’Doublor and the beginning of dance in American education* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> Franko, “Period Plots,” 172-173.

<sup>51</sup> Claudia Gitelman, “Sense Your Mass Increasing with Your Velocity: Alwin Nikolais’ Pedagogy of Unified Decentralization,” in *The Returns of Alwin Nikolais: Bodies, Boundaries and the Dance Canon*, ed. Claudia Gitelman and Randy Martin (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 26.

modern dance more impacted by “genius” personalities than German modern dance.<sup>52</sup> Rudolph von Laban promoted “impersonal analyses,” so there was less of a focus on the individual choreographer’s style of movement in German modern dance, though Laban’s technique was still “a ‘centralized’ one based on precise spatial, architectural orientations surrounding the body.”<sup>53</sup> Nikolais wanted to get away from what he perceived as the ego acting as an anchoring force in dance. In order to ensure that movement was not subservient to the ego, Nikolais attempted to remove the focus from the ego through “decentralization.” In decentralization, the first goal is to “contrive methods of releasing the body from the limiting vortex of the ego, the self.”<sup>54</sup> Nikolais desired for movement to be the master of the individual, not the other way around, enabling dance to be the art of motion: motion as the subject rather than literal subjects. Nikolais’s definition of dance was “dance is the art of motion, not emotion, and it carries its own intelligence within itself.”<sup>55</sup> With decentralization, movement can originate from anywhere, even outside of the body, rather than, for instance, the solar plexus or from contraction and release.

Originally taught at the Henry Street Playhouse, Nikolais’s technique was taught as a daily, three-year course. As Louis stated, “[t]he Nikolais/Louis technique is based on the philosophy that the undertaking of dance training is not a simple or singular event, but a lifelong investment in personal enrichment.”<sup>56</sup> The course began “with a two-hour

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<sup>52</sup> Nikolais and Louis, *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*, 9. (Printed in bold font, indicating written by Nikolais from *The Unique Gesture* manuscript.)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>56</sup> Nikolais and Louis, *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*, 1. (Printed in lighter font, indicating written by Louis.)

technique class, followed by one hour of improvisation and, after a half-hour break, a period of composition, percussion, or pedagogy.”<sup>57</sup> Gitelman observed, “the specificity of his method of training dancers was indispensable to the creation of his oeuvre.”<sup>58</sup> Since the Nikolais technique was central to the performance of his choreography, it makes sense that training in Nikolais technique would be a necessary part of any performance of Nikolais choreography, including reconstructions funded via the college component grants awarded through the American Masterpieces program. All of the American Masterpieces: College Component Nikolais grants mentioned teaching Nikolais technique as a key element of the project outside of the choreography reconstruction itself.

Dance technique itself operates as an economy of reproduction. Nikolais/Louis technique is said to be a “creative technique” because it involves improvisation and composition. However, students of this technique also participate in an hour and a half to two hour-long technique class that shapes the dancers’ bodies.<sup>59</sup> In “Dancing Bodies” (1997), dance studies scholar Susan Leigh Foster described five methods of cultivating the body via theatrical dance techniques and how dancers create their dancing bodies through years of training in technique classes. Despite Nikolais’s different viewpoint

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Gitelman, “Sense Your Mass Increasing with Your Velocity,” 26.

<sup>59</sup> In the introduction, Louis wrote, “Nikolais designed the course to begin with a two-hour technique class, followed by one hour of improvisation and, after a half-hour break, a period of composition, percussion, or pedagogy” (1). However, in his description of the stretches involved in a technique class later in the book, Louis observed that “the stretches and pliés should not exceed more than forty minutes of an hour-and-a-half-long class” (70). Nikolais and Louis, *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*.

emphasizing decentralization and including improvisation, his technique still required the dancers to train their bodies. In *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*, Louis wrote:

The instruments to make art are not natural ones. They are manmade or man-altered—and so, too, is man’s instrument for dance, the body, altered.

The dancer begins his evolution by transforming himself into an instrument of exceptional strength, flexibility, and motional range, and enhancing his sentient, tactile, and conceptions abilities.<sup>60</sup>

In order to successfully perform Nikolais’s work, dancers needed to develop their bodies; normal, average, or “natural” bodies would not be sufficient. In a theatrical dance class, Foster observed, “[b]oth the exercises themselves and any directives offered by the teachers are usually highly repetitive. Drilling is necessary because the aim is nothing less than *creating the body*.”<sup>61</sup> Louis echoed this same sentiment about the importance of repeatability:

One learns the skill of dancing by dancing. One gets stronger through repetition.

By doing, and doing, and doing, the body will gain strength and skill, allowing the dancer a versatile instrument to reveal intuitive judgments in all their subtlety. By repetition, these artificial skills become natural to the dancer’s body. All these performing skills can become natural through repetition, rehearsals, and performing. An artificial, manmade naturalness is created.<sup>62</sup>

For Louis, the repetition involved in technique classes enabled the altering of a “natural” body into something that was an instrument able to create “art.” If the body were still in its “natural” state, then performed choreography might not be art:

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<sup>60</sup> Nikolais and Louis, *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*, 42. (Printed in lighter font, indicating written by Louis.)

<sup>61</sup> Susan Leigh Foster, “Dancing Bodies,” in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 239.

<sup>62</sup> Nikolais and Louis, *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*, 42. (Printed in lighter font, indicating written by Louis.)

We can alter and restructure nature by altering our bodies with what were once “unnatural” skills and abilities. In other words, a dancer’s training is a preparation for artistry.

The dancer will now undergo a period of training to reshape and develop the body. This period will stress endurance, concentration, and the ability to metamorphisize the self into abstract imagery, among other transformations. The dancer will now shape and craft an instrument to deal with and perform the art of dance.<sup>63</sup>

In Nikolais classes, the emphasis was not only on creating a body able to technically master the work, but also one that could perform the choreography with the correct intention, purpose, and thought behind each movement.

Despite this emphasis on repetition in training, Nikolais, as stated previously, strived for the “unique gesture” in performance. For Nikolais, modern dance could achieve the unique gesture through its originality and creativity. *New York Times* dance critic Anna Kisselgoff moderated a panel discussion surrounding the Nikolais centenary in December 2010, “Alwin Nikolas: Preserving the Legacy,” at the Bruno Walter Auditorium at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. In her comments, Kisselgoff spoke of how Nikolais viewed dance as becoming too homogenized toward the end of his career and the importance of the “original gesture” to the dance maker. Louis who was on the panel interrupted Kisselgoff to inform her that Nikolais “called it the *unique* gesture.”<sup>64</sup> I recount this interaction here for the unscripted response to Louis’s correction of Kisselgoff and the implications for dance as an art form existing within an economy of reproduction. Kisselgoff, seemingly embarrassed that she used the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 42-43.

<sup>64</sup> Anna Kisselgoff, Alberto del Saz, Peter Kyle, Murray Louis, and Joan Woodbury, “Alwin Nikolas: Preserving the Legacy,” panel discussion videotaped at the Bruno Walter Auditorium, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, videographer Penny Ward, December 2, 2010 (New York) DVD, 83 min.

incorrect term on this panel, replied, “at the [*New York Times*], you’re not allowed to use the word ‘unique,’ you have to say ‘singular,’ it’s in the style book.” Louis responded, “Really?” And Kisselgoff continued, “well, they say nothing is unique, if you wrote ‘unique’ you would have it copyedited out.”<sup>65</sup> In the style book or not, the always reproducible and always referential form of dance, even if the performer does not know what or who he is referencing, cannot be unique.

Nikolais classes begin on the floor, so that rather than fight gravity, dancers can bring their awareness to this force. For the first forty minutes of class, dancers move through a stretching sequence—on the floor exercises might include leg swings, spinal extension, flexion, and twists, and, once dancers are standing, drop swings and leg warm-ups—to strengthen and begin warming up the body before moving into pliés with an awareness of dimensional directions and grain.<sup>66</sup> “Graining” was Nikolais’s term for “the ability to focus the attention of the body to a point in or outside of the body. It is an internal focus.”<sup>67</sup> Louis wrote, “[t]he plié is a basic exercise of the dance. It contains almost every principle for preparing the body to dance.”<sup>68</sup> Following the forty minutes of stretches and pliés, the technique class transitions into exercises moving across the floor and exploring the premise of the class for that day. Class premises or intentions range from engaging body parts to rotation action turns, from volume and three-dimensional

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Warm-up stretches are detailed pages 70-86 and pliés on pages 93-97 of Nikolais and Louis, *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*. (Printed in lighter font, indicating written by Louis.)

<sup>67</sup> Nikolais and Louis, *The Nikolais/Louis Dance Technique*, 97. (Printed in lighter font, indicating written by Louis.)

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 88.

forms to diagonal control. Premises introduced in technique class are then carried through for further exploration in both the improvisation and composition classes later in the day. The across the floor part of class acclimates dancers with “moving a three-dimensional body through space within a time structure.”<sup>69</sup> Class concludes with leaps, runs, and jumps for a kinetic release.

Bodies created through the repetition of technique classes fit within specific aesthetic visions of dance traditions and choreographers. Despite Nikolais’s claim that his technique was “basic,” different techniques create different types of bodies with different specializations, and Nikolais’s technique is no different. Technique classes for a specific technique look the same throughout the world, since their objective is to create the same dancing body. Because of this specificity, Foster noted that “[g]enerally, the style and skills [a given technique] imparts can be transferred only partially to another technique; thus, ballet dancers cannot assume the bearing or perform the vocabulary of movements found in contact improvisation, and vice versa.”<sup>70</sup> This is because the body of a ballet dancer has been created differently than the body of a contact improviser. Anthropologist Sally Ann Ness might say that these dancing bodies have been differently “inscribed.” In her article “The Inscription of Gesture: Inward Migrations in Dance” (2008), Ness explored the phrase “gesture as inscription” as it applies to dance. Ness investigated how dance techniques or gestures can be read as inscription, as something that inscribes and, as a result, transforms and has permanence. Focusing on twentieth century dancing bodies rigorously trained in a classical technique such as ballet or bharata natyam, Ness

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>70</sup> Foster, “Dancing Bodies,” 241.

observed that these dancers usually start studying the dance forms at an early age and, “[t]hese intensive regimes in many cases result in the permanent alteration of deep tissues, even bone structures.”<sup>71</sup> The dancer’s body, in Ness’s formulation, acts as a “living monument” of the technique in which it is trained—similar to Louis’s “artificial, manmade naturalness” created through repetition—and passes on this inscription to other bodies through training in a particular technique.

Del Saz is probably the best example of a person who most embodies a living monument of Nikolais technique. Del Saz has impeccable posture with broad shoulders and a narrow waist. His muscles are elongated and sinewy. When speaking, he communicates with his hands, however he does not simply gesture with his hands; del Saz’s hands and arms glide through space in a very intentional way, as though the air around them is thick, with their movement reverberating to and from his torso and chest. Born in Spain, del Saz had an early career as a figure skater. He joined a professional figure skating company when he was seventeen years old to tour throughout Europe and South America and then taught figure skating in Spain for several years before deciding that he wanted to change careers.<sup>72</sup> Del Saz arrived in New York in 1983 and entered the Nikolais school in September of that year. In January 1985, del Saz joined the Nikolais Dance Theater and has been with them ever since.<sup>73</sup> Del Saz’s entire dance training is in Nikolais’s way of moving; speaking on the “Alwin Nikolas: Preserving the Legacy”

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<sup>71</sup> Sally Ann Ness, “The Inscription of Gesture: Inward Migrations in Dance,” in *Migrations of Gesture*, ed. Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 13.

<sup>72</sup> Del Saz, discussion.

<sup>73</sup> Del Saz, discussion.

panel at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts in December 2010, del Saz said that he “didn’t have to unlearn anything” when he began his technical training at the Nikolais school and is referred to as a “pure” Nikolais dancer.<sup>74</sup> Del Saz discounts the expansive bodily education he went through as a figure skater (he was Spanish National Champion in 1980<sup>75</sup>) when considering how his body has been trained. Surely Ness would argue that del Saz’s extensive training as a figure skater has also inscribed his body in some way.

Considering the training that company members undergo before performing a choreographer’s work, it is nearly impossible for dancers in a reconstruction to experience the choreography in the same way. Speaking about when Nikolais began his career, del Saz said, “those times were different because people went to study with a certain choreographer, but even between [del Saz’s] generation and maybe two generations prior...the bodies are different.”<sup>76</sup> Foster argued that “choreographic experimentation with eclectic vocabularies and with new interdisciplinary genres of performance has circumvented the distinctiveness of these bodies” previously trained in a specific technique.<sup>77</sup> The “independent choreographers” to whom Foster referred as experimenting with eclectic vocabularies work outside of established dance traditions, institutions, and techniques, and also have not developed their own techniques to support the development of their work. Therefore, dancers are encouraged and expected to “train

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<sup>74</sup> Kisselgoff, del Saz, Kyle, Louis, and Woodbury, “Alwin Nikolas: Preserving the Legacy.”

<sup>75</sup> “Tito del Saz,” Marymount Manhattan College, accessed September 20, 2014, <http://www.mmm.edu/live/profiles/441-tito-del-saz>.

<sup>76</sup> Del Saz, discussion.

<sup>77</sup> Foster, “Dancing Bodies,” 253.

in several existing techniques without adopting the aesthetic vision of any.”<sup>78</sup> Foster identified this new body as a “hired body,” competent at many styles. Del Saz likewise observed this trend, saying, “if you look at the bodies from twenty years ago versus the bodies nowadays, the physicality of the bodies has changed. The possibilities of what you are able to do with the body are different.”<sup>79</sup> This body for hire does not retain or exhibit the distinctive qualities of each individual technical style, rather, the body “homogenizes all styles and vocabularies beneath a sleek, impenetrable surface.”<sup>80</sup> While this body can perform, in theory, any particular technical genre, it also necessarily is not expert at any one of them. This becomes a challenge when attempting to reconstruct a work previously performed with dancers extensively trained in a specific technique.

One of the complicating factors in reconstructing Nikolais’s choreography is working with dancers who do not have extensive training in his technique. Del Saz discussed this challenge in an interview, saying, “I try to push [dancers] in terms of moving in a way they’ve never moved before... ‘Don’t move from the point of view of muscle memory, but move from’—it’s a new experience... ‘Don’t go back to your resources as a dancer, try to just maybe approach [the movements] from a different point of view.’”<sup>81</sup> In addition to trying to teach dancers in a short period of time how to break away from years of technical training in different techniques, del Saz talked about the high level of skill in many dancers today. He said, “it’s a sensitive issue because people feel like when you reconstruct work—my goal is to try to keep it as pure as possible to

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Del Saz, discussion.

<sup>80</sup> Foster, “Dancing Bodies,” 255.

<sup>81</sup> Del Saz, discussion.

the original, but in that process, because you are working with different bodies...some of the quality may be lost.”<sup>82</sup> Since dancers today “have more physicality” than in previous generations—in conversation, del Saz used the example of dancers previously only being able to lift their legs up to ninety degrees and now dancers can lift their legs to almost 180 degrees—he has “to make a choice as an artistic director what is more important, the physicality at that very moment or to show the quality of that very moment. I take certain liberties to make sure that the emphasis of what I think is important at that very specific moment shows through.”<sup>83</sup> Through using different bodies in reconstructions and still trying to be true to the “original,” decisions still have to be made about the original. Is reproducing the physicality of the movement or the shape of the movement more important? These same questions come up when working with less technically skilled dancers as well. Del Saz said, “as a choreographer you have to look at that body [with certain limitations] and then say, ‘what can I do with it to make it look the best that I can and still challenge them?’”<sup>84</sup>

Training in a given dance technique aids in the reconstruction of a dance, allowing the performers to operate from a common knowledge base. The existence of techniques also make canonization more possible since bodies have been inscribed with the training necessary to perform certain choreography. However, the loss of distinctive techniques with dancers increasingly trained in multiple styles does mean that certain choreographic nuances are likely lost in performance. Writing about the “Preservation

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

Politics” conference that took place in 1997 at Roehampton Institute, Ramsay Burt recounted presentations that dealt with “[t]he ‘problem’ of how dancers interpret choreography in performance” and “the task of restaging works on companies whose dancers have a different technical training to those on whom they were initially made.”<sup>85</sup> This “problem” is part of a larger debate about the agency of the choreographer versus the agency of the dancers in how a piece is performed. In the current environment for contemporary Western dance where choreographers do not tend to train their dancers in techniques they created, the teaching of Nikolais technique seems of another time. The fact that students were educated about Nikolais technique as part of the American Masterpieces program gave the work an additional level of historicity, further adding to notions of Nikolais’s inclusion in the canon.

### **Canonization of Nikolais through American Masterpieces Program**

In 2009 and 2010, nine American Masterpieces grants were awarded in conjunction with Nikolais’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance, which continues to promote the work of Nikolais more than twenty years after the choreographer’s death, seized the opportunity to focus the spotlight on Nikolais during his centenary year to ensure that Nikolais’s choreography remained part of the discourse of American dance. The NEA awarded a total of \$220,000 in 2009 and 2010 combined to the Nikolais centenary projects, nearly 6 percent of all American Masterpieces: Dance dollars awarded in those years. American Masterpieces grants were awarded in two

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<sup>85</sup> Ramsay Burt, “Re-presentations of re-presentations: Reconstruction, Restaging and Originality,” *Dance Theatre Journal* 14, no. 2 (1998): 32.

categories: for dance companies, presenters, and festivals; and for college and university dance programs. The college component grants were for a fixed dollar amount of \$15,000. Six of the nine Nikolais grants awarded in the final two years of the American Masterpieces program were these college component grants.<sup>86</sup> One of the other three grants, awarded to the New Orleans Ballet Association, also included the reconstruction

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<sup>86</sup> 2009 grantees in the dance companies, presenters, and festivals category included: Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance (\$40,000 to reconstruct four dances from *Kaleidoscope* (1956) on the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company), Henry Street Settlement (\$40,000 to present “NIKOLAIS A Centennial Celebration,” a project that included an exhibition of archived programs and photos, screenings of archival films, Nikolais technique master classes taught by del Saz, a panel discussion, and a performance of four works created and originally performed at Henry Street—the performance consisted of three pieces danced by Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company: *Kaleidoscope* (1956; available for performance because of the American Masterpieces grant to Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance), *Noumenon Mobilus* (1953), and *Imago: The City Curious* (1963) and one piece performed by students in the Abrons Arts Center Dance Ensemble, *Tensile Involvement* (1955)), and New Orleans Ballet Association (\$50,000 to reconstruct *Temple* (1974) on Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company while the company was in residence in New Orleans and to reconstruct “Water Studies” from *Sanctum* (1964) on students from Tulane University’s Newcomb Dance Program). 2009 College Component grants of \$15,000 each included: University of Washington to reconstruct *Pond* (1982), University of North Carolina School of the Arts to reconstruct *Gallery* (1978), Southern Utah University to reconstruct *Imago* (1963), and DeSales University to reconstruct *Tensile Involvement* (1953). And, 2010 College Component grants of \$15,000 each included: Marymount Manhattan College to reconstruct *Crucible* (1985) and Hunter College (a City University New York school) to reconstruct *Aviary* (1978) and host the Nikolais “Sharing the Legacy” conference. Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance, “Grant Application,” application no. 09-900289 (October 2008); Henry Street Settlement, “Grant Application,” application no. 09-900307 (October 2008); New Orleans Ballet Association, “Grant Application,” application no. 09-900325 (October 2008); University of Washington, “Grant Application”; University of North Carolina School of the Arts, “Grant Application,” application no. 09-900347 (October 2008); Southern Utah University, “Grant Application,” application no. 09-900293 (October 2008); DeSales University, “Grant Application,” application no. 09-900309 (October 2008); Marymount Manhattan College, “Grant Application,” application no. 10-920126 (October 2009); and Research Foundation of the City University of New York, “Grant Application,” application no. 10-920153 (October 2009). All available via Freedom of Information Act requests to the National Endowment for the Arts.

of a Nikolais work on students at Tulane University as part of the larger project.<sup>87</sup> I will now take a closer look at two of these American Masterpieces grants that celebrated the Nikolais centenary and show how they contributed to Nikolais's canonization.

The Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance was awarded \$40,000 in 2009 to reconstruct four dances from *Kaleidoscope* (1956) on the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, a company that was involved with many of the other Nikolais American Masterpieces grants through performances or residencies. The Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company is based in Salt Lake City, Utah and was founded in 1964 by Shirley Ririe and Joan Woodbury.<sup>88</sup> Woodbury met Nikolais in 1949 at the summer workshop where he met Louis and Ririe also took classes with Nikolais. Ririe and Woodbury met each other in 1952 and began collaborating. The women soon shared a teaching position at the University of Utah and invited Nikolais and Louis to spend their summers working with University of Utah students in the early 1960s.<sup>89</sup> After Nikolais's death in 1993, and after Louis disbanded the Nikolais and Murray Louis Dance Company in 1999, "Louis selected the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company to preserve and present Nikolais' works, thus marking the first time an existing U.S. company has absorbed the collection of a past master while still maintaining its own identity."<sup>90</sup> As the Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance and the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company continue to collaborate, it has become a

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<sup>87</sup> New Orleans Ballet Association, "Grant Application," 4.

<sup>88</sup> "Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company History," Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, accessed March 20, 2014, <https://www.ririewoodbury.com/about/company-history>.

<sup>89</sup> Jannas Zalesky, "Pathbreakers: Shirley Ririe and Joan Woodbury," *Dance Magazine* 77, no. 9 (September 2003): 30.

<sup>90</sup> "Alwin Nikolais," Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, accessed March 20, 2014, <https://www.ririewoodbury.com/touring/item/52-alwin-nikolais>.

model for the NEA.<sup>91</sup> Part of this collaboration includes not only maintaining Nikolais pieces in the repertory of Ririe-Woodbury, but also piecing back together choreography that had not been performed for decades. The 2009 American Masterpieces grant reconstructed excerpts of *Kaleidoscope*, “Discs,” “Pole,” “Straps,” and “Clothes” (this section was originally called “Skirts”), collectively referred to as *Kaleidoscope Suite*. The reconstruction process, under the direction of del Saz and Joan Woodbury, culminated in a showcase performance that was documented with two video cameras. Not only was the choreography reconstructed, but missing costume pieces were recreated, lighting design was reconstructed to determine technical capabilities needed for the dance’s performance, and props and set pieces were rebuilt and created anew. Following the reconstruction, the grant proposal noted, the piece would be available for touring during the Alwin Nikolais Centennial Celebration during the 2009-2011 seasons.<sup>92</sup>

An undated press release issued by the Ririe-Woodbury Company announced the centennial celebrations in New York in the spring of 2010 noting the importance of these performances for awareness about Nikolais. The press release stated, “[i]t has been fifteen years since the death of Alwin Nikolais, and his legacy as a National Treasure is declining. For this reason the [Nikolais/Louis] Foundation, under the Artistic Direction of Alberto del Saz, is planning a number of activities to celebrate the centennial of Nikolais’s birth (1910) to raise his profile among communities.”<sup>93</sup> This press release

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance, “Grant Application,” 6.

<sup>93</sup> Jessica Ballard, “Alwin Nikolais Centennial Celebrates in New York City,” accessed September 15, 2014, [jessicaballard.weebly.com/uploads/3/6/7/5/3675584/nikolaispressrelease\\_new\\_york.doc](http://jessicaballard.weebly.com/uploads/3/6/7/5/3675584/nikolaispressrelease_new_york.doc).

reflected a concern about the decline of Nikolais's status and the centenary was offered as a remedy to showcase what the Foundation viewed as the talent and importance of Nikolais. Though the press release did not mention the American Masterpieces program, many of the activities mentioned in it were funded with the support of this initiative including the Abrons Art Center/Henry Street Settlement engagements and the performance of *Kaleidoscope*.<sup>94</sup> The language of the press release included terminology such as "legacy" and the idea that these live performances would introduce the work of the choreography to a new generation,<sup>95</sup> echoing much of the vocabulary used to describe the American Masterpieces program.

The American Masterpieces final report for *Kaleidoscope Suite* detailed the many considerations and some of the complications encountered during this reconstruction. The rehearsal period for reconstructing the piece took place over three weeks in August and September of 2009 at the Rose Wagner Arts Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, though much preparation work had been done prior to this, including holding auditions for four additional dancers to join the Ririe-Woodbury Company of six dancers, shipping costumes and props, and hiring stage technicians to replace original props and work on lighting.<sup>96</sup> The actual rehearsal process began with watching available video of the piece and del Saz contextualizing "the social period in Nikolais's life which had inspired the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance, "Final Descriptive Report," award no. 09-3348-717 ([2010?]), 1. Available via Freedom of Information Act request to the National Endowment for the Arts.

ballet” for the dancers.<sup>97</sup> “Rehearsal days were laced with learning each of the four works and having improvisation exercises which would help the dancer’s [*sic*] understanding of the quality of the choreography of each specific work.”<sup>98</sup> The three-week long rehearsal period concluded with a work-in-progress showing on September 4, 2009 at the Jeanne Wagner Theatre to determine technical requirements for touring the work as well as to record the piece with two cameras.<sup>99</sup> The Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance was not satisfied with the recording of the showing, writing in the final report that “[t]he center camera was inadvertently given a direct line-feed, so that it did not pick up the live sound of *Discs* on the floor...Also, [the company] did one run of the work before the audience arrived, and one after they were assembled. Neither of the two performances of the dancers met [the Nikolais/Louis Foundation’s] standards.”<sup>100</sup> The final report noted that the DVD that accompanied the report for the NEA would be replaced in April 2010, when the piece would be re-recorded during the performance of the reconstruction at the Rose Wagner Arts Center.<sup>101</sup> The final report did not state how the recorded performances fell short of the Nikolais/Louis Foundation’s standards and perhaps can be viewed as a failed reconstruction. However, *Kaleidoscope* was performed as part of centenary celebrations, so the reconstruction did become successful as it was reproduced in later performances.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

Two very different Nikolais reconstructions took place at Marymount Manhattan College during the 2010-2011 school year, only one of which, *Crucible* (1985), was funded through the 2010 American Masterpieces program. Students also worked with del Saz on excerpts of *Mechanical Organ* (1982), which was performed at Hunter College's "Sharing the Legacy" conference; however, this reconstruction as well as participation in the conference was not mentioned in the NEA grant. In an interview, project director Jens Giersdorf said that there was a conscious effort to not include participation in the conference when writing the grant because he wanted to make it clear that if Marymount Manhattan did not receive the grant, they would not be doing the *Crucible* reconstruction.<sup>102</sup> Marymount Manhattan students regularly participate in reconstructions as part of their coursework and the *Mechanical Organ* reconstruction was considered part of this usual curriculum, whereas the *Crucible* reconstruction and surrounding activities was a special additional opportunity, only available to students and the college community because of American Masterpieces funding. Marymount Manhattan was unique among the other colleges receiving Nikolais American Masterpieces grants because the school already includes Nikolais technique as part of regular coursework. All first year dance students, both BA and BFA students, take Nikolais technique with former Nikolais dancer Peter Kyle as part of the curriculum for the major.<sup>103</sup> The Marymount Manhattan grant is the only one that explicitly stated that students and others from the community would participate in Nikolais technique classes outside of the specific period

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<sup>102</sup> Jens Richard Giersdorf (associate professor of dance, Marymount Manhattan College), in discussion with the author, March 4, 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Jones, discussion and Meghan Quinlan, in discussion with the author, March 12, 2014.

of time when del Saz was on campus to work on the reconstruction. Grant activities began in June 2010, with Kyle teaching a Nikolais technique intensive. During the school year, local arts high school students visited Marymount Manhattan College's campus, participated with first year college dance students in a Nikolais technique class, and dance education college students gave the high school students a brief seminar about the Nikolais technique that the young dancers had just embodied.<sup>104</sup> A group of seniors from the Carter Burden Center for Aging also visited a rehearsal of Marymount Manhattan students working on the *Crucible* reconstruction. According to the final report and interviews with several participants in the project, these community outreach activities, required as part of the grant, "turned out to be a highlight of the grant activities."<sup>105</sup> The *Crucible* reconstruction was performed eight times as part of the college's Spring Repertoire concert at Theresa Lang Theatre.

The stakes of the Ririe-Woodbury Company's reconstruction are certainly different than when college students perform Nikolais's choreography. Both are furthering the choreographer's canonization, but are operating in different ways. Reconstructions by Ririe-Woodbury keep the choreography in repertory, in circulation, allowing audience members to continue to consume Nikolais's work reproduced on bodies in three-dimensional space. And, reconstructions by college students enable those

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<sup>104</sup> Giersdorf, discussion; Jones, discussion; and Quinlan, discussion.

<sup>105</sup> Marymount Manhattan College, "Final Descriptive Report," award no. 10-3348-7203 (December 2011), 2. Available via Freedom of Information Act request to the National Endowment for the Arts. Holly Jones, Meghan Quinlan, and Jens Richard Giersdorf all individually spoke about the success of these community outreach activities in interviews.

students to kinesthetically experience Nikolais's work and further his institutionalization as part of the curriculum on the college level.

### **Destabilization of the Canon**

Even as the American Masterpieces grants enabled Nikolias's canonization, there was a destabilization of an earlier canon in addition to opportunities for challenging Nikolais's inclusion in the canon. In referencing the numerous reconstructions of the 1980s, Franko noted the importance of reconstructions "because they hinted at an untamed value in the past (even forgotten) work," rather than the rejection of previous work required to indicate modernist progress.<sup>106</sup> Franko continued: "[r]econstructed works could make a contribution to the contemporary world not as surpassed predecessors *to* it but as active participants *in* it...this was disturbing the idea of canonicity, because with the unsettling returns heralded by reconstructions different historical accounts of origins were being implicitly proposed."<sup>107</sup> Thus, the reconstructions made possible with American Masterpieces support worked against canonization at the same time as they created a canon. The American Masterpieces program valued the historical work presented as historical, while the reconstructions also displayed for audiences similarities with contemporary choreography, showcasing the possibility of multiple origins and alternate canons.

While most Nikolais American Masterpieces grants celebrated Nikolais's "genius" and took his status as a given, the Marymount Manhattan College project

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<sup>106</sup> Franko, "Period Plots," 178.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

attempted to challenge the choreographer's canonization. Giersdorf organized four events to comprise the "Dialogues in Dance" series, public lectures hosted at Marymount Manhattan coordinated with the theme of Nikolais for the centenary during the 2010-2011 school year.<sup>108</sup> The final event in the "Dialogues in Dance" series brought together Heidi Latsky, choreographer from the dance company GIMP, choreographer Nancy Lushington, and Simi Linton, author of *My Body Politic* (2006), to problematize Nikolais's inclusion in the American dance canon. Speaking about that lecture in an interview, Giersdorf said that with the final lecture, he "tried to stick it to the grant a little bit, where [Giersdorf] purposefully [did not include] anything that was about Nikolais, but actually question[ed] strongly what Nikolais [was] doing and what those kinds of reconstructions require not questioning."<sup>109</sup> While Nikolais's choreography oftentimes abstracted the human body, the movement and manipulation of props and costumes required normative bodies. Nikolais bodies are highly technically trained, abled bodies, whereas GIMP utilizes different body types, including trained dancers and performers with physical disabilities.<sup>110</sup> Lots of work is necessarily excluded by canons and differently abled bodies are excluded by various techniques. Through the canonization of

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<sup>108</sup> The first three "Dialogues in Dance" lectures included: Claudia Gitelman and Randy Martin, editors of *The Return of Alwin Nikolais: Bodies, Boundaries and the Dance Canon* (2007), presented an "oral history of Nikolais' creative process and pedagogical aesthetic as well as reappraisal of his choreography in relation to the established dance canon." Gay Morris analyzed Nikolais's abstract work and gender neutrality of his dancers as a deflection from his sexual ambivalence. Del Saz, Peter Kyle, and Murray Louis examined the Nikolais legacy from their own unique generational viewpoints. Marymount Manhattan College, "Final Descriptive Report," 4.

<sup>109</sup> Giersdorf, discussion.

<sup>110</sup> "Mission," The Gimp Project, accessed June 29, 2014, <http://www.thegimpproject.com/gimp/mission/>.

dances that require technically trained, normative bodies as American Masterpieces, dancers who are not able to reproduce this choreography through an inability to create the necessary body are excluded. Similarly, choreographers who work with non-normative bodies are not part of the canon. Through their “Dialogues in Dance” presentation and performance, Latsky, Lushington, and Linton challenged the necessity of using normative bodies over non-normative bodies in dance. Giersdorf said that this final “Dialogues in Dance” event was his way of problematizing the American Masterpieces program of reconstructions and the project of canonization.<sup>111</sup>

The American Masterpieces project created a canon of American dance in order to preserve the art form’s history and legacy. Canonization became the vehicle through which dance masterworks could be saved from disappearance, educating new audiences about the importance of choreographers and their work. The Nikolais/Louis Foundation for Dance used the opportunity of Nikolais’s centenary coinciding with the availability of the NEA grant to bring visibility to the choreographer’s work and further canonize the dancemaker. Franko viewed Nikolais’s inclusion in a canon of American dance as a destabilization of the canon created via the discourse of modernism, but the addition of Nikolais also does not upset racial and gender hierarchies in American dance or the project of canonization itself. Through teaching a new generation of college students Nikolais technique and choreography, the American Masterpieces program ensured that the effects of exclusionary canonization will continue to reverberate close to the surface

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<sup>111</sup> Giersdorf, discussion.

of bodily archives for years to come, reproducing and reinscribing American dance canons.

## CHAPTER 2

### **The National Performance Network’s “Re-Creation Fund”: Jane Comfort, Pat Graney, and Marc Bamuthi Joseph’s Multiple Archives and Theories of Archiving**

In the fall of 2005, I had to create a fake thesis proposal for my Historical Methods class at the University of Chicago. Through this fake proposal about something in Chicago history, the class was to learn how to craft the proposals that would be required for approval of our masters’ thesis projects, including the identification of primary sources on our selected topic. Through some clicking around on the electronic *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, I stumbled across MoMing Dance and Arts Center, a dance venue and school in Chicago from 1974 to 1990, and learned that the Newberry Library housed the organization’s records.<sup>1</sup> I could not locate material descriptions in the Newberry’s online catalogue, something I needed for the fake proposal, so I asked a librarian about the collection. After the librarian had some back and forth with other librarians, I learned that while the special collections library did indeed house MoMing materials, they had not yet been archived. As an historian who had never quite considered the curatorial process that was archiving, I became fascinated and turned this fake proposal into my actual master’s thesis proposal. The Newberry is a closed stacks library, so researchers are not able to browse the shelves of the library and instead sit in a reading room where requested materials are brought to them. Since the MoMing records had not yet been catalogued, there was no way I could request materials for my research. The library staff accommodated me, anointing me an “intern” and providing me with an

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, s.v. “MoMing Dance and Arts Center,” by Nancy G. Moore, accessed July 12, 2014, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/835.html>.

identification badge, which allowed me to access a small, windowless research room located just outside of the stacks where mostly retired volunteers sifted through material for cataloguing purposes. I still could not access the closed stacks by myself. A librarian brought me into the closed stacks—the stacks were cold and kept dark except for when something needed to be retrieved and contained seemingly endless shelves neatly lined with uniform boxes all labeled with identifying numbers—and we walked past the pristinely organized Ann Barzel Dance Research Collection to the shelves containing the MoMing Dance and Arts Center Records. The uniform boxes used to preserve archived material abruptly ended and the shelves contained assorted boxes, some with lids, some without, of varying sizes and shapes. In particular, I recall a Bacardi rum box filled with random office files, promotional material, and VHS tapes. I loaded up a cart on wheels with several boxes and went back to the research room to dive into the mess of files that had not been touched since the organization folded and donated the records to the Newberry fifteen years prior.

Over the course of the six months I spent looking through those records, I thought many times about how fortunate I was that the Newberry was too busy archiving Ann Barzel's 340 linear feet of donated material to get around to sort through MoMing's records.<sup>2</sup> I doubt I would have encountered some of the gems that I did without the random order with which I had to work, not able to request the specific documents and folders that I thought applied to my research. For example, I stumbled upon a thank you

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<sup>2</sup> "Inventory of the Ann Barzel Dance Research Collection, ca. 1830-2010," The Newberry Library, accessed July 12, 2014, [http://mms.newberry.org/xml/xml\\_files/BarzelResearch.xml](http://mms.newberry.org/xml/xml_files/BarzelResearch.xml).

letter praising the work of MoMing sent following a Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane duet performance in 1984.<sup>3</sup> I was then able to find a *Chicago Tribune* review of the same night's performance when Chicago ballet legend Ruth Page's secretary, Sheila Malkind, disrupted the dance to request music and declare the dance "nothing."<sup>4</sup> And, this story turned into the introduction for my thesis. I also probably would not have come across multiple copies of the same organizational chart in numerous boxes if the library staff had to time to archive the records. Surely when the files are sorted through, only one of those organizational charts will remain in the archive, and the rest will be recycled. If a researcher wants to know the hierarchy of MoMing's staff at a given point in time, she only needs one copy of the organizational chart; however, the multitude of copies of the chart that existed in various files at the time the dance center shuttered its doors surely also implies something about its organizational structure. What else will be lost when MoMing's records are archived? How will it be decided what stays in the archive and what goes?

In *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003) Diana Taylor wrote:

There are several myths attending the archive. One is that it is unmediated, that objects located there might mean something outside the framing of the archival impetus itself. What makes an object archival is the process whereby it is selected, classified, and presented for analysis. Another myth is that the archive resists change, corruptibility, and political manipulation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from Kenneth Walker of the Carl Hammer Gallery dated September 28, 1984, "Correspondence – Personal 1982, 1983, 1984" folder, Box 8, MoMing Dance and Arts Center Collection, Midwest Manuscripts, Newberry Library.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Christiansen, "Heckler catches duo with its avant-guard down," *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

In the Newberry Library, a traditional archive in all senses of the term, the archive is certainly mediated, even if the average visitor does not see the archival process at work in a side research room filled with piles of papers and retired volunteers. The collections are constantly changing with new additions that provide different context for the materials already housed at the library, donations are catalogued and archivists decide what will be omitted from the archives and what search terms will be used to identify materials,<sup>6</sup> and determinations are made about what to accept as a worthy addition to the archive in the first place. I'm not sure what direction my thesis would have taken had MoMing's materials been catalogued, but MoMing's inclusion as a founding partner in National Performance Network (NPN)—a consortium of presenting organizations founded to support artists' touring around the country—in the mid-1980s ended up being a crucial turning point in my argument about the organization. I first learned about NPN through my research on MoMing, since MoMing was one of the fourteen organizations that comprised the original network.

In this chapter, I argue that dance is archived with multiple, overlapping methods and choreography can be preserved in many ways, only some of which are acknowledged by the American Masterpieces initiative. American Masterpieces touts the importance of Taylor's repertoire through supporting the reconstruction of dances reproduced as live

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<sup>6</sup> My Historical Methods class took a field trip to the Newberry Library where the librarian who gave us a tour mentioned how researchers need to think outside of the box when selecting search terms and in looking through the card catalogue. She specifically mentioned needing to check terms that might not be considered politically correct today because the term might have been common and in wide use when an item was catalogued fifty years ago or more.

performances, at the same time as the program privileges the archive by requiring recordings. I will first provide an overview of the history and structure of NPN. Then, I will outline how NPN framed its “Re-Creation Fund,” which was awarded to reconstruct five pieces, three of which were dance pieces that I discuss here. NPN applied for and received American Masterpieces: Dance funding to help support these three dance recreations that showcase both an expanded definition of “archive” and some of the modes of preservation possible in performance. Next, I will look at the two NPN pieces that changed the most in their re-creation—Marc Bamuthi Joseph’s *Word Becomes Flesh* (2003) and Jane Comfort and Company’s *Faith Healing* (1993). While the content of these pieces is altered in their recreations, the reconstructions still serve to preserve the work. Joseph employed what Andre Lepecki has termed a “will to archive” by not reconstructing the piece as it was in a previous incarnation; rather, Joseph continued exploring the choreographic possibilities inherent in this historic work, transforming his autobiographical solo into a quintet exploring universal themes of birth stories. Comfort’s reconstruction of *Faith Healing* (1993) calls into question whether the choreographer or the dancer is the source of the archive through continuing the exploration of fantasy lives in Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie* at the same time as she collaborated with new dancers to create the reconstruction. Then, I will discuss Pat Graney’s *Faith Triptych* reconstruction, consisting of *Faith* (1991), *Sleep* (1995), and *Tattoo* (2001). *Faith* choreographically remains the same in its recreation, with Graney even casting most of the same dancers from when the dance toured in the 1990s. *Faith Triptych* both displays the presence of bodily archives and is an example of archiving through the use of new

technology, OntheBoards.tv (OtBTV), which turned the piece into a dance film available on demand. In keeping with my opening, I will throughout this chapter occasionally play the role of bodily archivist, sharing my personal experience researching this work and translating my experiences into a written archive. Ultimately, I hope to make clear the multiple kinds of archiving that the NPN, via the American Masterpieces program, put into play and how these methods sometimes rest in tension with one another.

### **Background on NPN**

When David R. White, then executive director of Dance Theater Workshop (DTW), founded NPN in 1985, the organization, in a way, took over for a disbanded program of the NEA, the Dance Touring Program (DTP).<sup>7</sup> The NEA established the DTP in the late 1960s to encourage dance companies to tour outside of New York by giving money to states and companies enabling dancers to tour nationally, participating in both performances and residencies. The program was quite successful at getting dance out of New York City and educating audience members about the art form. With no real explanation, the NEA allowed the DTP to disband in 1983-84 when dance companies and audiences were at their peak.<sup>8</sup> With this lack of financial support and infrastructure for touring coming from the federal level, White saw “a national dilemma—artistic isolation and economic restraints that constricted the flow of creative ideas within and among

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<sup>7</sup> DTW is now known as New York Live Arts after a 2011 merger with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company.

<sup>8</sup> Jan Van Dyke, *Modern Dance in a Postmodern World: An Analysis of Federal Arts Funding and its Impact on the Field of Dance* (Reston: American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 1992), 37.

communities, independent artists, and locally-engaged arts organizations in the United States.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, he identified fourteen presenting organizations in 1984 to serve as a national network for hosting artists and performance residencies.<sup>10</sup> Jan Van Dyke and Susan Foster have both observed the increasing levels of institutionalization within the field of dance, especially during the 1980s.<sup>11</sup> This was the funding and organizational environment for dance into and during which NPN was founded. Tellingly, David White was not an artist; he was an arts administrator (and remains one today).

Artists are not formally part of the network. NPN supports artists through its “Partners”—presenting organizations that both commission new work and host performances of work on tour. Partner organizations have access to funds via NPN, and NPN, acting as an intermediary and additional layer of infrastructure, is able to attract national funders, such as the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Ford Foundation, and the NEA, which might not otherwise support the local presenters represented by the

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<sup>9</sup> “History,” National Performance Network, accessed August 26, 2013, <http://nnpweb.org/about/history/>.

<sup>10</sup> This original group of fourteen included DTW (New York, New York), The Dancers Collective in collaboration with More Productions (Atlanta, Georgia), Laguna Gloria Museum (Austin, Texas), Dance Umbrella in collaboration with the Institute of Contemporary Art (Boston, Massachusetts), Colorado Dance Festival in collaboration with University of Colorado Art Galleries (Boulder/Denver, Colorado), MoMing Dance and Arts Center (Chicago, Illinois), Contemporary Dance Theater, The Dance Hall (Cincinnati, Ohio), Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles, California), Walker Art Center in collaboration with Minnesota Independent Choreographers Alliance (Minneapolis, Minnesota), Contemporary Arts Center (New Orleans, Louisiana), Painted Bride Art Center (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), New Performance Gallery (San Francisco, California), On the Boards (Seattle, Washington), and D.C. Wheel Productions, Inc. (now Dance Place, Washington, DC). Stephanie Atkins (National Performance Network executive assistant), e-mail message to author, November 9, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> see Susan Leigh Foster, *Dances that Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002) and Van Dyke, *Post Modern Dance in a Post Modern World*.

network. NPN Partners are guaranteed at least two weeks of performance residence subsidies a year from the network. Partners select the artists with whom they would like to engage for a one- or two-week residency based on their own curatorial rationale, and the NPN standard contract is signed jointly by the artist, the Partner, and the NPN national office. There is no roster of artists to choose from; the artist simply needs to be comfortable working under the NPN standard contract. While some artists might only ever participate in one NPN Residency, many artists tour the country to different NPN venues participating in NPN residencies under the contract. According to NPN, the contract and fixed fee structure:

1) take[] money off the table, enabling artists and presenters to focus on the work and the ways to engage the community; 2) set[] a minimum standard for fees which guarantees that artists receive appropriate compensation while costs remain manageable for NPN Partners; and 3) ensure[] that artists have direct contact with the community.<sup>12</sup>

NPN subsidizes 40 percent of the cost of a residency following the standard contract (up to \$6,000 for one week, up to \$12,000 for two weeks) and Partners must raise the remaining 60 percent to cover the cost of the residency. The standard contract accounts

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<sup>12</sup> “NPN Performance Residency: Guidelines for Fiscal Year 2013,” National Performance Network, accessed August 27, 2013, [http://npnweb.org/wp-content/uploads/FY13\\_Performance\\_Residency\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://npnweb.org/wp-content/uploads/FY13_Performance_Residency_Guidelines.pdf). The fee structure includes: \$700 per week in salaries per artist or technician in residence, \$140 per week in fringe benefits per artist or technician on salary (vs. contract) with the company, the most economical round-trip transportation for all artistic or technical personnel in residence who are traveling from another community, \$75/night for housing (\$90 in New York and San Francisco), based on double occupancy, for all artists or technicians in residence who travel from another community, \$40/day per diem for all artists or technicians in residence who travel from another community, a fixed administrative allowance amount (\$1,500 for 1-week residency or \$1,700 for 2-week residency) is provided for non-personnel expenses of the artist/company in residence, and a fixed artistic director contingency fund amount of \$300 per residency is provided for the Artistic Director to use for any additional residency-related costs.

for and provides money to offset expenses indirect to the actual performance by providing, for instance, fringe benefits to cover the cost of medical insurance. As a testament to the standard fee structure, there are a range of NPN Partners in venue size, budget, and location. Thus, the NPN residency at one presenter might be the biggest and most expensive performance hosted all year, while at another organization, the NPN residency is the lowest budget item featured in its season. NPN also values the creation of new work and supports this through commissioning followed by guaranteed performance residencies in different communities. The Creation Fund grants at least \$10,000 to an artist for the development of a work. NPN subsidizes \$6,000 of this amount and co-commissioners supply \$2,000 each; two presenting organizations in different communities, one of which must be an NPN Partner, act as co-commissioners. The lead Partner co-commissioner applies for the grant from NPN. Once a Creation Fund is awarded, the co-commissioners have three years to host the commissioned artist for an NPN Residency, guaranteeing the artist at least a two-site tour and the co-commissioner an additional NPN residency subsidy in the year the work is presented. If the new work changes drastically from the original vision or the artist deems the work untourable, the co-commissioners still have to host a residency; however, the artist may present another work. So, in addition to the grant subsidy to work on a new piece, the artist also benefits from knowing that once her piece is created, there are guaranteed venues to perform the work along with the additional funds that are part of the residency's standard contract artist fees.

NPN hosts an Annual Meeting each year attended by representatives from each of its Partners. Artists who have received Creation Fund or Residency subsidies in the previous three years are also invited to attend along with others in the non-profit and philanthropic arts community. The Annual Meeting offers a space for networking and building relationships and NPN prides itself on the fact that “unlike other performing arts and visual arts gatherings, this meeting is deliberately designed to create a place at the table for artists. This reinforces the most important premise of NPN’s structure: building long-term relationships among presenters and exhibitors, artists, and communities.”<sup>13</sup> At the meeting, attendees participate in break out sessions, view plenaries, and see performances. Performances occur not only in the evenings on a proscenium stage, but also throughout the conference as curated “art bursts” and off the cuff performance moments. During the two Annual Meetings I attended, one of the NPN board members always had a trumpet with him, ready to play a few notes whenever the opportunity presented itself. These performance moments, particularly those occurring throughout the day, serve to create a greater sense of community among meeting attendees, producing new communities, and reproducing communities that occur at regional meetings and from a distance at other times during the year. NPN’s organizational focus on not only the creation and presentation of contemporary work, but also the building of relationships and sense of community influenced how the Partners and connected artists conceived of the American Masterpieces reconstructions and the processes of archiving and preservation.

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<sup>13</sup> “FAQ,” National Performance Network, accessed August 27, 2013, <http://npnweb.org/site/annualmeeting2010/faqs/>.

## **Celebrating Twenty-Five Years: The Re-Creation Fund (re-framing American Masterpieces)**

In honor of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2010, and following the Creation Fund model, for one year only NPN instituted a “Re-Creation Fund.” Rather than selecting an artist with whom to work as with the Creation Fund, Partners nominated works to be produced again as part of the Re-Creation Fund. A call for proposals went out to NPN Partners in mid-August 2009 to submit nominations of “major works that reflect NPN’s commitment to supporting innovative work by presenting and touring the remounting or restaging of these masterworks.”<sup>14</sup> In order to receive a nomination, NPN required that the Re-Creation Fund project had at least three sponsors, two of which had to be NPN Partner organizations, and one of which served as the lead commissioner of the recreation. NPN selected five works to be recreated, supporting five artists with a grant to reconstruct work that had initially been commissioned, and now re-commissioned, with the help of NPN Partners. As co-commissioners, each NPN Partner supported the recreation with a minimum \$15,000 co-commissioning fee and NPN supported the projects via NPN Residency support at a minimum of three sites.<sup>15</sup> Three of the five Re-Creation Fund projects fit within the dance discipline, and NPN applied for \$150,000 from the NEA American Masterpieces: Dance program to help support the project. The

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<sup>14</sup> National Performance Network, “Grant Application,” application no. 10-920240 (October 2009), 5. Available via Freedom of Information Act request to the National Endowment for the Arts.

<sup>15</sup> “Re-Creation Projects,” National Performance Network, accessed August 15, 2013, <http://npnweb.org/about/25th/recreation/>.

NEA awarded NPN \$75,000 for their “25 Years of Innovation: Remounting Contemporary American Dance Masterpieces of the National Performance Network” grant. As part of the Re-Creations, artists participated in conversations with Partners that were recorded and edited for the NPN website. All five Re-Creation Fund pieces were presented in December 2010 at the NPN Annual Meeting in Dallas.

As an organization committed to both the creation and touring of and community engagement surrounding contemporary, not historical, work, NPN was purposefully generous with the category of “reconstructions and restagings” mentioned and left undefined in the NEA’s call for proposals.<sup>16</sup> The NPN American Masterpieces grant proposal summary notes: “The remounted/recreated pieces are envisioned very broadly: older works might be remounted/restaged by the original artist/company with a younger generation of performers or set on another company entirely.”<sup>17</sup> NPN funneled support from the NEA’s American Masterpieces: Dance initiative through to three dance artists: Jane Comfort, Pat Graney, and Marc Bamuthi Joseph. Additionally, NPN awarded Re-Creation Fund grants to Pomo Afro Homos and Elia Arce. During the American Masterpieces application process, neither the Partners nor NPN knew the intentions for reconstruction of the selected artists, but the grant proposal allowed the choreographers and dancers agency in the project, stating, “the goal of the remounted project is not merely to duplicate master works of the past but to preserve these significant works, to

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<sup>16</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, “American Masterpieces: Dance, FY 2010,” CFDA No. 45.024, 2010NEA01AMD, 7334800, OMB No. 3135-0112 (June 2009), 1

<sup>17</sup> National Performance Network, “Grant Application,” 1.

explore fresh approaches, and bring contemporary interpretation to them.”<sup>18</sup> This contemporary interpretation provided space for artists to explore a variety of ways of archiving dance and not just revisit works from their past, but to use the opportunity and funds to preserve them while they continued exploring artistically.

### **Preservation through Changing the Dance**

#### *Universal Themes in Word Becomes Flesh*

When I started my research on this chapter, I googled “marc bamuthi joseph word becomes flesh” and the first result was a link to a 2011 production on Vimeo. Wait, what? Was it that easy to find a (free) recording of the performance I was doing research on? That never happens. MAPP International, a production company for performing artists, uploaded the recording on its Vimeo page. Marc Bamuthi Joseph’s *Word Becomes Flesh* (2011)<sup>19</sup> opens on a dark stage, with a single white spotlight from above lighting the performer welcoming the audience to the “spoken world” with his rhythmic recitation of words. The stage goes dark again before a DJ and his equipment appear in dim lighting—the beats and scratches that kick in are mixed live, on stage. The solo performer repeats his words of welcome, this time joined by four other performers who athletically move in a circle, doing push ups while they travel around him close to the ground. On the third recitation of this phrase, the solo performer joins the quartet, becoming a quintet of dancers moving in a circle.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> MAPP International, “Word Becomes Flesh (2011),” Vimeo video, 56:21, posted July 19, 2011, <http://vimeo.com/26629901>. The date provided on the recording is 2011, though the reconstruction was also performed in 2010 at the NPN meeting in Dallas.

This reconstruction was significantly altered from the 2003 piece, which was an autobiographical solo piece. Joseph's choreopoem *Word Becomes Flesh* was commissioned in both in its original form in 2003 and as a re-creation in 2010 by La Peña Cultural Center (Berkeley, California). The American Masterpieces production was also supported by Youth Speaks (San Francisco, California) and Painted Bride Art Center (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). What is not stated in the grant, but alluded to in the statement of commitment included with the grant by Paul Chin, executive director of La Peña Cultural Center, is that this autobiographical solo work would be turned into the quintet for its reconstruction. The vague reference included in the letter is that "[i]n supporting this work," La Peña is "also committing to support the ascension of five young members of the Living Word Project's Repertory Company."<sup>20</sup> Joseph is the artistic director of The Living Word Project and Youth Speaks. Joseph began his career on Broadway and is now based in Oakland, California. He was a United States Artist Rockefeller Fellow in Theater Arts in 2006<sup>21</sup> and appeared on the cover of *Smithsonian Magazine* in 2007 when he was named one of America's Top Young Innovators in the Arts and Sciences.<sup>22</sup> In 2011, Joseph received the Herb Alpert Award in Theatre, an unrestricted prize of \$75,000 awarded to risk-taking, mid-career artists.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> National Performance Network, "Grant Application," 23.

<sup>21</sup> "Marc Bamuthi Joseph," USA Fellows, accessed August 6, 2014, [http://www.usafellows.org/fellow/marc\\_bamuthi\\_joseph](http://www.usafellows.org/fellow/marc_bamuthi_joseph).

<sup>22</sup> "Marc Bamuthi Joseph," Hatch Fund, accessed August 6, 2014, <http://www.hatchfund.org/user/bamuthi>.

<sup>23</sup> "Marc Bamuthi Joseph 2011," Herb Alpert Awards, accessed August 6, 2014, <http://herbalpertawards.org/artist/2011/marc-bamuthi-joseph>.

The script of Joseph's *Word Becomes Flesh* (2003) is included in an anthology *Plays from the Boom Box Galaxy: Theater from the Hip-Hop Generation* (2009). Minimal stage directions along with the text Joseph spoke during the performance, including letters he wrote to his unborn son: "Today I heard your heart beat and it hit me/ Right at my knees and/ Buckled me/ I lost my legs/ I'm trying to find them again/ Looking in familiar places/ I begin with language/ My blood."<sup>24</sup> In the Vimeo version of the piece, the dancer says "right behind my knees," instead of "right at my knees." Reading the book while watching the Vimeo piece, I noticed other slight discrepancies like this that probably shift from performance to performance in certain "seens"—*Word Becomes Flesh* is organized in twelve movements or "seens" (instead of "scenes") along with an invocation and an epilogue. Other seens are entirely different. Instead of hearing about Joseph's relationship with his father, the performers tell what I assume are their own stories. The credits on the Vimeo piece note that it was "written and performed by Dahlek Brathwaite, Daveed Diggs, Dion Decibels, Kahlil Anthony, Michael Turner, and B.Yung."<sup>25</sup> While I found a trailer for a DVD of *Word Becomes Flesh* with Joseph as the performer,<sup>26</sup> locating the DVD was not easy. WorldCat shows that the DVD is housed in two college libraries—New York University and Lee College (Baytown, Texas)—however, interlibrary loan is typically not extended to audio-visual materials and archival

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<sup>24</sup> Marc Bamuthi Joseph, "Word Becomes Flesh," in *Plays from the Boom Box Galaxy: Theater from the Hip-Hop Generation*, ed. Kim Euell with Robert Alexander (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2009), 267-268.

<sup>25</sup> MAPP International, "Word Becomes Flesh (2011)."

<sup>26</sup> "Word Becomes Flesh DVD Trailer Marc Bamuthi Joseph," YouTube video, 0:40, posted by "Isaias Rodriguez," January 27, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55Z1Nwth1IM>.

materials rarely, if ever, circulate. There is even a website advertising the DVD, but it is not currently for sale,<sup>27</sup> so I was not able to compare the choreography of the two recorded performances.

The spoken word autobiographical solo featuring letters to Joseph's unborn son did not make sense for the choreographer to perform once his child was seven years old and older, but there were still opportunities for exploration with the work, and this exploration extended to the conundrum of how to translate his hip hop work onto other bodies. André Lepecki's "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances" (2010) observed that returning to pieces from the past is "one of the most significant marks of contemporary experimental choreography."<sup>28</sup> He differentiated his choreographic "will to archive" from a similar trend in visual arts termed by art historian Hal Foster an "archival impulse." For Foster, the "archival impulse" is a result of a failure in cultural memory and a desire to connect with the past, something to which cannot be connected. Lepecki's "will to archive" is not about the past or memory; it is the capacity of a choreographer to locate "non-exhausted creative fields," or what Brian Massumi calls "impalpable possibilities," in a past work.<sup>29</sup> NPN's Re-Creation Fund grants encouraged fresh approaches to its American Masterpieces reconstructions, which enabled Joseph the freedom and flexibility to play with how he thought of archiving and preserving *Word Becomes Flesh* outside of the text of the piece, since the piece did live

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<sup>27</sup> "Word Becomes Flesh Featuring Marc Bamuthi Joseph," PoetryTelevision.com, accessed July 6, 2013, <https://www.createpace.com/Store/ShowTtl.jsp?id=205397>.

<sup>28</sup> André Lepecki, "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances," *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 29.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

on as written words. In discussion with theater director Ellen Sebastian Chang and Sarah Guerra, program director at La Peña Cultural Center, Joseph said the piece was “so personal and tailor-made” for his body as writer-performer when the piece premiered in 2003 and he, in fact, “wasn’t in any rush to revisit that time or that work.”<sup>30</sup> However, once the idea came up through NPN, he was interested in this reconstruction because, he said, “hip-hop theatre to this point is still very much identified with the body and voice of the creator of the work. I don’t think there have been many, if any, transpositions of a hip-hop theatre work from the body of its original creator to other bodies.”<sup>31</sup> Joseph chose to archive by exploring untapped potentials in the work, in the way Lepecki described. In revisiting the work, Joseph came to see the piece as a coming of age story exploring universal themes. In Taylor’s repertoire, “even though the embodiment changes, the meaning might very well remain the same,”<sup>32</sup> and this is what Joseph strove for in his reconstruction. The “ontological challenge” for the audience also became an opportunity for Joseph’s exploration, “[h]ow do audiences apply the concept of authenticity to what is clearly a fiction for those that are presenting the narrative?”<sup>33</sup> This authenticity came through exploring common themes, since everyone was born and, even if someone never knew his father, he still has a relationship with him.

Different versions of dances become “fixed” for the researcher depending on which performance was recorded or documented in some way and on the accessibility of

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<sup>30</sup> MAPP International, “Word Becomes Flesh (2011)”

<sup>31</sup> Anna Alves, “it’s no longer just about the biography,” National Performance Network, accessed February 17, 2014, <http://nnpweb.org/about/25th/recreation/bamuthi/>.

<sup>32</sup> Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Alves, “it’s no longer just about the biography.”

these archival sources to the researcher. It is important, however, especially when researching dance, to always view archival sources in the context of other archival material as well as inaccessible sources. For this chapter, I compared the Vimeo recording of *Word Becomes Flesh* circa 2011 with the written version of the piece in *Plays from the Boom Box Galaxy*. If I ever have the chance to watch the DVD of Joseph's solo *Word Becomes Flesh*, I will be comparing it with the Vimeo quintet: the 2011 Vimeo version of the piece has become a definitive version for me, even though I know that the solo work preceded the group piece and that no two performances are the same. When I saw a review of the performance of *Word Becomes Flesh* as part of the NPN Annual Meeting in Dallas in 2010, I became disappointed that the version presented there was not the one archived online. Ellie Leonhardt wrote on her blog: "[t]he piece ends in a climactic moment when Joseph himself enters upstage and begins to move in the most magnificent way—slapping the floor, limbs flying, center strong and stable. (The other performers unfortunately do not match Joseph's explosive movement quality)." <sup>34</sup> Though I can't see this performance, it has been archived through Leonhardt's review. "As Joseph dances, he tells the audience that his son is now 9 and reveals that his grandfather's death is connected to his son's birth." <sup>35</sup> From the epilogue of the written version of the piece, I know the story of how Joseph's grandfather's death is connected to his son's birth:

My son M'kai is almost two years old now

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<sup>34</sup> Ellie Leonhardt, "Taboo You: It's too bad the National Performance Network's amazing Dallas showcase was one-time only," December 13, 2010, accessed October 31, 2014, [http://ellieleonhardt.blogspot.com/2010/12/taboo-you-its-too-bad-national\\_13.html](http://ellieleonhardt.blogspot.com/2010/12/taboo-you-its-too-bad-national_13.html).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Three months before he was born my grandfather died.  
Three times in one night  
Flatlined and revived  
Slipped into a coma twice  
The last time he came back bragging about this man-child  
He'd just met in the after-death  
After which his word became flesh  
Became sacred text  
The next testament  
My first breath  
My first born  
A boy  
And man...

He looks just like my granddad  
They recently met inside a revelation while Granddad was doing orbital  
    revolutions around his life  
The last time he was confronted at a crossroads by my son M'kai  
Of blood and bone and sacrifice  
Sanctified  
Granddad said, "I can't wait for you to meet your son..."<sup>36</sup>

I can piece these fragments together to have an idea of what the performance looked like on December 11, 2010 at the Majestic Theatre in Dallas. And this performance, which I can only see in my imagination, has become an additional source, one housed in my own bodily archive, for my research on *Word Becomes Flesh*.

### *Collaborative Choreography in Faith Healing*

The New York Performing Arts Library reference page for Jane Comfort's *Faith Healing* (1993) includes a note: "[t]ape ends before conclusion of work."<sup>37</sup> I saw this note when searching the online catalogue, but did not know what to make of it and requested

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<sup>36</sup> Joseph, "Word Becomes Flesh," 299-300.

<sup>37</sup> "Faith healing [videorecording]," New York Public Library, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://catalog.nypl.org/record=b13427503~S1>.

the video be added to my queue of recordings that I was researching. In the screening area of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, I watched Jane Comfort and Company's deconstruction of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* taped at Performance Space 122 in New York on April 9, 1993. *Faith Healing* reproduces Williams's play with further exploration of the fantasy lives of the characters including countless popular culture references. One of Laura's fantasies involves the Gentleman Caller arriving as Superman to take her flying, they run and jump around the stage hand-in-hand before landing with their hips on stools, arms and legs outstretched parallel to the floor, mimicking Superman's flying stance as they tilt and dip in unison. I had already seen this Superman scene online, posted as a teaser clip in 2009 prior to the performance of the reconstruction.<sup>38</sup> I took notes on the other references I picked up on: Michael Jackson, *Terminator*, Indiana Jones, *Gone with the Wind*, *The Princess Bride*, and *Dirty Dancing*. Then, Tom was having a fantasy affair with the Gentleman Caller (I could not pick up on any particular cultural reference, if there even was one), about ten minutes into the second act, and the video cut out. I have no idea how *Faith Healing* ends. This is how research in an archive goes sometimes. Actually, most of the time.

Jane Comfort and Company reconstructed the work *Faith Healing* with the support from Flynn Center for the Performing Arts (Burlington, Vermont) with Florida Dance Association (Miami Beach, Florida), Denison University (Granville, Ohio), and Dance Place (Washington, DC). Comfort majored in painting in college and did a stint in the Peace Corps in Venezuela before finding herself in New York, studying with Merce

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<sup>38</sup> Jane Comfort and Company, "Faith Healing (flying excerpt)," Vimeo video, 4:50, posted August 6, 2009, <http://vimeo.com/5981590>.

Cunningham. She began making her own work in 1978.<sup>39</sup> *Faith Healing* premiered at PS 122 in New York in 1993 and went on to be produced Off Broadway for a run at Classic Stage Company. Choreographer Mark Dendy reprised his role as matriarch Amanda Wingfield in the American Masterpieces reconstruction of *Faith Healing* and this important casting is noted even in the NEA grant application.<sup>40</sup> Dendy also brought the character of Amanda to life in *Department* (1991), a Comfort piece that also referenced *The Glass Menagerie* in its satirization of the American South and became the inspiration for *Faith Healing*.<sup>41</sup> The medium of dance enables Comfort to add additional subtext through movement that might not be available in a traditional performance of the Williams play.

*Faith Healing* showcases the importance of individual dancers in a performance as collaborators with the choreographer, and this complicates the American Masterpieces program's ability to preserve choreography with different dancers. Comfort creates work in collaboration with her dancers and, in the video about the reconstruction on NPN's website, Comfort says, "I've always made the work so collaboratively. I really don't like to dance around here alone and then they come and I show them the steps. I do like to think about structure and metaphor and I can write scenes and I have an idea. But then I

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<sup>39</sup> Amanda Smith, "Sassy, Intelligent, Provocative, and Funny," *Dance Magazine* (July 1999).  
<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Sassy%2c+Intelligent%2c+Provocative%2c+and+Funny.-a055127839>.

<sup>40</sup> National Performance Network, "Grant Application," 6.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, "Sassy, Intelligent, Provocative, and Funny."

just want to get in and do it together.”<sup>42</sup> Ramsey Burt noted the tendency of choreographers to work with dancers in this way in “Re-presentations of re-presentations” (1998), writing that “[w]hereas an author or composer may write a text or score which is subsequently given to the performers, a choreographer works directly with dancers to create a work.”<sup>43</sup> While the grant application does not explicitly state this, Dendy committing to reprise his portrayal of Amanda seems to be crucial to Comfort’s deciding to recreate the piece. Christopher Shea’s article on the NPN website stated, “Mark Dendy had been urging a revival for years, and Comfort was eager to return to what she sees as a ‘great high point’ for all involved.”<sup>44</sup> Comfort welcomed the opportunity to revisit the work with one of her early collaborators in deconstructing *The Glass Menagerie*.

Dancers are crucial not only in the performance of a piece that changes from night to night and over time, but also in the creation of the piece. “The process of reconstruction,” Burt wrote, “draws attention to the sometimes uneasy relationship between the idea of choreographer as inspired genius and the agency of the dancers who perform their work before audiences. At stake is the nature of originality.”<sup>45</sup> The agency of the dancers is brought into high relief in *Faith Healing* because Comfort did not approach her recreation any differently than her normal choreographic process. She

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<sup>42</sup> NPN, “NPN Re-Creation: Jane Comfort and Company’s ‘Faith Healing,’” Vimeo video, 8:06, posted April 21, 2011, <http://vimeo.com/22718272>.

<sup>43</sup> Ramsey Burt, “Representations of re-presentations: Reconstruction, Restaging and Originality,” *Dance Theatre Journal* 14, no. 2 (1998): 32.

<sup>44</sup> Christopher Shea, “everyone has this longing...,” National Performance Network, accessed February 17, 2014, <http://nnpweb.org/about/25th/recreation/janecomfort/>.

<sup>45</sup> Burt, “Representations of re-presentations,” 31.

explained this in the video, saying, “I feel like if you make [a dance] with people, it’s going to be stronger because they are going to be doing the stuff that they can do. As I’ve always said, ‘if you have a talent and I see it, it’s going to end up in the piece.’”<sup>46</sup> Even though Dendy was again taking on the role of Amanda in the 2010 version of *Faith Healing*, the rest of the cast was new, so, following Comfort’s choreographic process, it was not possible to make the same piece. During the rehearsal process for the reconstruction, Comfort recalled, “the other day the new Gentleman Caller made a joke about that, he said, ‘don’t sing, it’s going to be in there,’” if she discovered that singing was a talent of one of the performers.<sup>47</sup> Even Dendy’s Amanda seemed to have shifted, Nancy Alfaro, the first Laura, wrote in a guest blog for *Dance Magazine*, “to watch [Dendy] 17 years later pull out all the stops as Amanda was pretty spectacular. It seems life experience has added a more sympathetic dimension to his portrayal of a woman whose time has come and gone.”<sup>48</sup> I have not seen 2010’s *Faith Healing*. Brief clips that are available online are from the 1993 version; the webpage about the 2010 reconstruction on Comfort’s website even links to the 1993 clips.<sup>49</sup> I imagine many of the late 1980s and early 1990s pop culture references have been updated for the 2010 version. However, it is impossible for me to be certain, since I cannot watch the dances with different casts side-by-side. These assumptions made to fill in the gaps between different archival sources and multiple archival versions are inevitable in the process of

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<sup>46</sup> NPN, “NPN Re-Creation: Jane Comfort and Company’s ‘Faith Healing.’”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Nancy Alfaro, “‘Faith Healing’ Redux,” *Dance Magazine* Guest Blog, October 22, 2010, <http://www.dancemagazine.com/blogs/guest-blog/3546>.

<sup>49</sup> “Faith Healing (2010),” Jane Comfort and Company, accessed October 15, 2014, <http://janecomfortandcompany.org/portfolio/faith-healing-2010/>.

both reconstructing choreography and conducting dance research, a type of dance reconstruction.

### **Multiple Archives Preserve Dance Differently**

#### *Bodily Archives in Faith Triptych*

In the spring of 2011, I drove early into Los Angeles to see a Sunday matinee performance of Pat Graney's *Faith* at REDCAT. I had never seen Pat Graney's work, though I had been familiar with her name for almost a decade. Seattle-based choreographer KT Niehoff was a visiting artist at Oberlin College in the spring of 2003 when I was a senior. When I chatted with Niehoff about her background over smoothies at De Café in the basement of the student union building, she told me that when she felt she had to get out of New York, Graney was holding auditions for her Seattle company. Niehoff auditioned, got into the company, and picked up and moved to Seattle, never looking back. After dancing with Graney throughout much of the 1990s, Niehoff struck out on her own to form lingo dance theater. That particular Sunday, I arrived at REDCAT a couple of hours early, my laptop in tow, determined that a change of venue would do my qualifying exams reading list write-ups some good. The lobby of REDCAT is essentially a long, wide hallway stretching between the two entrances—the parking lot entrance, underneath Walt Disney Concert Hall, and the street entrance at the bottom of a hill on West 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Los Angeles. There is a café on the one side of the wide hall with a gallery for installations and the doors to the theater on the other side of the hall. Pre- and post-performance seating is available in the café as well as at a few small tables

lining the hallway. That day, I set up at one of the hallway tables, with my back to the parking lot entrance. While I was sitting there, a troop of women all dressed in black strapless mini-dresses came parading through the lobby from behind me, making their way toward the outside entrance. Some wore red patent leather stilettos that looked perfect for a drag performance as they strutted by, chattering and whooping as any group of women who know each other well and are excited to hang out might. Others carried their heels, opting to walk barefoot through the lobby and outside. Without much thought, I assumed these were the dancers in their costume off to take their picture in front of Walt Disney Concert Hall's swooping Frank Gehry architecture on this beautiful sunny afternoon.<sup>50</sup> When the dancers returned back through the lobby, I had to do a double take. Was one of those dancers KT? She had stopped dancing with Graney more than a decade ago, but, yes, that was KT Niehoff among the group of other women who appeared to be in their 40s. Sure enough, I checked the program upon receiving it when I entered the theater and found my seat, and Niehoff was among the dancers listed. In fact, none of the dancers listed recently performed with Graney's company. Graney recruited dancers who had performed in the piece when it was first touring, with five of the seven dancers having performed in either the first or second casting of *Faith*.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> I confirmed that the dancers were, in fact, going to take pictures in front of Walt Disney Concert Hall in my conversation with Niehoff.

<sup>51</sup> On the Boards, "Performance Prospectus: Pat Graney Company; *Faith Triptych*" (October 2010), 2. [http://www.patgraney.org/docs/Pat\\_Graney\\_prospectus3\\_0.pdf](http://www.patgraney.org/docs/Pat_Graney_prospectus3_0.pdf). Nancy Burtenshaw, Deb Rhodes-King, and Peggy Piacenza performed with the original cast of *Faith* in 1991, KT Niehoff and Kim Root performed with the second cast, while Amii Legendre and Sara Parish were new to the piece in the 2010 reconstruction. Amii Legendre was, however, part of the original cast of *Sleep*, premiering in 1995 and also part of the larger *Faith Triptych* recreation.

Pat Graney is based in Seattle, Washington and has been creating work since 1981. She received a Doris Duke Performing Artist Award in 2013 and was recipient of the “Arts Innovator” Award from Artist Trust, funded by The Dale and Leslie Chihuly Foundation in 2011.<sup>52</sup> In 2008, Graney received both the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts, awarded to “risk-taking mid-career artists,” and was an United States Artists Rasmuson Fellow in Dance.<sup>53</sup> Graney is perhaps best known for her work with incarcerated women, called *Keeping the Faith/The Prison Project*, which has been ongoing since 1992.

*Keeping the Faith/The Prison Project* is “an arts-based residency program that features dance, expository writing and visual arts, and culminates in performances” and has taken place at prisons all over the country and internationally.<sup>54</sup> On the Boards, a venue in Seattle that showcases international and regional contemporary performance, and Graney have an ongoing relationship “that extends back to the earliest days of the organization and [Graney’s] career. She used to trade work for rehearsal space when she was working on her earliest creations.”<sup>55</sup> Along with MoMing, On the Boards was one of the original fourteen NPN Partner organizations in 1984. Graney’s *Faith* (1991), *Sleep* (1995), and *Tattoo* (2001) were all originally commissioned by On the Boards, as was the 2010 *Faith*

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<sup>52</sup> “Pat Graney,” Pat Graney Company, accessed June 18, 2014, <http://www.patgraney.org/about/biography>. For more information, see “Pat Graney,” Artist Trust, accessed June 18, 2014, [http://artisttrust.org/index.php/award-winners/artist-profile/pat\\_graney](http://artisttrust.org/index.php/award-winners/artist-profile/pat_graney) and “Pat Graney,” Doris Duke Performing Artist Awards, accessed June 18, 2014, <http://ddpaa.org/artist/pat-graney/>.

<sup>53</sup> “Pat Graney 2008,” Herb Alpert Awards, accessed June 18, 2014, <http://herbalpertawards.org/artist/2008/pat-graney> and “Pat Graney,” USA Fellows, accessed June 18, 2014, [http://www.usafellows.org/fellow/pat\\_graney](http://www.usafellows.org/fellow/pat_graney).

<sup>54</sup> “Pat Graney,” Pat Graney Company.

<sup>55</sup> On the Boards, “Performance Prospectus,” 5.

*Triptych* reconstruction.<sup>56</sup> I will focus mostly on *Faith*, since *Sleep* and *Tattoo* are not available for viewing in the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts. When I spoke with Graney, she did not know that *Faith* had been archived in New York.

*Faith Triptych*'s themes explore the relationship between bodily knowledge and enduring materials. Lena Richardson wrote an article about the reconstruction that is included on the NPN website, noting that the three-work triptych focuses "on women's lives and embodied experience."<sup>57</sup> *Faith* explores women's sexuality and power, *Sleep* investigates "rites of passage in women's lives," and *Tattoo* "examines genetic memory and markings, exploring ancient tattoos on women's bodies."<sup>58</sup> The article by Richardson additionally noted that the inspiration for the triptych "came to [Graney] in a dream."

Richardson wrote:

In the reverie that inspired *Faith*, Graney was a space-age anthropologist: "I have on a white space suit with a white hat and we are actually rappelling down these buildings, me and these two bearded white guys." In her dream excavation, Graney comes upon a huge wire sculpture:

"I realize that the sculpture is made out of thousands of pieces of dishes and dirt and books and clothing. It's like 'this is someone's life, this is the culture's life' ... what I sort of surmised in the dream, was that the culture had died and what they left behind was a symbol for faith."<sup>59</sup>

While the choreography deals with themes surrounding embodied experiences, Graney's interpretation of the culture's life was seen only through physical objects left behind.

These embodied experiences compared with physical objects call to mind Paul Connerton's incorporating and inscribing practices, as described in *How Societies*

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<sup>56</sup> On the Boards, "Performance Prospectus," 3.

<sup>57</sup> Lena Richardson, "it came to me in a dream," National Performance Network, accessed February 17, 2014, <http://nnpweb.org/about/25th/recreation/patgraney/>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

*Remember* (1989). Incorporating practices impart information only available in someone else's presence, while inscribing practices impart intentional information that is trapped or held somehow, for instance, in writing or through the physical objects left behind in Graney's dream. Since inscribing practices leave something behind, versus the essentially traceless incorporating practices, inscribing practices are privileged and are the site of a society's history and memories—what had been left behind in Graney's dream.

Incorporating practices do not exist outside of their performance and are acquired without reflection, since they are learned unconsciously. Thus, incorporating practices are able to avoid the process of cumulative questioning that accompanies discursive practices, and it is for precisely this reason that Connerton cautioned it is important to not discount incorporating practices.

Red patent leather stilettos are an object that figure prominently in *Faith*, yet the image of the shoes by themselves is completely different than when the dancers are wearing the shoes. The third section of *Faith* begins with a dancer walking barefoot onto a dark stage in a short black strapless dress, carrying a pair of the red stilettos I had seen in the lobby before the performance, into an illuminated space. She kneels down and caresses the shoes, lifting one up to rub its shiny exterior on her face. The performer then takes a roll of medical tape from the inside of the other shoe and proceeds to bind her feet before stuffing them into the red shoes, standing, and wobbling off the stage. When the lights come up again, six dancers are standing in a line upstage wearing the strapless dresses and red shoes—they are posing confidently with a hand on one hip and strutting across the stage. Over the course of these five minutes of the dance, the shoes transform

from a fetishized object into a symbol of oppression and then a source of feminine power. Graney choreographed the movement for this section without the shoes, and as soon as the performers put the heels on, the choreography was totally transformed.<sup>60</sup> According to Graney, her “work is so much about contexts and switching contexts,” and adding the heels to the choreography switched the context of the movement for the audience.<sup>61</sup> The interpretation of the inscribed object all depends on how the dancers’ bodies are interacting with and wearing the shoes; the incorporating practice of walking in heels provides context that would otherwise not be available.

Graney has long played at an intersection between the visual arts and performing arts, most recently moving into creating installation work, first with *House of Mind* (2008). Graney described her process in an interview, saying, “for the most part, I just get these visual images and I think I’ve got to make that or do that or be that, in some way, and so visual has always been writ large in my work.”<sup>62</sup> Caravaggio’s paintings, Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel, the animation of Zbigniew Rybczyński, and Francesco Clemente’s work all inspired *Faith* along with Zen Buddhist Houn Jiyu-Kennett’s writings.<sup>63</sup> The piece is a series of vignettes. In the first section, seven women dressed in short velour tunic dresses move into and out of tableaux that are reminiscent of the images depicted in Caravaggio’s religious work. Ben Geffen’s lighting design calls to mind Caravaggio’s use of light and shadows in his paintings as the dancers move with a kind of reverence, evoking longing, which is only enhanced by the score featuring a Latin

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<sup>60</sup> Pat Graney, in discussion with the author, October 16, 2014.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> On the Boards, “Performance Prospectus,” 4.

Mass by composer Arvo Part. Relaxed pointing index fingers recur throughout this section, mirroring those seen in *The Calling of St. Matthew* (c. 1600).<sup>64</sup> In the painting, Jesus “extends his right arm in an action deliberately evoking God’s to Adam on [Michelangelo’s] the Sistine [Chapel] Ceiling” in order to call St. Matthew to follow him.<sup>65</sup> Graney’s choreography embodies Caravaggio paintings, bringing to life bits and pieces from the still images, transferring the paintings that reside in the archive into the realm of the repertoire. In so doing, the images are changed. Not only does Graney use women in place of men, but she also locomotes the actors, depicting the moments and transitions before and after the dancers come to stillness in a pose. In an interview prior to the premiere of *Faith Triptych*, Graney commented, “I would say that my work has always been primarily more visually based [than movement inspired]...the reality is it’s just moving like your eye moves around a painting.”<sup>66</sup> She further described her choreography, saying, “you settle on one image, and instead of moving on one music cue, you think it’s going to move on, it moves on another music cue and you sit there for longer, you get to look at the lighting and the people and development in an active sense of the visual.”<sup>67</sup> Despite the fact that performers rest in one pose for longer than audience

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<sup>64</sup> Willard Spiegelman, “A Dramatic Enlightenment,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 14, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970204485304576644963288722674>

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> “Interview: Pat Graney and Marcie Sillman; Recorded at On the Boards, Sep 22, 2010,” On the Boards, accessed August 6, 2014, [http://www.ontheboards.org/sites/default/files/pat\\_graney\\_interview\\_transcript.pdf](http://www.ontheboards.org/sites/default/files/pat_graney_interview_transcript.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

members might expect out of a dance performance, the dancers do eventually move, unlike the characters in a Caravaggio painting.

Just as Graney viewed her actual choreography as closely related to the visual arts, she thought similarly of her reconstruction. In Michael Upchurch's review of the piece in the *Seattle Times*, he wrote, "[d]espite the significant trims and revisions Graney has made to fit these pieces into a 3 ½-hour time slot, she doesn't view 'Faith Triptych' as a new work. Instead, she sees it more as a museum-like visual-art retrospective: 'an exhibit of work — you're looking at work that happened over a 10-year period.'"<sup>68</sup> The reconstruction of *Faith*, *Sleep*, and *Tattoo* for the American Masterpieces program and NPN Re-Creation Fund utilizing bodily archives was the first time that the three works appeared together, quite different from *Faith*'s solo inclusion in the New York Public Library. In an interview, Graney said:

I always was really envious of the idea of seeing a retrospective of someone's work. I love seeing retrospectives of people's work and where they've come from and where they've gone and what the curatorial person has done with it and what their take on it is and...reading what the artist had written about that work or that journey. And, I always thought dance has never seen that because it's never really given those kind of kudos to be able to say this is a valid art form and we'd like to see a retrospective of this, of these works. And so I always thought I just would love to see them together, to see what were the beginning—the germs of thought and where did that germ go, what did it flower into later...where did it actually go and it was really satisfying to see that.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Michael Upchurch, "Seattle choreographer Pat Graney revamps her 'Faith Triptych' at On the Boards," *Seattle Times*, October 16, 2010.

[http://seattletimes.com/html/thearts/2013153832\\_graney17.html](http://seattletimes.com/html/thearts/2013153832_graney17.html).

<sup>69</sup> Graney, discussion.

Graney had long thought about doing the pieces together, but Geffen, her lighting designer, always said that it would be a technical nightmare.<sup>70</sup> When the Re-Creation Fund opportunity presented itself, Graney approached On the Boards, to see if producing *Faith Triptych* might be possible. A couple of different ideas were discussed about the presentation of the pieces. Graney envisioned starting *Faith* during the late afternoon, having a dinner party, then a performance of *Sleep* followed by a cocktail party, and ending the evening with *Tattoo*.<sup>71</sup> Another idea proposed by On the Boards was to have each performance on a different evening over the weekend.<sup>72</sup> All three pieces were performed on the same night at On the Boards, though, despite other planned engagements through the NPN Re-Creation Fund at Myrna Loy Center/Helena Presents (Helena, Montana) and Flynn Center for the Performing Arts (Burlington, Vermont), On the Boards was the only venue where this happened. The pieces, as a triptych, took a lot of time. One obvious difficulty on presenting a dance retrospective is the amount of time required for performers and audience members when showcasing full-length work. REDCAT hosted *Faith* in 2011 when I viewed the piece and *Faith* was also presented in Dallas at the NPN Annual Meeting in 2010. The other NPN Partners that were signed on to host *Faith Triptych* fell through.<sup>73</sup>

For the reconstructions, Graney cast dancers who performed in the pieces before, which calls attention to the existence of bodily archives at the same time as exhibiting that bodies are never the same. Graney noted, “I always wanted to use the original cast

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

members because it seemed like to me, I wanted to see mature performers on stage naked. I wanted to see what people looked like. Of course, unfortunately, or fortunately, all those people looked a lot more in shape than they ever were before” for the reconstruction.<sup>74</sup> Part of the reason for storing materials in an archive is that, with the proper care, the decaying process will slow. While many of the bodily archives reconstructing *Faith* did not conform to the expectation of “decaying” materials, Graney’s knee did not survive the test of time intact. Graney, who was part of the original cast of *Faith* in its previous incarnation, planned to be part of the reconstruction, but during rehearsals she “could not get up and down from the floor.” When she went to the doctor, Graney discovered that she “didn’t have any cartilage in [her] right knee at all.” She said, “I was bummed. I thought, ‘I can do it, I can do it,’ and then, I thought, ‘I actually physically can’t stand up that quickly’ to be able do it.”<sup>75</sup> In *Sweating Saris* (2012), Priya Srinivasan expanded Taylor’s notion of repertoire to suggest “that the repertoire is also an archive, its contents found in traces of live bodily interactions, its records captured in muscle memory and through bodily labor and kinesthetic contact.”<sup>76</sup> Graney recruited her former company members to perform the reconstructed triptych pieces, dancers who knew the choreography and carried it with them in their bodies. Speaking about the rehearsal process in an interview, dancer KT Niehoff said, “I always had this right hip injury” while performing *Faith* in the early to mid-1990s, “and the first day of rehearsal [for the reconstruction, the injury] came back. And I hadn’t had it in

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Priya Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 186 n10.

forever—fifteen years. So the body memory of it was that deep...we were all the same, but all really different...[the choreography] came back really fast...the muscle memory of it was just so weird.”<sup>77</sup> Even if the performers did not remember specific steps, the kinesthetic traces of the rehearsals and performances resided within their muscles.

Niehoff recounted a time in rehearsal:

Nancy [Burtenshaw] and I, we were doing the first section, the Caravaggio section, and we were looking at the video...trying to work out this one tableau and we were like, “this doesn’t feel right, I don’t—this is weird, it feels so weird.” And maybe two or three hours into it, we looked closer at the video and were like, “oh, that’s *you*, not me, and that’s *me*, not you.” And then it was like, “*oooh yeah*, I know this move, this is exactly what I know.”<sup>78</sup>

While the dancers themselves were archives of the choreography, they still reworked the piece from another archival source, the video recording. There is an interesting interplay between which archive is privileged in reconstructing this section. At first, the dancers rely more on the video than on their memory of the piece, granting the video authority over their own bodily archives. But, the dancers cannot reconcile the recording with their own bodily memory of the choreography—“this doesn’t feel right...it feels so weird.” Then, upon closer examination of the video, the dancers realize that they had mistaken themselves for each other and this is confirmed with their bodily archives when they switch roles. While the video captures the steps, the dancers’ bodies know the choreography when they move through the phrases.

The dancers who were twenty years older than when they first performed in *Faith* also highlight the impossibility of a reconstruction that duplicates the original; even when

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<sup>77</sup> KT Niehoff, in discussion with the author, September 17, 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

a piece is not cast with a new group of dancers, the bodies of the performers have changed at the cellular level, and yet also remained the same, as with the hip injury. Therefore, the choreography will be, at least ever so slightly, different because the medium through which the dance is performed has changed. For the reconstruction, the costumes from the first section, the dresses and underwear, were the same, but Graney decided to replace the costumes from the ball section since the shorts had become too short and the black strapless dresses from the third section had to be replaced because they could not be located.<sup>79</sup> While some of the costumes may have been the same, the bodies had changed and this was a concern for some of the dancers. Neihoff recalled, “Amii LeGendre and I were talking before we got together and were like, ‘are we, like—like, are we going to be able to do it?...what if we’re just old and decrepit and I can’t dance anymore?’”<sup>80</sup> Then, on the first day of rehearsal, LeGendre “walks in and she’s like a *fucking goddess*. And I was like, ‘Oh. She’s fine.’ And everybody was like that, everybody was just stunning and older and just nuanced and...we were just better.”<sup>81</sup> The constantly changing bodies of performers point to the fact that a performance cannot be repeated from one night to the next, much less over a gap of twenty years. The instability of bodies and bodily archives does not mean that archives of enduring materials are constant. Taylor pointed out that, contrary to popular belief, archives do not resist

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<sup>79</sup> Graney, discussion.

<sup>80</sup> Neihoff, discussion.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

change. In fact, both the meaning of archival objects changes over time and archival objects sometimes go missing.<sup>82</sup>

While the choreography, the costumes, and the cast remained largely the same for the reconstruction of *Faith*, the piece had changed. Niehoff said that “*Faith* was so much better” in its reconstructed iteration, “we were like ‘old’ people at that point and we were...just better and smarter...you can just appreciate it more and see more detail and understand nuance in a way you used to not be able to do at age twenty-two.”<sup>83</sup> The dancers’ age and life experiences brought a depth to the performance that had not previously existed. Graney said that working with dancers in their forties and fifties for the reconstruction “gave it this incredible sense of history and a weight of understanding a mature performer can give someone if they perform something over time. It’s really—it was so beautiful and so full of meaning.”<sup>84</sup> When she constructs new material, Graney creates about four times as much content as she uses in the final piece and she believes that this “imbue[s] the work with a sense of history and I do think that history is somewhat palpable to the audience even if they don’t understand what it is, that there is a sensibility of the weight of research having been done to excavate this material.”<sup>85</sup> This sense of history and research was pushed even further for the reconstruction: “you have the living excavation of that material in these people’s bodies and it was so incredible to see that. It was beautiful...for the performers still to come off stage crying and to understand what that journey had been for them as individuals, as artists creating that

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<sup>82</sup> Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 19.

<sup>83</sup> Niehoff, discussion.

<sup>84</sup> Graney, discussion.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

work with me.”<sup>86</sup> Despite the mature women’s bodies being in better shape than they had been twenty years previous, their naked bodies portray life experiences in a way that they could not when the dancers were in their twenties. Niehoff said, “*Faith* needed women, like, *women*. And we were all women [in 2010], we all had a lifetime to bring back to the piece and that’s what it needed...I think it would have been a *totally* different process and a *totally* different piece if she had worked with new dancers and I don’t think it would have had the power that it did, at all.”<sup>87</sup> While the image of the women walking toward the audience, confronting the audience, in heels is powerful in the 1991 version of *Faith*, the women evoke additional layers of power in the 2010 reconstruction.

#### *Archive On Demand*

I contacted Pat Graney through emailing the managing director of On the Boards, who passed on my interview request to the choreographer. When Graney reached out to me, she included in her email that On the Boards had “all three pieces of the Triptych for download.”<sup>88</sup> I had already purchased downloads of the pieces through On the Boards.tv (OtBTV) and I thought about how easily accessible this work had been to me as a dance researcher (while not free on YouTube or Vimeo, I also did not have to travel to a traditional archive) and fascinating that Graney brought up the works’ availability in her email. (Graney’s mention of the OtBTV recordings in this email became more complicated when I finally spoke with her, since Graney does not like how her work is

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Niehoff, discussion.

<sup>88</sup> Pat Graney, e-mail message to author, July 28, 2014.

presented in them. Graney works with her own videographer to archive her choreography, reviewing shots and edits before the recording even takes place.) OtBTV splits the proceeds from downloads with the artists with their revenue sharing model,<sup>89</sup> so Graney received \$22.50 from my purchase of *Faith Triptych*. Though *Faith*, *Sleep*, and *Tattoo* were presented together as an evening length work at On the Boards, they are three separate downloads on OtBTV, available for \$15 each. The commodification of the choreography through on demand streaming technology made it more desirable to archive the pieces separately. When I visited the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts to watch footage from “original” performances of the pieces that were reconstructed via the American Masterpieces program, I brought my laptop with me into the reading room—visitors cannot bring coats and bags into the reading room and must check them just outside on the third floor of the library—so that I could take notes. As previously mentioned, recordings of *Sleep* and *Tattoo* are not available at the archive, but there is a videotape from a June 20, 1991 performance of *Faith* in the Studio Theater at Jacob’s Pillow. While I had seen *Faith* live at REDCAT in 2011, I also had the OtBTV download on my computer. After filling out the form for *Faith* circa 1991 to be queued on the television on which I screened recordings, I muted my computer and opened up the mp4 file of *Faith* circa 2010. When the 1991 videotape of a Jacob’s Pillow performance began on my television, I clicked on the play button on Quicktime to start the 2010 recording on my laptop. I listened to the music from the 1991 recording with headphones and my eyes darted back and forth between the two screens. The steps were

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<sup>89</sup> “About,” OntheBoards.tv, accessed August 8, 2014, <http://www.ontheboards.tv/about>.

the same. The costumes were the same. The dances (and, indeed, some of the dancers) were the same. The 2010 version was faster; some of the pacing was quicker than the 1991 while still retaining the adagio, drawn-out quality. Because of this, I had to sometimes pause the OtBTV recording and wait for the Jacob's Pillow performance to catch up to the same part in the choreography. Since the reconstructed version of *Faith* appeared as part of the evening-length *Faith Triptych*, the piece had to be shortened. Overall, the 1991 version was about seven minutes longer than the 2010 version. (More content was cut from *Sleep* and *Tattoo* to fit all three pieces into an evening for the triptych performance.<sup>90</sup>) However, as far as I could tell, nothing significantly changed outside of the tempo between the two pieces preserved in these two archives. The quality of and ease of access to the two recorded archives, however, were quite different.

The notion of dance as ephemeral is attractive to some scholars because it means that the art form escapes commodification, but OtBTV is an example of how contemporary performance is reproduced and commodified, with commodification as the desired outcome. While the other NPN Re-Creation Fund reconstructions were also documented, the NPN grant application specifically noted the recording of *Faith Triptych* as part of OntheBoards.tv.<sup>91</sup> Performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan posited in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1996) that performance is an art form that inherently occurs in the present and therefore, only becomes itself through

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<sup>90</sup> Graney, discussion.

<sup>91</sup> National Performance Network, "Grant Application," 6.

disappearance.<sup>92</sup> Similar to J. L. Austin's conceptualization of the performative utterance,<sup>93</sup> Phelan stated that live performances cannot be reproduced or represented and performance is ontologically nonreproductive.<sup>94</sup> This supposed resistance to reproduction, according to Phelan, is the greatest strength of performance; its disappearance is its source of power since it exists outside of circulations of finance and an economy of reproduction.<sup>95</sup> OtBTV, a website that offers pay-per-view performance films, both supports and challenges this notion, offering conflicting views about the relationship between live and filmed versions of performances. Lining up with Phelan's view, OtBTV is "NOT about recreating the live experience," rather, according to On the Boards's manifesto presented as part of an "Engaging Dance Audiences" Dance/USA webinar, "it is something new."<sup>96</sup> However, artistic director Lane Czaplinski has also said that they "'view OntheBoards.tv as simply another stage of [the organization's] space."<sup>97</sup> After selecting a piece to add to its online catalogue, OtBTV works with a professional film company and venue to "capture each performance during a live run of the show with four to five high definition cameras that sit amongst the audience."<sup>98</sup> The film company edits the piece in close consultation with "the artist to determine specific edits that best

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<sup>92</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 146.

<sup>93</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

<sup>94</sup> Phelan, *Unmarked*, 148-149.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

<sup>96</sup> Sarah Wilke, "Engaging Dance Audiences: OntheBoards.tv," Dance/USA, accessed July 2, 2014, [http://www2.danceusa.org/uploads/EDA/Social\\_Media\\_Webinars/OnTheBoards.pdf](http://www2.danceusa.org/uploads/EDA/Social_Media_Webinars/OnTheBoards.pdf), 12.

<sup>97</sup> Eliza Bent, "Theatreflix, or Archive Fever: Seattle's On the Boards explores the benefits of filming live performances for a small cost to consumers," *American Theatre* 27, no. 10 (December 2010): 54.

<sup>98</sup> "About," OntheBoards.tv.

represent the artist's live performance" and the finalized film is uploaded to the website for streaming or download "along with additional features and extras that help viewers get a better picture of the artist, the particular work, and what live audiences thought of the piece during the run of the show."<sup>99</sup> Performance films can be "rented," available for forty-eight hours, for \$5 or "owned," \$15 for a digital download; subscriptions are also available for individuals and institutions. In a blog post announcing the, at the time, forthcoming OtBTV initiative, Tania Kupczak described the project as "the live art equivalent to the museum catalogue, providing access for those not able to see a show due to scheduling, geography or cost, and giving art fans the opportunity to revisit a favorite piece again and again."<sup>100</sup> In this case, the live performance is cost prohibitive and the OtBTV version, while certainly part of circulations of finance that Phelan derides, is more accessible than the live showing. The OtBTV recording of *Faith Triptych* made available the repetition of the piece not possible in either live performance, stored in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, or contained within bodily archives.

The pros and cons of this on demand service are debated in some of the press surrounding OtBTV. Once a piece is selected, the resulting "performance film" is, to be sure, a different thing than a live performance. However, it is also a different thing from how most dance is documented. The video of *Faith* from the Jacob's Pillow performance was a single, wide shot of the stage—individual details were not visible and I could not

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Tania Kupczak, "OTBTV | Contemporary Performance On Demand," *On the Boards: The Blog*, July 29, 2009, <http://www.ontheboards.org/blog/otbtv-contemporary-performances-demand>.

distinguish between dancers. Niehoff observed that “technology has transformed, so you actually can create something you’d want to watch...you can edit, you can get high-res, you can actually capture the music, that has value to it.”<sup>101</sup> The OtBTV version was shot in high definition from multiple angles; Claudia La Rocco wrote in a *New York Times* article that Thinklab’s Matt “Daniels’s cameras have points of view, moving away from strict documentation toward territory that is closer to a filmic adaptation of a live experience.”<sup>102</sup> Adrienne Trustcott, choreographer and performer, was quoted in the article saying, “[t]he more dance is recorded on video, and even perhaps the better and more sophisticated and artistic that documentation becomes, the more it threatens to perhaps deliver a ‘definitive version’ of the work,”<sup>103</sup> something with which music recording artists have grappled for decades. Philip Auslander discussed the phenomenon of what he termed “rock authenticity” in *Liveness* (1999) when analyzing the relationship between live performance and sound recording. Auslander argued that authenticity is determined through a complex negotiation between the sound recording and live performance. The increasing presence of streaming reproductions of dance work might lead to a similar negotiation for live dance audiences. At least one group working with OtBTV has already made a modification to their live performance: “Temporary Distortion, whose company members use video in their work already...decided to revise and reshoot (using their own cameras) an entire scene based on the first editing pass” of

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<sup>101</sup> Niehoff, discussion.

<sup>102</sup> Claudia La Rocco, “Recording Staged Works for All the World to See,” *New York Times*, January 20, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/24/arts/dance/24boards.html>.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

their OtBTV performance film.<sup>104</sup> Trustcott continued, saying, “part of what I love so much about live performance, dance in particular, is that with every single performance it resists a definitive version of itself, its performers, its audience, etc., and I think that’s what keeps it a renegade form.”<sup>105</sup> Trustcott’s thinking of dance as a renegade form is reminiscent of Phelan’s belief that performance exists outside of an economy of reproduction, resisting commodification since it disappears.

Rebecca Schneider importantly asked in *Performing Remains* (2011), “in privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently?”<sup>106</sup> This calls to mind the bodily archives of Graney’s dancers. On the Boards hopes that OtBTV will encourage new audience members for live performance who first experienced the genre through the on demand performance films. As a performance venue first and foremost, On the Boards privileges live performance, despite their willingness to experiment with this new form of archiving performance work. On the Boards’ directors “Czaplinski and Wilke are the first to admit that seeing a live performance is preferable to seeing it taped.”<sup>107</sup> However, “recordings of classical music haven’t stopped people from seeing orchestras live,” observed Czaplinski. Adds Wilke, ‘OntheBoards.tv gives you a different experience. You

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<sup>104</sup> Suzi Steffen, “Live... from Seattle,” *Stage Directions* (January 1, 2011) <http://www.stage-directions.com/current-issue/104-projection/2944-live-from-seattle.html>.

<sup>105</sup> La Rocco, “Recording Staged Works for All the World to See.”

<sup>106</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 98.

<sup>107</sup> Bent, “Theatreflix, or Archive Fever,” 55.

have the chance to see a detail you may have missed in performance, or to catch a different angle. You can't rewind when it's live.”<sup>108</sup>

The American Masterpieces program grappled with tensions that exist among multiple archives. In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Taylor noted a rift at the turn of the twenty-first century between the archive, which includes texts and other supposedly enduring materials such as bones and films, and the repertoire, which describes embodied practices and knowledge, including performances.<sup>109</sup> The NEA's American Masterpieces program seemingly championed the importance of the repertoire, since the initiative funded the “performance at home and on tour” of reconstructed works.<sup>110</sup> This initiative crucially required the embodiment of choreography through performance. In talking about the American Masterpieces program, Niehoff said, “how do you historically archive work like this? And I think to do it ‘for real’ again, instead of work on trying to fine-tune the VHS you have of it, to show it again and to let people feel it again and let people live it again” is how the work should be archived and preserved.<sup>111</sup> However, American Masterpieces still privileged the conventional archive; in submitting a grant, not only were prospective awardees asked to write a project narrative, but they also were asked to submit “[o]ne copy of the proposed work, if available,” and “[o]ne unedited copy of performances by the company or ensemble that will carry out the project.”<sup>112</sup> In addition to requesting traditional archival material in the form of recordings as part of the

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 19.

<sup>110</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, “American Masterpieces: Dance, FY 2010,” 1.

<sup>111</sup> Niehoff, discussion.

<sup>112</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, “American Masterpieces: Dance, FY 2010,” 5.

application process, the NEA outlined that the “artistic merit” of proposed projects would be judged based on “plans for documentation,” among other criteria.<sup>113</sup> This requirement of documentation suggests that the live performance alone as a mode of preservation is not enough.

The NPN reconstructions worked with wider definitions of preservation and archiving than the scope of the NEA’s American Masterpieces initiative. The artists who “re-created” pieces from the past chose to do so in ways they deemed appropriate. Joseph worked with his students from Youth Speaks to translate his personal story, *Word Becomes Flesh*, into one with universal themes that also addressed the backgrounds and stories of the new performers. Comfort updated *Faith Healing* by continuing to work with Dendy as Amanda, but bringing in a new cast of supporting characters with whom to collaborate. This piece also highlights that while Comfort may be a repository of the work, Dendy is another, perhaps equal or greater, archival source. Graney’s *Faith Triptych* exemplifies new ways of archiving work in the form of OtBTV as well as the oldest way of preserving work, through bodily archives. Finally, my use of the first person throughout this chapter serves as a reminder that all archives are embodied. Just as the meaning of something in a traditional archive changes over time, material passed through bodily archives also transforms.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 6.

### CHAPTER 3

#### **“What’s all this about a ‘masterpiece’ grant?”: Surrogation and Reproduction in David Gordon’s *Trying Times* and *Trying Times (remembered)***

*Trying Times (remembered)* (2008), David Gordon’s Pick Up Performance Co(S.)

American Masterpieces funded reconstruction of *Trying Times* (1982), begins with an empty stage. The evening-length work premiered in Los Angeles, California at REDCAT in December 2008 before touring to Dance Theater Workshop (DTW) in New York City later that same month. There is a large projection on the back wall with a black and white still image from a curtain call of one of the 1982 performances at DTW. The title of the piece, “TRYING TIMES,” appears across the top of the screen, just above the dancers’ heads. Then, “(REMEMBERED)” is scrawled across the bottom of the image. Gordon’s handwriting is used for the “opening credits.”<sup>1</sup> The credits continue with images of company members from 1982 identified on the screen, with their names appearing as handwritten capital letters, along with the year in which they joined, or “picked up,” Pick Up Performance Co. and when they left, or “packed up.”<sup>2</sup> While the credits roll projected on the back wall of the stage, dancers begin to cross through the dimly lit stage space, simply walking from one side of the stage to the other. The credit listing concludes and brings special attention to Valda Setterfield, Gordon’s wife and company member from the beginning. Setterfield “picked up” in 1962 and, according to the credits, is “still

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<sup>1</sup> Zoe Woodworth, “Trying Times (Remembered) opening credits,” Vimeo video, 0:57, posted August 26, 2010, <http://vimeo.com/14455702>.

<sup>2</sup> Pick Up Co. 1982: Susan Eschelbach, picked up: 1978, packed up: 1986; Keith Marshall, picked up: 1979, packed up: 1987; Paul Thompson, picked up: 1981, packed up: 1984; Margaret Hoeffel, picked up: 1978, packed up: 1986; Nina Martin, picked up: 1982, packed up: 1984; Valda Setterfield, picked up: 1962, still unpacked. Woodworth, “Trying Times (Remembered) opening credits.”

unpacked.” Setterfield continues to perform with the company more than twenty-five years after *Trying Times* was first choreographed. Her image on the screen freezes, and Setterfield walks onto the stage to a microphone positioned downstage.

Through both his changing of the title of the piece and his use of projections from 1982, Gordon calls attention not only to the fact that the piece is a reconstruction, but also to the imperfect process of surrogation. In *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996), performance studies scholar Joseph Roach explored the ways culture reproduces and recreates itself and the relationship between memory, performance, and substitution in this process. Roach described this process that does not begin or end as “surrogation,” the attempt to fill actual or perceived absences.<sup>3</sup> Roach wrote, “[i]nto the cavities created by loss...survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternatives...The fit cannot be exact. The intended substitute either cannot fulfill expectations, creating a deficit, or actually exceeds them, creating a surplus.”<sup>4</sup> Roach observed the surrogation process in cultural performance, but his idea is heightened and further complicated when applying it to reconstructions, such as those made possible through the NEA’s American Masterpieces initiative. *Trying Times (remembered)* exemplifies this process because Gordon forces attention to the seams of surrogation.

In this chapter, I argue that the American Masterpieces program attempted to bring back and revive masterworks by creating surrogates through reconstruction without acknowledging either the imperfection inherent in the reconstruction process or the

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

presence of multiple performance surrogates existing in the past. Gordon is a rich case study through which to analyze American Masterpiece reproductions because he exposes the seams in surrogation while simultaneously destabilizing and reinscribing seemingly stable categories like “masterpiece” and “original.” Gordon both benefited from and dismissed the canonizing structures of U.S. dance, and his complicated stance towards both funding and artistic labels already placed him in a contradictory position vis-à-vis the American Masterpieces: Dance program. In this chapter I will first discuss how performances are always already surrogations, using the evolution of Balanchine’s *Apollo* (1928) as an example—since Gordon’s *Trying Times* references *Apollo*—and how the idea of a performance as surrogation is further complicated when dealing with a reconstruction. Then, I will situate Gordon’s position within the dance field as a prominent member of the first generation of postmodern dancers, tracking his early career along with the dance boom of the 1960s and 1970s. Next, I will look at two instances of Gordon contesting his postmodern categorization, first, when he spoke on a panel at the Walker Art Center, and second, when he rejected the term “postmodern” in the media surrounding *Trying Times*. Following that, I will tease apart Gordon’s artistic statement that appeared shortly after his reconstruction of *Trying Times*, including his undercutting of the American Masterpiece label. Gordon’s approach to reconstructing *Trying Times* simultaneously canonized his earlier work and refused to do so. Finally, I will show how *Trying Times (remembered)* acknowledges the imperfect surrogation process of performance and reconstructions of which the American Masterpieces program is in denial. At the same time, the piece subscribes to the notion of an aura

surrounded “original” masterpiece through use of a recording of a 1982 performance in the reconstruction.

### **Performance as Surrogation; *Apollo*’s Surrogation**

A reconstruction further complicates Roach’s notion that “definitions of performance...commonly assume that performance offers a substitute for something else that preexists it. Performance, in other words, stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace.”<sup>5</sup> Reconstruction implies that the thing did, in fact, previously exist and evidence has to be collected and assembled in order to embody and replace this elusive entity, made all the more elusive through the distance of time.<sup>6</sup> According to the Cooperative Agreement between the NEA and the New England Foundation for the Arts, who administered the American Masterpieces: Dance grants in 2007, “art of the highest quality – *that otherwise would not be available* – will be brought to communities across the nation” through the reconstructions made possible through the grant (italics mine).<sup>7</sup> This initiative attempted to replace performances from the past that the NEA deemed significant with performances that

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>6</sup> As far as I know, none of the American Masterpiece: Dance grants supported a project to reconstruct a previously assumed “lost” masterpiece, such as the extremely detailed, years-long project undertaken by Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer reconstructing Vaslav Nijinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) for the Joffrey Ballet in 1987 detailed in Millicent Hodson, *Nijinsky’s Crime Against Grace: Reconstruction Score of the Original Choreography for Le Sacre du Printemps* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1996). Hodson conceded in the preface that the “verdict of ‘lost masterpiece’ was relative” (xxi).

<sup>7</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, “Cooperative Agreement for American Masterpieces: Dance, in connection with National Initiatives,” DCA 07-37, CFDA 45.024 ([2006?]), 3. Available via Freedom of Information Act request to the National Endowment for the Arts.

approximated these historic works in the present, a project in surrogation. However, American Masterpieces did not acknowledge that performances are not static and are always already recreating themselves through surrogation.

Gordon's *Trying Times* originally referenced one of George Balanchine's signature pieces, *Apollo* (1928), and the history of *Apollo* brings to light the lack of a singular performance. The ballet features three muses who visit and instruct a young Apollo, the Greek god of music. The muses, Calliope (muse of poetry), Polyhymnia (muse of mime), and Terpsichore (muse of dance and song), are identifiable from their props—a tablet, mask, and lyre, respectively.<sup>8</sup> Balanchine choreographed *Apollo* while still with the Ballets Russes and he viewed the piece as his artistic coming of age.<sup>9</sup> When DTW and REDCAT showcased *Trying Times (remembered)* in 2008, Gordon's *Trying Times* choreography had not been seen since 1982; yet, when Gordon watched Balanchine's *Apollo* choreography in the early 1980s, the piece had been reproduced countless times, featuring several different casts since its premiere more than fifty years previous. In fact, despite composer Igor Stravinsky's score being inextricably linked to Balanchine's choreography, Balanchine was not the first choreographer to set a dance to the music. The Library of Congress in Washington, DC actually hosted the first public performance of *Apollon Musagète*, its initial title, on April 27, 1928. Arts patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge commissioned the Stravinsky score and the piece premiered with choreography by Adolph Bolm, who also danced in the role of Apollo. Before Bolm

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed description of *Apollo*, see Nancy Goldner, *Balanchine Variations* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 5-12.

<sup>9</sup> "Apollo," The George Balanchine Trust, accessed February 12, 2014, <http://balanchine.com/apollo/>.

even danced in Washington, however, Stravinsky conversed with Serge Diaghilev, impresario and founder of Ballets Russes, and Balanchine about a Parisian performance. Balanchine choreographed *Apollo* for Diaghilev's Ballet Russes and later brought the piece to New York City Ballet. Balanchine's *Apollon Musagète* premiered in Paris on June 18, 1928 with costumes that included the muses in long white skirts by André Bauchant, though these were substituted for costumes designed by Coco Chanel the following year.<sup>10</sup>

The costuming was not the only element of the production of *Apollo* to change over its years in repertory. In his book on the collaboration of Stravinsky and Balanchine, Charles M. Joseph stated, “[n]o sooner had the first curtain fallen in Paris in 1928 than *Apollon Musagète* began to change.”<sup>11</sup> The piece initially included a staircase to Mount Parnassus that was later eliminated. Without the set piece for the dancers to climb at the end of the dance, looking toward the heavens, Balanchine adjusted the choreography to “the now famous ‘sunburst’ figure, in which the Muses stand in arabesque as they lean against Apollo.”<sup>12</sup> This pose appeared earlier in the dance, so rather than create something new, Balanchine simply reordered preexisting choreography. Through the numerous casts of the ballet, the choreography continued to evolve for each new dancer, “[f]or Balanchine was never above tailoring movements to emphasize strengths or minimize weaknesses.”<sup>13</sup> Each dancer performed a surrogation, taking the place of the

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<sup>10</sup> Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky & Balanchine: A Journey of Invention* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 90.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 122.

dancer who performed the role previously. The performance of Stravinsky's music became faster over time and the costumes changed further, becoming more plain, a signature of Balanchine's later work. In the late 1970s, after Stravinsky's death, Balanchine cut the entire Prologue. Former New York City Ballet dancer William Weslow said that Balanchine edited out the Prologue "because he didn't want [Mikhail] Baryshnikov to do the wild pirouettes at the beginning and create a sensation...He wanted to cut it so that Baryshnikov wouldn't be the great star dancer at the New York City Ballet."<sup>14</sup> Following Balanchine's death, artistic director Peter Martins brought back the Prologue in some productions of the piece as well as the staircase to Parnassus.<sup>15</sup> Baryshnikov's *Apollo* was the version that entranced Gordon on his frequent visits to the New York City Ballet with dance critic Arlene Croce.<sup>16</sup> If an American Masterpieces grant had been awarded to reconstruct *Apollo*, which version would be recreated? The ever-evolving series of surrogates showcases how elusive a definitive version of a performance can be and, consequently, the complications inherent in a reconstruction process.

### **Gordon's Position in the Dance Field**

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<sup>14</sup> William Weslow quoted in Francis Mason, *I Remember Balanchine: Recollections of the Ballet Master by Those Who Knew Him* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 321.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph, *Stravinsky & Balanchine*, 123.

<sup>16</sup> Of note, Baryshnikov and Gordon met Gordon during the early 1980s and became friends with Baryshnikov performing in *David Gordon's Made in USA* (1987) television program. Baryshnikov initiated *PastForward* (2000), a program created and produced by his White Oak Dance Project, to celebrate and explore the ongoing influence of Judson Dance Theater and asked Gordon to direct the project. Gabrielle Barnett, "An Interview with Mikhail Baryshnikov," *CriticalDance* (October 2000). <http://www.criticaldance.com/interviews/2001/mbaryshnikov010401.html>.

Gordon's early career, like others in the first generation of postmodern choreographers, tracked with the "dance boom"—a time of proliferation of dance companies, venues, writing about dance, and an increasing presence on college campuses—generally dated from the late 1950s to the early 1980s. Gordon grew up in Manhattan and attended Brooklyn College, where he majored in fine arts. He performed in the dance club while at Brooklyn College and began dancing with choreographer James Waring while still a student in 1956. In 1960, the Living Theater presented Gordon's first choreography as part of a program featuring the work of Waring students. Gordon choreographed the duet, *Mama Goes Where Papa Goes*, for British dancer Valda Setterfield and himself. Setterfield and Gordon met performing with Waring's company; the couple married in 1960 and continues to perform together today.

Gordon first began to make a name for himself as part of Judson Dance Theater. In *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964* (1983), dance historian Sally Banes tells the history of what has come to be known as Judson Dance Theater, a series of concerts that presented the choreography of a number of dancemakers, including Gordon, taking place over the course of two years. These concerts rejected earlier notions of modern dance and are usually cited as the beginning of "postmodern dance," which is characterized by task-based movement, chance choreography, and a lack of virtuosity. The first performance of Judson Dance Theater, in 1962, consisted of the presentation of work created in a composition class taught by Merce Cunningham's accompanist, Robert Dunn. Banes noted that Gordon and Setterfield occasionally attended Dunn's choreography class in 1961-1962 at Cunningham's studio with an "ineffable air of being

‘in it but *not* of it’.”<sup>17</sup> A number of the participants in the choreography class recalled that Gordon and Dunn were frequently at odds during the class.<sup>18</sup> Already familiar with the technique of chance choreography through his work with Waring, Gordon found the class to be too rigid at times.<sup>19</sup> Banes dated the end of Judson Dance Theater to 1964, one year prior to the establishment of the NEA, a critical funding agency for modern dance.

While the NEA supports many dance genres, the Endowment’s founding impacted modern dance most profoundly. Sociologist Leila Sussmann’s 1984 study, “Anatomy of the Dance Company Boom, 1958-1980,” analyzed dance companies listed in the *Dance Magazine Annual* for trends. Sussmann observed that a dance boom occurred for both ballet and modern dance companies during this time period; however, the rapid increase in the number of companies happened at different points in time for each of these forms due to different funding mechanisms. “The big boom for ballet took place in the Sixties, stimulated by Ford Foundation financing, while the big boom for modern dance occurred in the Seventies, stimulated by the support of the National Endowment for the Arts.”<sup>20</sup> The founding of the NEA encouraged other funding agencies to expand their budgets for the arts. According to a 1976 “Fact Sheet” generated by Nancy Hanks, NEA Chairman from 1969-1977, in 1965, there were thirty-seven professional dance companies in the United States and, by 1975, this number grew to

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<sup>17</sup> Sally Banes, *Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 19.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 30-31.

<sup>19</sup> Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 99.

<sup>20</sup> Sussmann, Leila. “Anatomy of the Dance Company Boom, 1958-1980.” *Dance Research Journal*. Vol. 16, No. 2 (Autumn 1984): 24-25.

157.<sup>21</sup> Applications for grants also increased at a tremendous rate during this time, with greater numbers of companies in existence as well as more artists and arts organizations becoming aware of the federal money available.

In addition to funding, other forms of patronage such as dance criticism and organizations that provided infrastructural support to dance artists increased during this “boom” period. Jill Johnston, critic for the *Village Voice* throughout the 1960s, brought visibility to the choreographers presenting work at Judson Dance Theater, including Gordon, by regularly attending and reviewing performances.<sup>22</sup> The careers of Arlene Croce, Marcia Siegel, Deborah Jowitt, and Nancy Goldner began in the mid-1960s,<sup>23</sup> and

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Straight, *Nancy Hanks: An Intimate Portrait; The Creation of a National Commitment to the Arts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), 388-389. No definitions were provided for this Fact Sheet. In some cases, 1965 numbers were understated and 1975 numbers were inflated (Straight, *Nancy Hanks*, 388). These numbers also do not coincide with numbers that Sussmann presented according to the *Dance Magazine Annual*. Sussmann cited the total number of dance companies increasing from 249 in 1965 to 468 in 1975, with modern dance companies growing from seventy-two to 182 and ballet companies from 161 to 260 (Sussmann, “Anatomy of the Dance Company Boom,” 24-25).

<sup>22</sup> Though her career began by looking at the work of more mainstream choreographers like José Limón, Johnston shifted to writing the vast majority of her reviews about experimental work being produced at Judson Church and in loft spaces in New York. Johnston viewed her writing about dance as an art form itself, modeling her experimental style after the work that she attended and viewed. For more information about Johnston’s career as a dance critic, see Sally Banes, “Jill Johnston: Signaling through the Flames,” *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994 [1980]): 3-10. For a collection of articles written by Johnston, most of which originally appeared in the *Village Voice*, see Jill Johnston, *Marmalade Me* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998 [1971]).

<sup>23</sup> For more information about the early careers (1965-1985) of Croce, Siegel, Jowitt, and Goldner and the New York School of dance criticism, see Diana Theodore, *First we take Manhattan: Four American Women and the New York School of Dance Criticism* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996).

the Dance Critics Association was founded in 1974.<sup>24</sup> Many venues in which to present theatrical dance were established in response to available funding, greater numbers of dance companies, and larger dance audiences.<sup>25</sup> Some of these venues even commissioned choreography, providing both financing and a performance space in which to present work. (David R. White, then executive director of DTW in New York, commissioned *Trying Times* and offered Pick Up Performance Co. a three-week season, instead of the usual long weekend engagement. Of this experience, Gordon said, “[i]t showed me what could happen to a piece of work and how much I could learn from it by getting to do it for a while.”<sup>26</sup>) Professional management nonprofits, such as Performing Artservices, Inc., founded in 1972, and Pentacle, founded as Dance Works, Inc. in 1975, provided production and administrative support for contemporary artists working in music, theater, and dance.

Gordon both participated in one of the new dance companies established during the 1970s and founded his own company during this decade. From 1970 to 1976, Gordon performed as a regular member of Grand Union, an improvisatory company and collective that featured many members of Judson Dance Theater. Grand Union consisted

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<sup>24</sup> Dance scholar Katja Kolcio recounted the founding of the Dance Critics Association (DCA) along with five other dance organizations—American Dance Guild (ADG), Congress on Research in Dance (CORD), American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA), American College Dance Festival Association (ACDFA), and Society of Dance History Scholars (SDHS)—in *Movable Pillars: Organizing Dance, 1956-1978* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010). Kolcio argued that the dance organizations outlined were a result of both increasing interest in arts education and dance research and the presence of objectivism in both academia and choreography.

<sup>25</sup> Dance Theater Workshop was founded in 1965.

<sup>26</sup> Deborah Jowitt, “Building a Home for a Fragile, Fiery Community,” *New York Times*, April 16, 2000. <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/16/arts/dance-building-a-home-for-a-fragile-fiery-community.html>.

of, at times, Becky Arnold, Trisha Brown, Barbara Dilley, Douglas Dunn, Nancy Lewis, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer.<sup>27</sup> Like many of the other dancers in Grand Union, Gordon worked on his own choreography outside of the collective. Gordon founded his company, the Pick Up Company, in 1971 and incorporated the company as a non-profit entity in 1978. Pick Up Performance Co(S.), as it is now known, was one of the hundreds of modern dance companies established in the 1970s.<sup>28</sup>

In a 1982 profile on Gordon and Setterfield that appeared in *The New Yorker*, dance critic and balletomane Arlene Croce dated the changing fortunes of postmoderns to the late 1970s and early 1980s, coinciding with Suzanne Weil becoming director of the NEA's dance program in 1976. Weil had previously served as performing arts coordinator at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis from 1968-1970 and as the first director of the performing arts department there from 1970 to 1973. She advocated for the presentation of work by Judson participants and selected Grand Union as the first residency, celebrating the opening of the Edward Larrabee Barnes building at the Walker in 1971. One of Weil's first acts as NEA dance chair was to invite Gordon to become a member of the Dance Panel—the body convening several times a year to review and adjudicate NEA dance applications and grants.<sup>29</sup> Gordon first served on this dance panel

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<sup>27</sup> For more information, see the “The Grand Union: The Presentation of Everyday Life as Dance” chapter in Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 203-234.

<sup>28</sup> Pick Up Performance Co. changed its name to Pick Up Performance Co(S.) in 1992 to account for Ain Gordon, the son of David Gordon and Valda Setterfield, joining the company as co-artistic director. “ABT and NYC Ballet Dancer Robert La Fosse Performs with Pick Up Performance Co(S) Oct. 13-15 at the Dance Center,” The Dance Center of Columbia College Chicago, July 5, 2011. [http://www.colum.edu/dance-center/PDF\\_Folder/pickup-release.pdf](http://www.colum.edu/dance-center/PDF_Folder/pickup-release.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Arlene Croce, “Making Work,” *New Yorker*, November 29, 1982, 60.

during fiscal year 1977-1978, where he met and served with Croce along with other luminaries such as Jack Anderson, Carmen de Lavallade, Arthur Mitchell, and chairman of the panel, Robert Joffrey. In 1979, Gordon succeeded Joffrey as chairman of the NEA's Dance Panel. As a member of the dance panel, Gordon acted as an advocate for postmodern dance and, according to Croce, "was the solitary radical" on the panel of twenty-three members.<sup>30</sup> Separate from this appointment, the NEA awarded Gordon his first choreography fellowship of \$14,700 for a new work in 1978.<sup>31</sup> He received another NEA grant the next year, followed by a Guggenheim. Croce noted "the sequence of events and the actual money amounts were in no way unusual for an artist who was just coming to broad public notice" and that a "similar pattern of support may be traced" for many other rising choreographers at that time who had not previously been funded on the national level.<sup>32</sup> By 1980, Gordon was making enough money as an artist to quit his "day job" dressing windows and as an unofficial design consultant for Azuma, a Japanese import firm.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the fact that Gordon continues to make work today, and despite his place as a prominent member of the first generation of postmodern dancers, there is very little outside of performance reviews written about his choreography. Most of the academic scholarship on Gordon surrounds his participation in Judson Dance Theater and Grand Union. He also garners mention in writing about Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* (1966), since

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>31</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Annual Report 1978* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 1979), 76. <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/NEA-Annual-Report-1978.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Croce, "Making Work," 60.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 84-85.

Gordon performed the piece along with Rainer and Steve Paxton as three simultaneous solos at Judson Church on January 10, 1966, then called *The Mind is a Muscle, Part 1*.<sup>34</sup> Gordon performed the piece many other times, including in 1970, with five other dancers for the opening of the *People's Flag Show* at Judson Church, at which the dancers performed in the nude, with American flags tied around their necks.<sup>35</sup> Banes devoted an entire chapter to him in *Terpsichore in Sneakers* (1980), entitled "The Ambiguities." In the chapter, Banes detailed a number of Gordon's pieces, analyzing how he overlays spectacle and glamour with movements that do not seem like choreography, creating an effect of constantly changing meaning as he subverts any clarity offered by text with ambiguous context and choreography. "[U]ltimately," Banes wrote, "the ambiguity of what is 'real' and what is dramatic, or scripted, floats tantalizingly to the surface of the dance."<sup>36</sup> Roger Copeland picked up on Gordon's ambiguous nature writing about his shifting between the dance world and the theater world in "The Double Identity of David Gordon" (1996). "Making Work," Croce's *New Yorker* profile on Gordon and Setterfield, is one of the most extensive sources of information on Gordon's career up to that point and since. Croce's article spanned more than fifty pages in the November 29, 1982 issue of the magazine. The critic and dancemaker became friends after serving together on the 1977-1978 NEA Dance Panel and, in 1981 and 1982, Croce spent several months visiting with Gordon and Setterfield for *The New Yorker* profile. The article included Gordon's biography along with a history of postmodern dance to that point. Croce also detailed a

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<sup>34</sup> Yvonne Rainer, "Trio A: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation," *Dance Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 98.

day-in-the-life of Gordon and Setterfield on tour and during a rehearsal and performance of *T.V. Reel* (1982). The article was published just prior to the premier of *Trying Times* on December 3, 1982—the start of the three-week run for Pick Up Performance Co. at DTW.<sup>37</sup>

Gordon’s career benefited greatly from the infrastructure that arrived via the dance boom; however, he also remained critical of the canonization this provided him. As I discuss below, Gordon dismissed the postmodern label created by dance critics and historians, though this categorization also situated Gordon within a larger oeuvre of American dance and worthy of funding and audiences. This complicated relationship with both funding and labels even early in his career foreshadowed the contradictory position in which he found himself when faced with the task of reconstructing *Trying Times* as part of the American Masterpieces: Dance program.

### **Categories and Labels**

Even during his early Judson days, Gordon had a reputation as a rule breaker and someone who did not care for his categorization as a dancer. When Croce wrote her *New Yorker* profile in 1982, she noted that Gordon “prefers to call himself a performance artist; he doesn’t say that he makes dances—he says that he makes work, or that he constructs performance.”<sup>38</sup> In the 1990s, Gordon began working in more traditional theater, rather than dance, settings. Writing about this transition, Copeland pointed out:

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<sup>37</sup> Croce, “Making Work,” 63.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

Gordon is a true contrarian; he always seems to work against the grain. When he created dances for formal *dance* companies and organisations – and this applies equally to the Judson Dance Theater and American Ballet Theatre – he invariably refused to call himself a choreographer. His programme credit usually read, “movement construction” by David Gordon. But when it came to *The Family Business*, a play that contains no dancing, his credit read “directed and choreographed by...”<sup>39</sup>

Copeland observed in this article that Gordon always straddles the line between dance and theater, with lots of talking in his “dance” pieces and lots of movement in his “theater” pieces.

While Gordon is regularly referred to as a member of the first generation of postmodern dancers, he does not like being grouped into this or any other category. In 1981, a year before *Trying Times* premiered, Gordon begrudgingly, according to Croce’s profile, performed on the opening night of “New Dance USA,” a week-long conference featuring performances, lectures, and discussions at the Walker Art Center.<sup>40</sup> The next day, he spoke as the only artist on a panel about performance residencies for sponsors, and Croce recorded this discussion in her *New Yorker* article. Gordon observed with annoyance that, despite previous successful engagements at the Walker, because of the previous night’s performance, he would not be asked back for several years, since he had

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<sup>39</sup> Roger Copeland, “The Double Identity of David Gordon,” *Dance Theatre Journal* 13, no. 2 (Autumn/Winter 1996): 18.

<sup>40</sup> While I am focusing here on the term “postmodern,” entitling the Walker conference “New Dance,” is just as problematic as a vague and ambiguous term. Croce noted that the term was also misleading, since while some of the performers were newcomers, others had been around for 20 years (59). And, regarding Gordon’s less than enthusiastic appearance on the bill, Croce wrote, “deep down, [Gordon] rejected the festival and what it seemed to be saying about ‘new dance.’ Although he hates to share a concert, he had accepted the Walker invitation to share the opening night with Trisha Brown and Charles Moulton... ‘What it all comes down to,’ he said... ‘is if Trisha Brown is willing to be here, then so am I.’” Croce, “Making Work,” 60.

already fulfilled the slot open for postmodern dance. (Performance venues with limited slots to fill a programming season, typically want a variety of performers to bring in the widest audience over the course of the season. A certain number of performance slots might be reserved for international artists, some for well-known artists who are expected to sell out tickets, and, perhaps in the early 1980s, a slot or two for postmodern dance. Then, once an artist or company performs at a particular venue on a given season, even if popular, the artist or company will not be booked at the same venue the following season.) The programming staff at the Walker, and presumably the audiences, viewed and categorized Gordon as a fringe attraction, outside of the mainstream of modern dance, and Gordon fulfilled that fringe niche for the Walker through performing as part of the “New Dance” program. Croce quoted Gordon as saying:

I think my work speaks for itself...I think other people’s work speaks for *itself*. I do not understand why I should have to take up my humble position in a chronology that begins somewhere off in the dark with Martha Graham and Merce [Cunningham] and says the ultimate end *is* Merce and means that I wait my turn while everybody in between, from Erick Hawkins to Don Redlich, gets all the bookings. I’d rather not be called a postmodernist, frankly.<sup>41</sup>

Through his mentioning of Graham and Cunningham, Gordon situates himself as part of the established American modern dance canon.<sup>42</sup> Even while he placed himself within this lineage of modern dance, Gordon did not seem to care for the limits it placed upon

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<sup>41</sup> Gordon quoted in Croce, “Making Work,” 76.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon’s lineage as a dance artist can easily be traced back to American modern dance forerunners Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn via a few direct connections: Gordon took composition classes from Robert Dunn, who was Cunningham’s accompanist; Cunningham performed as a soloist in Graham’s company before venturing out on his own; and Graham, considered to be one of the mothers of modern dance in the United States, began her studies at the Denishawn school with Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn.

him. Postmodern dance represents a wide range of work and Gordon is generally grouped within this vast array. Despite the lack of specificity of the term, postmoderns were lumped together, placing limits around their marketability as a touring artists and what was expected of their work during this time period. In wanting his work to speak for itself, Gordon seemingly indicates that he would prefer to not be included in any kind of a tradition and discounts the benefits that his lineage and categorization as a postmodernist brought him.

In the original *Trying Times*, Gordon choreographically rejected his categorization. 1982's *Trying Times* concludes with a courtroom scene where Gordon is on trial for having the audacity to reference Balanchine's *Apollo*.<sup>43</sup> (*Trying Times (remembered)* also ends with a courtroom scene, but the trial is surrounding the issue of the American Masterpiece grant and title, rather than the citing of Balanchine's *Apollo*. While Gordon is the dancer on trial in 1982, Gordon does not perform in 2008.) Set designer Power Boothe's architectural pieces are manipulated by the dancers to create a courtroom set and three dancers testify against Gordon. He pokes fun at himself and the notion that dancers don't dance in postmodern choreography with a performer testifying, "he makes me talk. I am a trained you know what, but he makes me talk."<sup>44</sup> Setterfield is

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<sup>43</sup> This is despite historical reference as a feature present in some postmodern dance. In her introduction to the 1987 paperback edition of *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, Banes wrote that the early post-modern choreographers, Gordon is part of this group, referenced history as a major theme: "in a sense, a way of looking back, of acknowledging the heritage these choreographers had set out to repudiate...these pieces set themselves in dialogue with their own history." Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, xvii.

<sup>44</sup> David Gordon, "Trying times (Videotape)," videotaped by Video D during a performance at the Dance Theater Workshop's Bessie Schönberg Theater, New York on

cast in the role of Gordon's defense attorney. Her closing argument begins, "I mean, is it more important to know what, I go, he is or to see, you know, I mean, to *see* what's in his work? The only group he admits he belongs to, I go, was fathered by his father and includes, I go, his son."<sup>45</sup> Through Setterfield's words, Gordon expresses his concern that his categorization prevents or at least hinders audience members from viewing his work from a fresh perspective. And, in referencing his family as the only group he belongs to, Gordon claims no identity outside of his family. Setterfield continues, "There is no case, I go, to be made, you know, for him not having, I mean, a cause. Because he never had one. He doesn't deny, I mean, postmodern you know what. He doesn't know, I go, what, you know, he is. Is he guilty, I go, of playing hide and seek when we all want, I mean, is to play tag?"<sup>46</sup> While Gordon doesn't claim a postmodern identity, he also doesn't deny it; Gordon simply doesn't want to be limited by a postmodern label in the music he is allowed to use or the venues in which he can perform. This can be seen as an explicit rejection of his categorization, but also a response to his frustrations at the time as a touring artist, not being asked back to certain venues for several years. The *New York Times* review of the piece in 1982 quoted Gordon discussing this section of the dance: "That line about hide-and-seek and tag gets laughs, but it also says something about this insistence on labeling, on slots,' Mr. Gordon said with some annoyance. 'I was there when Yvonne Rainer invented the term "post-modern" for her own work. It seemed

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December 17, 1982, performed by David Gordon/Pick Up Company, DVD, transferred from digital betacam cassette.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

perfectly reasonable. But I don't know what it means."<sup>47</sup> Here Gordon made another important point about this terminology as nondescript.

More than twenty-five years later, Gordon still had a distaste for labels, this time directed at the American Masterpieces grant. Shortly after *Trying Times (remembered)* toured, Gordon included the following paragraph as part of his artistic statement:

With some frequency I admit I make the work I can raise the money to make. I recently re-imagined *Trying Times* 1982 (2007 NEA Dance "Masterpiece" grant) as I've been doing w/work of other theater artists. *Trying Times* referenced, originally, the Balanchine/Stravinsky Apollo. In collaboration w/CalArts & early DTW video, 2008 dancers danced w/1982 dancers & Valda Setterfield danced w/her younger self @ REDCAT in LA & for 25th anniversary performances @ DTW in NY.<sup>48</sup>

I am interested in this quotation from Gordon. His admission that he sometimes makes work because of available funds seems obvious to anyone who read reviews of *Trying Times (remembered)*. Gia Kourlas wrote in *Time Out*, "David Gordon, an innovator since his Judson days, constructs. He doesn't reconstruct. But a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts series American Masterpieces: Dance changed all of that."<sup>49</sup> Claudia La Rocco echoed this same sentiment in the *New York Times*, saying, "David Gordon, an uncommonly smart artist, has always avoided revisiting his dance-theater works. But he also knows better than to pass up a grant, even one from the National

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<sup>47</sup> Jennifer Dunning, "David Gordon's Dance Ironies," *New York Times*, December 12, 1982, <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/12/arts/david-gordon-s-dance-ironies.html>.

<sup>48</sup> "CHIME Across Borders: ARTISTIC STATEMENT/David Gordon," Margaret Jenkins Dance Company, accessed October 29, 2012, [http://www.mjdc.org/CHIME/borders\\_gordon-as.html](http://www.mjdc.org/CHIME/borders_gordon-as.html).

<sup>49</sup> Gia Kourlas, "The Time is Ripe: David Gordon stages a dance from the past," *Time Out*, December 8, 2008. <http://www.timeout.com/newyork/dance/the-time-is-ripe>.

Endowment for the Arts that supports historical work.”<sup>50</sup> Writing for the *Village Voice*, Deborah Jowitt noted that “Gordon was reportedly embarrassed to apply for an NEA grant in the ‘American Masterpieces’ category, but I’m happy he received one.”<sup>51</sup> Dianne Haithman, in the *Los Angeles Times*, provided a bit more background on the thinking behind the NEA application when she wrote:

Even though the self-deprecating dance-maker was monumentally uncomfortable with the idea of submitting his work to the NEA in a grant category with the title “American Masterpieces,” he allowed his manager-producer to send in an application -- and, even though Gordon was none too sure, the NEA indeed found “Trying Times” worthy of the “masterpiece” title.<sup>52</sup>

These reviews, along with the outright declaration in his artistic statement of making work for money, gesture toward Gordon’s ability to detach his artistic impulses or desires from his economic needs. At the same time, the fact that he includes this detachment in his artistic statement points to either his actual discomfort with this disconnect or his belief that those reading this statement (and all of the *Trying Times (remembered)* reviews) want him to be uncomfortable with the idea of making work purely because it is fundable, or both.

Following the dance boom, Gordon and other choreographers had to grapple with changes in the structures of funding for dance and the other arts in the 1980s and beyond.

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<sup>50</sup> Claudia La Rocco, “Fuzzily Looking Back, Aided by Ghosts,” *New York Times*, December 12, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/13/arts/dance/13tryi.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Deborah Jowitt, “David Gordon Makes His Past New,” *Village Voice*, December 17, 2008. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2008-12-17/dance/david-gordon-makes-his-past-new/>.

<sup>52</sup> Diane Haithman, “Dance pioneer David Gordon revisits ‘Trying Times,’” *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 2008. <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-gordon2-2008dec02-story.html>.

During that time, there was a gradual shift from funds available for individual artists to funds for performance venues and companies that had established not-for-profit statuses.<sup>53</sup> Susan Leigh Foster focused on the historical period from the mid-1970s through the 1980s in *Dances that Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull* (2002), exploring the stigma surrounding the corporatization of dance that occurred following the dance boom. When confronted with the issue of supporting themselves and their dancers, choreographers had to ask themselves whether or not their work would be fundable. Foster cited David Hyry, an arts manager, as saying, “[a] lot of new work is being made because of available funding...I call this type of work ‘funders [*sic*] art.’ In this scenario, schedules are often tight, and not enough time goes into the work.”<sup>54</sup> Because of this, “funders’ art” is often creatively inferior. Gordon had long been known as a funding pioneer. In the late 1980s, Gordon created a series of pieces inspired by different regions in the country, culminating in *United States* (1988). A *Wall Street Journal* article described the extensive funding and presenting collaboration at the time: “[t]he project, an evolving exploration of America in movement, music and words, is an unprecedented collaboration among 27 presenters in 17 states. The consortium not only is commissioning the piece but also serving as a network for its performance, on a national

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<sup>53</sup> Following this shift, Gordon incorporated Pick Up Company in 1978 as a 501(c)3 organization.

<sup>54</sup> Susan Leigh Foster, *Dances that Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 139.

tour.”<sup>55</sup> While the *Wall Street Journal* and others heralded its funding plan, *United States* was considered an artistic let down.<sup>56</sup>

Gordon’s admission in his artistic statement to making the work for which he can receive funding may be included to proactively deflect any criticisms of creating funders’ art or buying into the system of dance corporatization. The choreographer’s economic reasons for making some work instead of other work is expounded in Gordon’s artistic statement in the paragraph following the above excerpt: “[a]s *Trying Times* remembered took economic/aesthetic precedent, *Uncivil Wars: Moving w/Brecht & Eisler* was temporarily put aside. All the while I continued to research & be haunted by essays of Bertolt Brecht.” This suggests that were it not for the money, Gordon would not have reconstructed *Trying Times*. His reference to continued research on Brecht as well as hauntings by the playwright throughout the *Trying Times (remembered)* reconstruction process leads one to believe that Gordon was much more drawn, artistically, to the Brecht piece that had to be put aside. *Uncivil Wars: Moving with Brecht & Eisler* premiered to positive reviews at the Walker Art Center in March of 2009,<sup>57</sup> three months after *Trying Times (remembered)* ran at both REDCAT and DTW.

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<sup>55</sup> Pam Lambert, “Dance by Consortium: ‘United States,’” *Wall Street Journal*, December 14, 1988.

<sup>56</sup> Katy Matheson, “David Gordon,” in *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*, ed. Martha Bremser (London: Routledge, 1999), 121.

<sup>57</sup> Camille LeFevre, “‘Uncivil Wars’: Bush era prompted David Gordon to revisit land of roundheads, pointheads, war and deficits,” *MinnPost*, March 11, 2009. <http://www.minnpost.com/arts-culture/2009/03/uncivil-wars-bush-era-prompted-david-gordon-revisit-land-roundheads-pointheads-> and Deborah Jowitt, “David Gordon Reworks a Brecht Play to Prod at America Political Perils,” *Village Voice*, November 10, 2009. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2009-11-10/dance/david-gordon-reworks-a-brecht-play-to-prod-at-america-political-perils/full/>.

Rather than refer to *Trying Times (remembered)* as a reconstruction, Gordon's artistic statement calls the piece a reimagining. The American Masterpieces grants were awarded for, according to the Cooperative Agreement between the NEA and the New England Foundation for the Arts, "the reconstruction or restaging of significant American dances for performances locally and on tour."<sup>58</sup> Defining something as a reconstruction implies that the thing has been lost or destroyed—evidence has to be collected and assembled in order to put the thing together again. The cooperative agreement, as mentioned earlier, described the work produced through the grant as "otherwise...not...available."<sup>59</sup> Reimagining, however, does not point toward loss or a lack of availability, but to rethinking or reinterpreting. In speaking about his project in the *Los Angeles Times*, Gordon said, "I'm trying to figure out how not to make 'Trying Times' a chore but a creative, investigative something without people dumping on me afterward for not being true to the original...I don't want to be true to the original. I want to be true to myself."<sup>60</sup> In referring to his work as reimagined, Gordon avoids the implication that *Trying Times* has been lost, damaged, or not available and therefore avoids having to assemble evidence in an attempt to put back together the original *Trying Times*.

In his artistic statement, Gordon calls into question the canonicity inherent, as I analyze in chapter one, in the name of the NEA grant—American Masterpieces: Dance—

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<sup>58</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, "Cooperative Agreement for American Masterpieces: Dance," 3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Gia Kourlas, "The 'Times' of His Past, Returning to Its Birthplace," *New York Times*, September 7, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/07/arts/dance/07kour.html>.

by calling the grant a “2007 NEA Dance ‘Masterpiece’ grant.” In other words, Gordon drops “American” from the grant title and places “Masterpiece” within quotation marks. Perhaps Gordon is mistakenly referencing the title for the grant. More likely, just as he is uncomfortable with his categorization as a postmodern dancer, he is uncomfortable with being slotted into a nationally defined “American” dance heritage. The inclusion of “masterpiece” in quotes serves as a self-deprecating nod to his own status even as it diminishes the label of masterpiece in general: how could it be that he, David Gordon, created a masterpiece? And, what is a masterpiece anyway? In doing so, Gordon questions his belonging, and perhaps anyone’s choreography belonging, in these categories of “American” and “masterpiece,” just as he had done with the categories of “postmodern” and “new dance.” Despite Gordon’s vocal dislike of the American Masterpiece label, he both agreed to apply for the grant and also accepted the grant. He even went on to receive an additional two American Masterpieces grants: Pick Up Performance Co(S.) received \$50,000 in 2010 to reconstruct *Dancing Henry Five* (2005), and Peak Performances at Montclair State University received an American Masterpieces: Presenting grant for \$70,000 in 2008 (dance grants were only available in 2007, 2009, and 2010) to remount *Shlemiel the First* (1994), directed and choreographed by Gordon. Pick Up Performance Co(S.)’s homepage now straightforwardly declares that David Gordon received three NEA American Masterpiece Program grants.<sup>61</sup>

Through comparing his own process on *Trying Times (remembered)* to his work that references other theater artists, Gordon turned the 1982 version of himself into an

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<sup>61</sup> Pick Up Performance Co(S)’s Homepage, Pick Up Performance Co(S), accessed February 8, 2014, <http://www.pickupperformance.org/>.

other. Gordon claimed to have approached this reconstruction as though 1982's Gordon was another person entirely. Kourlas wrote in her *Time Out* review, "[a]s [Gordon] sees it, his recent work, involving the playwright Bertolt Brecht, isn't so different from what he's doing with *Trying Times (remembered)*."<sup>62</sup> In addition to the Brecht piece that premiered following the run of *Trying Times (remembered)*, Gordon reconstructed William Shakespeare's *Henry V* as *Dancing Henry Five* in 2005 (for which he received a 2010 American Masterpieces grant to restage). And, *Trying Times* reconstructed Balanchine's *Apollo*, originally. (*Trying Times (remembered)* reimagined Gordon's own *Trying Times*.) Kourlas cited Gordon as saying, "I am looking at something and trying to understand the method behind it... What was the person who made this thinking of? Why is this following that? I can make adjustments and changes and everybody is willing to play with me."<sup>63</sup> Of course, "the person who made this," in the case of *Trying Times* and *Trying Times (remembered)*, was Gordon himself. Through distancing his 1982 self from his 2008 self, Gordon simultaneously elevates his position in the field—his 1982 self is worthy of looking at again in the same context as Brecht, Balanchine, or Shakespeare—and critiques the ideology of reconstruction.

### ***Trying Times (remembered)* as a Surrogate of *Trying Times***

The original *Trying Times* referenced and lifted quite a bit from ballet legend George Balanchine's *Apollo* (1928). In the year leading up to the premiere of *Trying Times*, when Croce was working on her profile of Gordon for *The New Yorker*, he often

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<sup>62</sup> Kourlas, "The Time is Ripe."

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

accompanied her to performances of New York City Ballet where *Apollo* was in repertory.<sup>64</sup> In Gordon's statement included in the American Masterpieces grant proposal, he wrote, "I spent evenings at NYC Ballet, seeing Balanchine's *Apollo* many times, before I realized a virus had entered my brain. The idea of a muse was a little grand for me but I began to consider it."<sup>65</sup> (In the final report for the grant, Gordon acknowledged that his quartet at the opening of *Trying Times* with Susan Eschelbach, Margaret Hoeffel, and Valda Setterfield were surely his muses.<sup>66</sup>) He continued, "I dared to dream of taking on the Stravinsky score and the mighty reputation of this particular Balanchine ballet to create my own new work."<sup>67</sup> Enchanted by the music, Gordon used Stravinsky's composition, also named *Apollo*, originally *Apollon musagète*, in *Trying Times*. The title of the dance, *Trying Times*, supposedly hints at Gordon's entrance to the "dance world through the back door," since he was not a trained dancer.<sup>68</sup> The piece deliberately lifted images, such as a quartet with Gordon cast as *Apollo* and Eschelbach, Hoeffel, and Setterfield as muses, and vocabulary, including the prominent use of diagonal lines and lunges, from *Apollo*. These references are embedded in and spliced with Gordon's more typical task-based movement, including the manipulation of architectural pieces designed by Power Boothe, one of the first of many collaborations between the artists.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Pick Up Performance Co., Inc., "Grant Application," application no. 07-701392 (March 2007), 12. Available via Freedom of Information Act request to the National Endowment for the Arts.

<sup>66</sup> Pick Up Performance Co., Inc., "Final Descriptive Report," grant no. 08-3300-7028 (May 2009), 3. Available via Freedom of Information Act request to the National Endowment for the Arts.

<sup>67</sup> Pick Up Performance Co., Inc., "Grant Application," 12.

<sup>68</sup> Haithman, "Dance pioneer David Gordon revisits 'Trying Times.'"

For Balanchine, *Apollo* was a seminal work, marking an important shift in his choreography, and is often referred to as his “signature piece;” for Gordon, *Trying Times* likewise marked an important shift in his career. Gordon recalled, “[p]eople never came to see my work. The performances [of *Trying Times*] were sold-out because I was simultaneously a dance panelist on the NEA and using the music of Stravinsky that was Balanchine’s property.”<sup>69</sup> Word spread that Gordon had choreographed a version of *Apollo* and people who would not normally either see Gordon’s work or go to performances at DTW saw *Trying Times*. The fact that Gordon himself was shocked by the turn of events is obvious in his recollection that, “[h]onest to God, Peter Martins [then, the newly appointed balletmaster and, now, the Ballet Master in Chief of New York City Ballet] came to Dance Theater Workshop.”<sup>70</sup> Following the DTW commission for *Trying Times*, Gordon received commissions from Dance Theatre of Harlem, American Ballet Theatre, and GRCOP at the Paris Opera (Groupe de Recherche Choregraphique de l’Opera de Paris).<sup>71</sup> Just as *Apollo* marked a turning point in Balanchine’s career, *Trying Times* marked a turning point in Gordon’s career.

In December 1982, David Gordon’s Pick Up Company performed *Trying Times* at DTW’s Bessie Schönberg Theater. There is no projection featuring opening credits and there is no microphone, as referenced at the beginning of the chapter. The lights come up on Nina Martin as she places a large wooden frame the size of a door on the stage.

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<sup>69</sup> Gordon quoted in Kourlas, “The Time is Ripe.”

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Pick Up Performance Co., Inc., “Grant Application,” 12 and Kourlas, “The Time is Ripe.”

Wearing a black button down shirt tucked into brown pants, Martin stands so that the wooden structure frames her and says:

I mean I care about him, you know. And I'm worried, you know. I mean, I tried to warn him. But no, he won't listen, you know. I mean, with enough rope, I mean they'll hang you, you know. I mean, I tell him. But him? He just laughs, you know. I mean stick to one thing, you know. That's my motto. I mean, one thing you know, you know? Keep it simple, you know. I mean, but him, you know, he won't stand still. I mean, he's stepping on too many toes. I mean, if he gets out of hand, they're going to stop him, you know. I mean, oh, I don't know, you know?<sup>72</sup>

Martin then picks up the wooden frame and walks off stage, revealing a quartet of three women and a man on stage behind her. Through this monologue, Gordon acknowledges—and moves past—the dangerous territory into which he strayed in recreating Balanchine's signature piece, *Apollo*.

Gordon's *Trying Times (remembered)* referenced the 1982 piece, *Trying Times*, but did not attempt to replace the piece, highlighting the surrogation process at play in reconstruction. With her image frozen on the screen at the end of the opening credits, Setterfield, wearing a white turtleneck and black pants, approached the microphone. In her crisp British accent and with a singsong voice anyone familiar with Gordon's work surely knows, Setterfield began:

I mean, I still care about him, you know. And, I'm worried, you know. I mean, I tried to warn him. But no, he wouldn't listen, you know. I mean, with enough rope they'll hang you. I mean, I told him. But him, he just laughed, you know. I mean stick to one thing, you know. That's my motto. One thing you know, you know? I mean, keep it simple, you know. But him, he won't stand still. I mean, he's still stepping on too many toes. I

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<sup>72</sup> Gordon, "Trying times (Videotape)."

mean, what's all this about a 'masterpiece' grant? I mean, they're going to get him, you know. I mean, oh, I don't know what I mean, you know.<sup>73</sup>

She then emphatically calls for "music!" cuing Stravinsky's score to begin as she walked over to join three dancers, two women and a man, who were waiting for her center stage. Gordon calls attention to the presumed absence filled by his reconstructed 2008 surrogates through the title of the piece, as well as through the choreography. In case the opening video sequence and modification of the dance's name were not enough indication, Setterfield's opening monologue also allowed Gordon to hint to the audience that the dance about to unfold would be self-aware as a reconstruction. Comparing the opening monologues of *Trying Times* and *Trying Times (remembered)*, slight modifications to the speech in 2008 include using the word "still" on two occasions and Setterfield's saying, "what's all this about a 'masterpiece' grant?" Gordon literally voiced his discomfort with the American Masterpiece label for *Trying Times* through his wife's first spoken lines.

Gordon's choreography in the opening section of *Trying Times (remembered)* visibly represents surrogation. Mirroring *Apollo*'s single male dancer and three women, when the Stravinsky score begins, Gordon's choreography features four dancers, gliding to join hands, forming duets, a trio, and an occasional quartet. The choreography consists of little more than walking with arm gestures as the dancers float into and out of kaleidoscope-like tableaux. As this occurs on stage in *Trying Times (remembered)*, the 1982 production of *Trying Times* is projected on the screen behind the dancers. Because

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<sup>73</sup> "TRYING TIMES 1982 (REMEMBERED)," YouTube video, 4:59, posted by "Margaret Jenkins," August 18, 2009, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nj6C\\_7qfCbo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nj6C_7qfCbo).

of this, the audience can see that what is happening on stage is different from what happened in the earlier production, an imperfect surrogation. In the projected 1982 version, there were only four dancers moving through this opening sequence—Gordon with his muses, Setterfield, Eschelbach, and Hoeffel. In 2008, there are thirteen dancers in this section. Only four dancers at once are part of the action, with additional dancers walking onto the stage and substituting out for someone performing as part of the foursome—an adagio tag team quartet that signals the surrogation that might occur when a piece remains in repertory and dancers leave the company, as in *Apollo*'s evolution. Shifts in timing are detected between the video and the live dancers. For instance, at one point, the quartet stands in a diagonal line with Setterfield upstage, turning downstage in front of the other dancers into a leaning balance with support from the dancers behind her, but the action on the stage is preceded by the same series of steps projected on the screen; the audience watches a canon occur between these two quartets—one live, one recorded. The projection shows that there was not a video element from an earlier performance as part of the 1982 production.<sup>74</sup>

The presence of the video of *Trying Times* makes clear the absences of *Trying Times (remembered)* and makes explicit the purposefully imperfect surrogation that takes place onstage. Mark Franko's review of the piece for *Ballet-Dance Magazine* notes the "interesting [choreographic] differences in both content and timing" between the dancers on stage and the dancers in the video "— sorts of willful discrepancies that keep us aware

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<sup>74</sup> Though, actually, the piece that Gordon premiered prior to *Trying Times* in 1982, *T.V. Reel*, did combine video with live dancers as described in Croce, "Making Work."

of Gordon's point that memory can be imprecise."<sup>75</sup> Franko continued, "[w]e cannot but watch the dance as it mirrors or fails to mirror the film. Gordon imposes on our viewing a sense of comparison and of framing."<sup>76</sup> Only one member of the original cast performs in the 2008 piece. Valda Setterfield performs in both versions, despite her body aging twenty-five years between the performances. Quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, Setterfield said, "[i]t's just another me... My hair was the same color, I didn't have so many lines [in *Trying Times* as in *Trying Times (remembered)*], and I think, 'I don't do that now, my knees are not ready for that,' but it's fine."<sup>77</sup> One of the more poignant moments in the choreography is a sustained duet between the two Setterfields, the younger Setterfield's movements are modified to better fit the body of the aging dancer, seventy-four years old in 2008. Juxtaposed on stage with her younger self on screen, Setterfield brings into high relief the surrogation that is taking place. Roach's surrogation is never a perfect fit. While Setterfield performed in both the 1982 and 2008 versions of the piece, her body, like the bodies performing Pat Graney's *Faith Triptych* (2010) that I discuss in chapter two, is not the same—even Setterfield cannot fill her own shoes in 2008.

Gordon had long thought of his choreography as an ongoing process. Croce's 1982 article cited Gordon from a 1978 program note:

I think of my work as ongoing: a process in which the materials I work with reappear under new circumstances. I support changes in context, the

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<sup>75</sup> Mark Franko, "Another Balanchine, David Gordon's 'Trying Times,'" *Ballet-Dance Magazine*, March 2009. [http://ballet-dance.com/200903/articles/davidgordon\\_trying\\_20081211\\_franko.html](http://ballet-dance.com/200903/articles/davidgordon_trying_20081211_franko.html).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Haithman, "Dance pioneer David Gordon revisits 'Trying Times.'"

freedom to re-examine, to alter, to abandon materials or to re-use them for a good laugh at myself and my world. Keeping the options open extends the life span of a work and my interest in it.<sup>78</sup>

While the choreography from *Trying Times* did not remain in Pick Up Performance Co(S.)’s repertory as *Apollo* did for Balanchine, moving with the choreographer from the Ballets Russes to New York City Ballet, the experience of creating *Trying Times* continued to inform Gordon’s work. The collaboration with Boothe “established a precedent of using actual objects early on in rehearsal” and, in fact, the visual devices Boothe developed for *Trying Times* cropped up from time to time in Gordon’s other work.<sup>79</sup> In the grant application, Gordon wrote about these visual devices saying, “[t]hose actual objects made their way into the next four years of actual work as I continued to take advantage of their decorative power while investigating their meaningful and changeable partnering identities. (Last year[, in 2006,] the original diagonally striped canvas cloths were used as ships and skirts in *Dancing Henry Five*.)”<sup>80</sup> As Balanchine continued to refine the choreography of *Apollo*, catering to different casts or bringing the piece more in line with his developing vision of modernism, each version and individual performance a surrogate of the previous, the costumes were also refined. The cast of *Trying Times* in 1982 was costumed in layered earth tones—rust, golden yellow, and brown. In perhaps a nod to *Apollo*’s series of surrogations, Gordon costumed his *Trying*

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<sup>78</sup> Croce, “Making Work,” 68.

<sup>79</sup> Pick Up Performance Co., Inc., “Grant Application,” 12.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. The grant proposal was submitted in March 2007, so I dated “last year” as 2006, but *Dancing Henry Five* premiered in 2005.

*Times (remembered)* dancers in a clean assortment of black shoes, black pants, and white tops.<sup>81</sup>

### **Aura of the “Original”**

The collaboration with the 1982 video was not part of Pick Up Performance Co(S.)’s proposal to the NEA. If Gordon did include his reconstruction plans in the grant proposal, it is unknown if he still would have received the grant. In the proposal, Gordon noted that “I have looked at the original record tape and I’m impressed (yes, I am) with range of movement, design, response to Stravinsky music and use of dialogue in the fragmented narrative journey that culminates in the trial and the music’s glorious end.”<sup>82</sup> However, Gordon does not mention that the “original record tape” would be used in the reconstruction, acting as a sort of documentary film displaying what the choreography looked like in 1982. Gordon described the beginning of his process in the grant’s final report: “I began to attempt to locate dancers of my 1982 company and to ask permission to use their images in an annotated, edited, re-visitation of my own history in order to create something interesting and new to me and *Trying Times (remembered)* was born with the dancer’s [*sic*] consent and in collaboration with CalArts.”<sup>83</sup> For the reconstruction, five professional dancers from Gordon’s company were joined by eight student performers in school at CalArts. Two student understudies were also part of the work, though the collaboration with CalArts was also not part of the grant proposal.

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<sup>81</sup> Franko, “Another Balanchine, David Gordon’s ‘Trying Times.’”

<sup>82</sup> Pick Up Performance Co., Inc., “Grant Application,” 12.

<sup>83</sup> Pick Up Performance Co., Inc., “Final Descriptive Report,” 3.

The projection of *Trying Times* within *Trying Times (remembered)* shows in the most visible way that the choreography was not lost.<sup>84</sup> While a live production of *Trying Times* was not in repertory anywhere, the choreography was available on video and DVD. In fact, as I address in the chapter two, the American Masterpieces grant requested recordings of the dances along with proposals. Included as part of the final descriptive report for the American Masterpieces grant, Gordon's statement said that he "was persuaded by" his "manager/producer Alyce Dissette to watch the video of the original performance at DTW (commissioned and presented by David White) for the first time in 25 years."<sup>85</sup> Gordon's process in 2008 did not begin from his memory or his dancers' memories of the live performances; rather, the reconstruction began with the technological reproduction from 1982. In *Liveness* (1999), Philip Auslander analyzes rock as a form that reverses Walter Benjamin's assumption that an original, by definition, cannot be mass-produced. In rock, live performance is a recreation of a recording; the recording is the original.<sup>86</sup> Similar to Auslander's analysis of rock, while the 1982 DTW video was certainly not mass-produced, *Trying Times (remembered)* as a live performance was reconstructed taking the technological reproduction as the original. However, in his use of the video as an original, Gordon undermines the acknowledgement of surrogates that the projection in *Trying Times (remembered)* enables.

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<sup>84</sup> To be sure, there are many works that have been reconstructed both within and outside of the American Masterpieces framework that existed in a more fragmentary state prior to their reimaginings. In addition, video and digital media are far from stable forms.

<sup>85</sup> Pick Up Performance Co., Inc., "Final Descriptive Report," 3.

<sup>86</sup> Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 84.

Gordon's use of the projection of the technological reproduction of the 1982 performance in the 2008 production complicates Benjamin's notion of original, reproduction, and aura. Perhaps taking a page from Auslander, Gordon referred to the 1982 recording as the original in the grant statement. However, Benjamin argued in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) that a technological reproduction, such as this 1982 recording, is quite different than an original. (I am setting aside for the moment that the concept of surrogation precludes the possibility of an original.) Benjamin believed that the "here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in a particular place" lacked in technological reproductions; copies made via technological reproduction are able to be in situations not possible for the original.<sup>87</sup> And, according to Benjamin, "what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura."<sup>88</sup> While I cannot travel back in time to December 1982 to experience the performance of *Trying Times* in the here and now at DTW, I can view a video recording (converted to DVD) of the December 17, 1982 production at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division.<sup>89</sup> And yet, I did see *Trying Times (remembered)* live at REDCAT in December 2008. Dance sociologist Helen Thomas wrote about watching Martha Graham's

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<sup>87</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Art in the Age of its Technological Reproduction," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 61. Though Auslander complicates this understanding of "live" as unmediated.

<sup>88</sup> Benjamin, "Art in the Age of its Technological Reproduction," 62.

<sup>89</sup> The deterioration of videotape is a concern for many interested in the preservation of dance recorded in this way. For more on the ephemerality of videotape, see Auslander, *Liveness*, 45. For more on the problem of relying on videotape to document dance work, see Dance Heritage Coalition, *Dance Videotapes at Risk* (Washington, DC: Dance Heritage Coalition, 2003). <http://www.danceheritage.org/dancevideotapesatrisk2.pdf>.

*Appalachian Spring* (1944) live in 1999: “[d]uring the performance of the dance, as it was unfolding before my eyes, I found myself comparing and contrasting the dance with the 1976 film of the dance and not a previous live performance I had seen many years before.”<sup>90</sup> The Martha Graham Company’s performance did not present *Appalachian Spring* as a reconstruction, just one of many revivals of Graham’s earlier work for the production. Thomas was extremely familiar with the 1976 recording through her research and said, “[i]n this instance, the film had become fixed, it suddenly took on the status of the original, *it was* the dance, and at the same time, the performance took on the character of the copy, the quality of which was measured against the film. This is a kind of reversal of the ‘aura’ of the work of art within the era of technological reproducibility.”<sup>91</sup> Following Benjamin, the 1976 film of *Appalachian Spring* or the projected recording of *Trying Times* cannot have the aura that live performance possesses. However, I experienced the same flip as Thomas did when watching *Trying Times (remembered)*. The video projection of the 1982 piece included as part of the reconstruction possessed more aura than the live bodies dancing on stage.

According to Benjamin, the aura of a technological reproduction has withered; however, framed within the context of the 2008 American Masterpiece reconstruction, the video of the 1982 choreography takes on a certain gravitas. The granting of the American Masterpiece title to *Trying Times* heightened the aura of the piece as “a formulation of the cult value of the work of art in categories of spatiotemporal

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<sup>90</sup> Helen Thomas, *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 132.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

perception.”<sup>92</sup> The projection of the dance in 1982 represents the “authentic” version of the choreography. *Trying Times* circa 1982 is the piece, after all, that was deemed worthy of the “American Masterpiece” categorization and reconstruction as part of the American dance canon due to its artistic, historic, and cultural significance. Gordon does not use the video projection for the duration of *Trying Times (remembered)*, and it is clear the video was not created for use in this way as the backs of audience members’ heads are in the frame and there is audible laughter and chatter in the background. The video is edited to appear and disappear at different moments during the piece, but it also is edited visually. In the final report, Gordon said, “I used excerpts of the original DTW videotape. I removed color, sharpening and projecting the black and white image.”<sup>93</sup> Through making the video black and white, Gordon creates the illusion that the video is older than its twenty-five years. In so doing, Gordon framed the video in a historical context for the audience, making both the 1982 performance and the video itself appear more distant. Gordon turns the video embedded within the 2008 production, rather than the live dancing bodies, into a cult object imbued with aura.

*Trying Times (remembered)* presented a contradiction in both acknowledging the presence of and imperfection inherent in surrogation at the same time as giving credence to the idea of an original in performance, one that is surrounded by aura. Gordon challenges the audience to question the authority of both the masterpiece label as well as ideas about an original and authenticity in dance. While the video projection serves to indicate the imperfection of reconstruction, something the American Masterpieces

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<sup>92</sup> Benjamin, “Art in the Age of its Technological Reproduction,” 75(n).

<sup>93</sup> Pick Up Performance Co., Inc., “Final Descriptive Report,” 3.

program fails to acknowledge, the recording is also presented as an object with significant aura. The American Masterpieces program grants the title of “masterpiece” to dances, certainly something worthy of aura, and assumes a singular performance from the past can be reconstructed with the help of program funding. This represents a fundamental misunderstanding of how dance and performance exist always as reproductions and surrogations.

## CONCLUSION

President Barack Obama appointed Rocco Landesman as the tenth Chairman of the NEA and the Senate confirmed Landesman in August 2009. During Landesman's first budget testimony before a House subcommittee in April 2010, he "put his stamp on the [NEA] budget," cutting the American Masterpieces program.<sup>1</sup> Landesman also set about rebranding the NEA, introducing the slogan "Art Works." The NEA's 2012-2016 strategic plan published in October 2010 stated "art works" as its guiding principle:

As NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman has explained, the phrase has triple meaning:

*"Art works" is a noun.* They are the books, crafts, dances, designs, drawings, films, installations, music, musicals, paintings, plays, performances, poetry, textiles, and sculptures that are the creation of artists.

*"Art works" is a verb.* Art works on and within people to change and inspire them; it addresses the need people have to create, to imagine, to aspire to something more.

*"Art works" is a declarative sentence.* Arts jobs are real jobs that are part of the real economy. Art workers pay taxes, and art contributes to economic growth, neighborhood revitalization, and the livability of American towns and cities.<sup>2</sup>

The "art works" guiding principle represents a new theorization of dance by the NEA: dance works are a thing created by choreographers, choreography changes and inspires people, and dancers and choreographers are laborers. This new theorization does not

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Taylor, compiled by Dave Itzkoff, "N.E.A. Chairman Testifies on Capitol Hill," *New York Times*, April 13, 2010. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/14/arts/14arts-NEACHAIRMANT\\_BR.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/14/arts/14arts-NEACHAIRMANT_BR.html).

<sup>2</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Art Works for America: Strategic Plan, FY 2012-2016* (October 2010): 4. <http://blogs.bu.edu/plan2010/files/2011/02/NEAstrategicPlan2012-2016.pdf>.

necessarily discount or replace previous conceptualizations of the form, since dance can both inspire people and be ephemeral, dancers can be laborers and not be in touch with the art form's history. "Art works" as a verb, however, is very much in the present tense, indicating at least a small shift away from the past championed by the American Masterpieces program. While American Masterpieces: Dance gazed passively backward at the history of American theatrical concert dance, the grants also actively reproduced these works in the present, hoping to preserve their legacy for future generations.

In this dissertation, I have taken three case studies—grants surrounding Alwin Nikolais's centenary, the grant to the National Performance Network (NPN), and the grant reconstructing David Gordon's *Trying Times* (1982) as *Trying Times (remembered)* (2008)—in order to elucidate some of the conflicting narratives surrounding the American Masterpieces: Dance initiative that funded reconstructions and restaging of dances during three fiscal years, 2007, 2009, and 2010. The American Masterpieces: Dance project set about, as the title of the 2007 *NEA Arts* article proclaimed, "preserving classics of an ephemeral art." However, the preservation of dance, an art form that, despite its endless reproducibility, cannot be repeated, does not work only in the ways that the NEA intended. The grant program funded and supported reconstructing choreography on bodies in live form and recording these performances for potential future reproductions. At the same time, American Masterpieces did not acknowledge the canonization project's exclusions or multiple ways of archiving and reproducing dance. In its approach to preservation, the program additionally assumed the existence of an original dance, representing a lack of understanding the form, which always exists as a

surrogation of a surrogation. The American Masterpieces: Dance initiative attempted to preserve the legacy of dance through reconstructions while failing to acknowledge that reconstructing choreography and preserving dance are inherently complicated, layered, and fraught projects.

Chapter one focused on the multiple and overlapping avenues through which the creation of a canon can occur and the ways that the American Masterpieces program opened up these opportunities to enable Nikolias's canonization. The creation of a canon through the American Masterpieces program was an attempt by the NEA to bring fixity to dance through preserving its legacy via reconstructions and documentation of these reconstructions. Nikolais's work became inscribed in the American Masterpieces canon not only through reproducing the choreography with both a professional company, the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, and college students across the country, but also through the teaching of Nikolais technique to these college students. These reconstructions operated on different levels, and while serving to create a canon, they also destabilized an existing American dance canon.

In chapter two, I looked at some of the many ways that choreography is archived. The American Masterpieces grant to NPN was divided via NPN's "Re-Creation Fund" to three dance artists—Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Jane Comfort, and Pat Graney. Each selected to reproduce their previous choreography in different ways that highlight varied theories of archiving. Joseph's choreopoem *Word Becomes Flesh* (2003) had already been archived in written form prior to the reconstruction, but the reconstruction provided an opportunity for Joseph to reproduce and archive the autobiographical work on other

bodies. The reconstruction of *Faith Healing* (1993) showcases the collaborative process at play in much contemporary work, and the role of dancers as co-creators, and co-archivists, of the work. The dancers' bodily archives were tapped in recreating Pat Graney's *Faith* (1991) as part of *Faith Triptych* (2010). *Faith Triptych* was additionally archived utilizing on demand streaming technology of OntheBoards.tv.

David Gordon reproduced *Trying Times* as *Trying Times (remembered)* for his American Masterpieces reconstruction. Gordon has a long history of rejecting categorization, which made him an interesting case study to look at in relation to the American Masterpieces program in chapter three. I analyzed Gordon's reproduction that includes a video projection of the 1982 piece. The presence of the video in *Trying Times (remembered)* calls attention to the absence of the "original" *Trying Times* and the surrogation process that is always at play in performance; the dancers in 2008 can only reproduce, and not replicate, the choreography that is on the screen. While questioning the premise of the American Masterpieces program for dance since every performance is a surrogation, Gordon also reinforced the idea that dance can have an original through the presentation of an "authentic" performance of *Trying Times*, recorded on December 17, 1982. Similarly, Gordon questions the existence of masterpieces at the same time as solidifying his work as a masterpiece through reconstructing his work as part of the American Masterpieces program.

As historical distance from the American Masterpieces program becomes greater, I am interested to watch how these reconstructions are remembered, archived, embodied, and reproduced. Alberto del Saz continues to reconstruct the work of Nikolais with Ririe-

Woodbury Dance Company as well as teach Nikolais technique and choreography to college students. But, it is unclear how Nikolais's work will live on after del Saz is no longer able to perform this function. Jane Comfort and Pat Graney have no plans to continue performing *Faith Healing* and *Faith*, respectively, but the recording of *Faith* is easily accessible as part of OTB.tv. Marc Bamuthi Joseph's *Word Becomes Flesh* reconstruction is even more accessible than *Faith* because it is free on Vimeo. The piece also continues touring, at least as recently as fall 2013 and is currently promoted on MAPP International's website.<sup>3</sup> Pick Up Performance Co(S.)'s website does not list *Trying Times (remembered)*, but both of David Gordon's other American Masterpieces funded projects—*Dancing Henry Five* and *Shlemiel the First*—are listed.<sup>4</sup> In the years, decades, and centuries to come, will entries into American dance canons be adjusted to account for these American Masterpieces? How will choreographers and dancers continue to challenge singular assumptions about the ways to preserve, archive, and pass on their art form's legacy? In what new ways will artists and performers challenge and subvert institutional structures at the same time as benefitting from them? How else will NEA initiatives and other funding mechanisms theorize dance?

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<sup>3</sup> "Marc Bamuthi Joseph/The Living Word Project," MAPP International Productions, accessed November 19, 2014, <http://mappinternational.org/projects/view/28>.

<sup>4</sup> "David Gordon," Pick Up Performance Co(S), accessed November 19, 2014, <http://www.pickupperformance.org/david.html>.

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