UC Berkeley
UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title
Social Dance after Social Practice: Between the Stage and the Museum

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5954n4mk

Author
Evans, Randi Marie

Publication Date
2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Social Dance after Social Practice: Between the Stage and the Museum

by

Randi Marie Evans

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Performance Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Gender, Women, and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair
Professor SanSan Kwan
Professor Julia Bryan-Wilson

Spring 2022

Copyright 2022

Randi Marie Evans

All Rights Reserved

Abstract

Social Dance after Social Practice: Between the Stage and the Museum

by

Randi Marie Evans

Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies

Designated Emphasis in Gender, Women, and Sexuality

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

This dissertation examines dance practices by choreographers and visual artists from the late 20th century whose work incorporates a range of (often marginalized) communities in order to address the social issues of their time. I argue that these participatory and collective dances by Anna Halprin, Adrian Piper, and Bill T. Jones are overlooked in the nascent genealogy of social practice that has yet to consider dance as either a medium or conceptual frame. Conversely, I contend that the frame of social practice addresses a gap in dance studies that has yet to contend with the ethics, power dynamics, and history of community-based and community-sourced dance practices. Through the conscious deployment of bodies in space, social practice often appears as staged encounters, and performance studies scholars, such as Shannon Jackson, have analyzed it as such. Yet, I argue social practice is also inherently choreographic. By bringing a dance framework to social practice—and an art historical framework to dance studies—I demonstrate the synergy between social practice and the ethos of Black social dance: improvisation, community, and collectivity. Such connections and influences prompt the need to elaborate new frames and categories around what I call "social practice dance."

Acknowledgments

Central to this dissertation is an exploration of what it means to have community and work in community with one another. My dissertation is inspired by my previous professional and educational experiences at the Central District Forum for Arts & Ideas, the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance, Able ARTS Works, and Compton Dance Theatre. Additionally, while at Berkeley, I have had the good fortune of being a part of many different communities that have been spaces of learning, growth, and support: the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performances Studies; the Dance Studies Working Group; Julia Bryan Wilson's dissertation group; TDPS ABD writing group; and Dance for Parkinson's Disease at Berkeley Ballet Theater. I am a better scholar, colleague, advocate, and person because of the generosity of these communities.

I am thankful to the many friends and colleagues who have supported me along the way: Juan Manuel Adalpe, Natalia Duong, Christian Nagler, Miyoko Conley, Jess Dorrance, Sima Belmar, Megan Hoetger, Olive McKeon, Heather Rastovac, Belgíca del Rio, Aparna Nambiar, Lashon Daley, Miyuki Baker, Lyndsey Ogle, Martha Gonzalez, and Jamal Batts. I am particularly grateful to Julia Havard and Kim Richards for the love and support they have shown not only me, but my family as well, over the years.

A big thank you to my dissertation chair, Shannon Jackson. I feel very fortunate that I had the opportunity to work with you. Thank you for continued and consistent support throughout this process. I appreciate the ways you have shown up for me, cheered me on, and buoyed me through the ups and downs of graduate school. I am deeply grateful to my committee member, SanSan Kwan, not only for your support through the dissertation, but in all the ways I had the privilege of working with you over the years – as a professor, advisor, and mentor – I have learned so much from you. I appreciate the ways in which you supported me as not only a student, but a parent as well. Thank you also, to my committee member, Julia Bryan-Wilson. In addition to having you as a committee member, I am also grateful that I got to experience two seminars with you. I appreciate how you created intentional spaces for your students to interact, grow, and share with one another through your writing group. I made long-lasting friendships and learned so much because of the space you cultivated.

Outside of my committee, I have had the opportunity to work with numerous outstanding faculty. In particular, I am grateful to Abigail DeKosnik who has been an incredible mentor and exemplar of compassionate and adaptive pedagogy. I am also thankful for Julia Fawcett, who I have learned so much from as instructor and who has also been an invaluable source of support during the ups and downs of graduate school.

I am grateful to the many loving childcare providers who have cared for my children over the years. Without their help I would have certainly floundered. Thank you: Emily, Stacey, Soleil, Tatiana, Olivia, Julia, Xanthe, Paris, Mariam, and Tsering.

I have many family and friends who have been supporting and rooting me on long before I ever had the thought of graduate school. My sister, Melissa, and brother, Marc, have been sounding boards for me, listening and offering their perspectives, and cheering me on through the good

times and supporting me through the hard times. My in-laws, Terry and Donna, have been immensely supportive and helpful. They have always been willing to step in whenever we needed help – helping us move, making meals after babies were born, and being all-around awesome grandparents. I am thankful for the support and love, Kristen, has provided me as both my best friend and sister-in-law. Finally, my parents have always been my biggest cheerleaders. Their belief in me often surpasses my own and has carried me through when I have felt doubtful or uncertain. I have been able to take risks in my life and chart a different path because of their faith in me.

Lastly, when I think about the beginning of my journey at Berkeley, I often think of a single photo. It's a picture of my husband, Matt, my then 16 month-old daughter, Naomi, and me in front of an obscenely large moving van at a gas station in the middle of Oregon. We are smiling and heading into the unknown, leaving behind our first home together, family, friends, and jobs so that I could pursue my doctorate. Amidst the sacrifices, we made new friends, built community, and enjoyed many adventures in northern California. We added to our brood, too, with Liv and Jude joining us in the coming years. This dissertation is for them. For, Matt, who supports me in all things and continues to make me laugh. For Naomi, Liv, and Jude who surprise me every day, make all things more enjoyable, and see me and love me.

All endings are beginnings and I look forward to what's to come.

Table of Contents

Introduction		1
Chapter 1	Countercultural Dance: The Politics of Inclusion and Participation	15
Chapter 2	Abstracting the Vernacular: Social Dance in the Gallery	33
Chapter 3	Relational Choreography and AIDS Activist Art: Reconsidering *Still/Here*	53
Epilogue	Dancing Alone Together: Social Distance Dance	72

Introduction

Community-based art. Social practice. Reformist art. Participatory art. Relational art. Immersive art. Therapeutic art. Victim-art. These are some of the labels that are commonly used to describe the art of my case studies. Each word or phrase is laden with value, historical context, and an associated discipline. What looks social to art historians might get labeled immersive by theater scholars. What is labeled social for dancers might look participatory for visual artists. Meanwhile, the catch-all, community-based, is often equated with "feel good" art, or more pejoratively, "bad art." Within this dissertation I analyze case studies by both choreographers and visual artists whose work adheres and alludes these labels: Anna Halprin's collaborative workshop and performance with members of Studio Watts; Adrian Piper's "funk lessons" for white people; and Bill T. Jones's community workshops with people with terminal illnesses. How are these works, and words, connected despite their disparate genealogical foundations?

The answer depends, I argue, upon a conscientious use of bodies moving in space: practices that foreground the relationality between, often disparate, bodies as a method for making meaning, responding to the world, and, sometimes at its very best, instituting change. In her 2012 book, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, art historian Claire Bishop proposes a genealogy of social practice that centers on artwork that utilizes the participation of non-artists as the basis for creation. Because the majority of Bishop's case studies focus on the live encounter of bodies in space, these works are deemed as being, at the least, performance-like, if not explicitly performance or theater. Thus, she posits, understanding performance as inherent to social practice could offer scholars an opportunity to reconsider the history of contemporary art history through the lens of theater. She states: "It is hoped that these chapters might give momentum to rethinking the history of twentieth-century art through the lens of theater rather than painting (as in the Greenbergian narrative) or the ready-made (as in Krauss, Bois, Buchloh and Foster's *Art Since 1900*, 2005)."[1] Considering Bishop's assertion as a dance scholar, I see the emphasis on the relationality or sociality of bodies in space as, not only theatrical, but also= choreographic. That perspective led me to wonder, rather than a theater lens, how could a dance lens be used to more fully understand the stakes and conceptions of social practice? How can we situate historic dance practices as integral to a contemporary understanding of social practice? And finally, at a time when art historians are more consistently writing about dance, how does one recognize dance as a practice that not only runs parallel to visual arts, but is intertwined with it?

This dissertation, *Social Dance after Social Practice: Between the Stage and the Museum*, offers a counter genealogy of social practice that focuses on choreographers and visual artists from the late 20th century whose seminal work pre-dates the "social turn" of the late 1990s.[2] I do not aim to analyze canonically social practice works *as* dance or choreography, I am focused specifically on works that employ dance as a method for collaboration and participation.

The use of the word "social," as a description for both politics and aesthetics, has been a choice term for artists, art institutions, and scholars. However, the use of the word "social" as both an adjective and noun can imply a myriad of meanings, genealogies, and assumptions. In one vein, as highlighted above, the word can connote the visual art term "social practice,"

---

[1] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 3.
[2] Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum* 44, vol. 6 (2006). The term the "social turn" coined by Claire Bishop in "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents" (2006) although Bishop clarifies in her book, *Artificial Hells*, clarifies it is actually a *re-turn* to the social.

wherein the realization of the work is contingent on viewer or community participation. In addition, the word can imply a social justice lens meaning the artist seeks to address social issues, often around race, gender, or sexuality, through their work. A third designation, with a decidedly longer history and usage, relates to the physical practices of social dance, namely movement practices that develop informally within a specific community. In the United States, social dance is often understood in relationship to racial and/or class formation and has had to work to gain legitimation on the concert dance stage. As we can see, both the visual art and dance connotations of the word "social" propose a range of aesthetic and political possibilities; however, central to both is the understanding that the works or techniques are produced with communities of bodies moving and working together. The case studies I analyze center the use of dance and movement between and among specific communities of individuals as essential to the realization of the work, thus creating the hybrid category of "social practice dance."

My case studies oscillate between visual artists and choreographers who use the participation of distinct communities as central to their work. Additionally, it is through the use of dance – as both a medium and method – that these artists work. By medium, I mean dance is the outcome of the project and how it exists as a form. By method, I mean that dance is the method through which the artist approaches working with the participants. Dance as a method supposes that it dance is not only an end object, but also an embodied and relational process that can create change among all participants, including the audience. Although it is difficult to ascertain the types of social change that can occur in these projects, which is one reason many people remain dubious of social practice, all of the artists within these case studies utilize dance as a method; they position embodied movement alongside others as a pathway for personal and collective change or growth. In many ways, this project queries the ways in which dance serves as a method of sociality across disciplines. Further, I argue that these works offer new ways to think about what it means to dance, move, and create "socially." Such new kinds of choreographic thinking perhaps have even greater resonance in our era of "social distancing."

My project asks the following questions: What does it mean to dance or move socially, particularly in taking in the divergent understandings of the "social" in both dance studies and art history? How does vernacular, popular, and social movement and materials become transfigured in high art spaces? What are the racial, gender, and historical implications of these processes of co-formation? What are the ethical pitfalls and political potentials of these practices?

To address the interdisciplinary parameters of what I term "social practice dance," I broach the "social" within three different parameters: as relational, as political, and as non-specialized. These parameters also correspond to and address questions related to histories of space, politics, and labor. Although I am attempting to offer a neat framework of how the lexicon, techniques, and theories of the "social" have been used across disciplines and genres, my framework of the "social" is more spatial than linear; as such, there are necessary overlaps and discrepancies. Nevertheless, the framework is an important delineation as it broaches a new approach to understanding the confluences of dance studies and art history.

Social as Relational

One way to think about contemporary art history is through a continuous engagement with presence. Michael Fried famously decried minimalist sculpture as "theatrical" due to the ways in which this turn in sculpture was dependent upon the presence of a viewer or audience. In his canonical essay, "Art and Objecthood," Fried highlights Tony Smith's *Die* (1962), as one of

the iconic sculptures that ushered in minimalism. A six-foot cube made of steel, Fried points to *Die* through a quoted exchange between Smith and artist Robert Morris. Morris asks why Smith did not make *Die* larger so it would tower over an observer or smaller so that an observer could see the top. To this Smith replies that he was making neither a monument nor an object.[3] Although, in this recounting, Smith does not explicitly state what he *is* making, we can infer many things by his negation. If it is neither monument nor object, perhaps he is less concerned with his work as a thing, but rather how his work manifests an encounter or tableau – all of which presumes the presence of another body and the relationship held between body (or bodies) and object.

Miwon Kwon, in her genealogy of site-specific art, states: "Site-specific work in its earliest formation, then, focused on establishing an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site, and demanded the physical presence of the viewer for the work's completion."[4] Thus, the work is intrinsic to the site and the disparate bodies that will come into contact with the work. Yet, the connection between site and the bodies that inhabit or shape said site are brought closer together through new genre public art in the 1990s. Kwon tracks how new genre public art transformed from an engagement with a specific site toward sited communities and social issues.[5] As Kwon's work demonstrates, engaging with sited communities and associated social issues is not without issue as a "community" is neither neutral nor static. Further, an engagement with a specific community often equates to an engagement of social issues for which the artist may not be well-equipped.

The framework of presence has become further refined through the language of the "social" explicated over the past two decades through the development of social practice. The broad discourse on social practice in the visual arts follows a lineage from conceptualism, institutional critique, and relational aesthetics; the so-called "social turn" has often designated practices that employ participatory, performative, community-based, and/or discursive practices where the art is, to a greater extent, contingent on the presence and participation of an audience. Formative work on "relational aesthetics" by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud foregrounds a co-presence and relationship between the artwork and the viewer, or more often, the artwork becomes a site to facilitate relationality among discrete bodies.[6]

Again, in *Artificial Hells*, Bishop moves away from Bourriaud's configuration of "relational aesthetics" as she states the works she analyzes are less interested in an aesthetic than "the creative rewards of participation as a politicized working process."[7] Further, she organizes her work around the notion of participation "in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance."[8] From another perspective, art historian Grant Kester, in his work *Conversation Pieces*, highlights the ways in which modern artworks of the late 1990s and early 2000s utilize dialogue and conversation among performers, participants, and audience, often addressing social issues, as the core of the work. Central to his

---

[3] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 128.
[4] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2004), 12.
[5] Ibid, 112.
[6] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du Reels, 2002).
[7] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 2.
[8] Ibid.

framework is the dialogic as means through which the works he analyzes come to fruition.[9] Finally, coming from a performance studies perspective with *Social Works,* Shannon Jackson tracks the aesthetic and political paradoxes involved in both defining and claiming social practice. Further, she explores the degree to which anti-institutionality or disruption is celebrated over practices that seek to implement care and stability. From a performance studies perspective, Jackson uses the lens of theater to think through a series of social practices that offer structures of support and collectivity. She states: "Performance's historic place as a cross-disciplinary, time-based, group art form also means that it requires a degree of systemic coordination, a brand of stage management that must think deliberately but also speculatively about what it means to sustain human collaboration spatially and temporally."[10]

The phrase "social turn" came into prominence when Claire Bishop published her 2006 article entitled "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents."[11] In it, Bishop traces a variety of visual artists whose work from the late 1990s to the present centralized the use of distinct members of communities as the basis, or more often material, of their work. In one notable section she discusses Phil Collin's *they shoot horses* (2004), a dual-channel video installation that features a group of Palestinian teenagers dancing to Western pop music for a duration of 8-hours, or the length of a workday. Bishop's central focus revolves around the paradox of viewing Palestinian teenagers in relationship to Western pop music and fashion. She argues that the work provides the viewer with a nuanced reading of globalization through the use of durational performance and the genre of reality TV. Yet, despite implicit references to the seduction, labor, and endurance of the dancing, dance is never a central frame through which she considers the work. Thus, Bishop misses the opportunity to connect the work to Horace McCoy's 1935 novel, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, which centers on the grueling dance marathons of the Great Depression. In both the novel and the art, social and popular dance are forms of pleasure – let's bring people together; however, dance is also a compulsion and demand – don't stop entertaining us. By foregrounding dance in the work, it becomes evident the ways in which dance has been, and continues to be, used as a way for poor people and people of color to prove their worth. In all, I contend that the "social turn" has turned a blind eye to the choreographic nature of social practice and thus has also absented dance as part of a genealogy of social practice.

Having tracked a genealogy of social practice above, we can further complicate this scene by integrating scholarship where social practice art has been theorized from a dance perspective. Consider a post-modern dance framework in which the criteria for what constituted "dance" was expanded. Moving from a demonstration of codified technique to simply movement in space, it is easy to see how one could frame the purposeful and controlled movement of bodies in space in many social practice works as "dance-like" or even choreographic. For dance scholar André Lepecki, whose scholarship often moves fluidly among such diverse forms of performance art to post-modern dance to street dance, understanding dance as simply "movement in space" allows him a framework through which to consider a wide array of performative social art work.[12] Case in point is Lepecki's 2013 article "Choreopolice and Choreopolitics: or, the task of the dancer" in which he utilizes three case studies— choreographer Sarah Michelson's *Devotion Study #1*,

[9] Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).
[10] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2011), 14.
[11] Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum* 44, vol. 6 (2006).
[12] See also André Lepecki (2010).

memorial street dance by Oakland group Turf Feinz, and *Tatlin's Whisper #5* by Cuban visual artist Tania Bruguera— to explicate the limits and freedom of movement in surveilled and constrictive environments. The use of Bruguera's work is a stark contrast to the other two examples as *Tatlin's Whisper #5* does not employ "dance" per se, but rather the artist installed horse-mounted anti-riot police to separate, move, and pacify gallery crowds at the Tate Museum in London. The police and their trained horses perform what Lepecki describes as "an extraordinary investigation of the choreographic dynamics between police and public in a control society"[13] From Lepecki's framing, Bruguera's work enacts a "social choreography" that implicates museum patrons into a performance that lays bare the ways in which policing is a type of choreographic practice. Or put another way, she explores how choreography is used to discipline and control.

Although not explicit, Lepecki's example demonstrates how visual artists who center their work on the deployment of bodies in space are employing techniques of choreography, thus dance. A basis for social practice is "relationality," the constructing of situations wherein disparate bodies interact with one another forming an amorphous and temporal art work. I align with Lepecki in that I also agree that social practice is inherently choreographic or dance-like, yet as tidy as that may seem, I am cautious to luxuriate in the viewpoint that all movement is inherently dance. Part of the goal of this dissertation is to pull at the discourses and practices that assume there can be any sort of "natural" or "unmarked" movement. A dancing body is never divorced from the body that inscribes it. In other words, how a body moves is as important as the shape, color, size, and gender of that body. As I argue later, specifically through the work of visual artist Adrian Piper, movement holds meaning and value because of, not despite of, the body that inscribes it.

Lepecki is not the only scholar to utilize the term "social choreography," it is also the title of Andrew Hewitt's monograph *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement*. While Lepecki uses the phrase in reference to Bruguera's work in choreographing disparate individuals (or put another way, in determining the movement of individuals in a social space), Hewitt uses the term to demonstrate how dance was used to practice new forms of sociality and social order during the turn of the century. Hewitt states:

> By attempting to reconnect to a more radical sense of the aesthetic as something rooted in bodily experience, I use the category of social choreography as a way of examining how the aesthetic is not purely superstructural or purely ideological. Social choreography is an attempt to think about the aesthetic as it operates at the very base of social experience.[14]

In other words, Hewitt is interested in dance not as a metaphor, but as a practice that inscribes social order onto the body through choreographed interactions. In Lepecki's analysis of Bruguera's work, the aesthetic transpires from the political – the mounted police compel museumgoers into a dance, whereas for Hewitt the aesthetic is where politics are enacted and practiced. In both instances, however, power and social order are inscribed through the body and practiced through choreographic repetition.

---

[13] André Lepecki, "Choreopolice and Choreopolitics: or, the task of the dancer," *TDR: The Drama Review* 57, no. 4 (2013): 15.

[14] Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 2.

Social as Political

There is no neat line between the social as relational and the social as political; thus each section in this dissertation is more of a continuation of the last association than an attempt to draw a new line in the sand. As social practice shows us, and as Lepecki and Hewitt show specifically in turning their attention to choreography, the orchestrated relationality among bodies *is* political.

Randy Martin, in *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*, interrogates social movement theories in sociology and the limits to the consideration of the body as mobilized or in motion. Martin states:

> Dancing cannot, by itself, cause change in other social arenas, but clearly connections and meditations can establish a certain legacy for dance beyond the scene of its performance. Nevertheless, what is situated in the world, what people contest in myriad forms, can also be found in dance. More pointedly, dance displays, in the very ways that bodies are placed in motion, traces of the forces of contestation that can be found in society at large.[15]

Although Martin is careful about not reducing dance and social movements as one in the same, he seems to suggest that his sites of analysis – from Judson to Bill T. Jones to an Ice Cube video – can be seen *as* social movements. Dancing, in the myriad of sites from which it flourishes, is inherently political. Put another way, dance is never divorced from the social forces that shape the possibilities of movement in a particular time and space.

Susan Foster, in her article, "Choreographies of Protest," takes a different approach to the way dance intersects with social movements. In her article Foster analyzes three historic protests – the Greensboro lunch counter sit-ins, ACT UP die-ins, and the WTO protests – and the different choreographic tactics these protestors employed in their coordinated and well-organized interventions as a way to move past the representation of protest as volatile and violent. Foster, however, is cautious about reducing these social movements to dance and states: "I do not intend to read these events as dances, for that would radically decontextualize their motivation and intent. Nor do I intend to demonstrate the close ties between artists and activists that may influence a given choice of action. Instead, I want to reconstruct these events, asking of them the kinds of questions that a dance scholar might ask."[16] Instead of reading the protests as dance, Foster instead shows how theories of dance might help centralize the role of the body as articulate matter in the discourse and representation of social movements.

Indeed, these two examples from Martin and Foster highlight differences integral to this project – dance as a material or technique and dance as a framework for understanding the coordination of bodies in space. Again, in thinking about social practice specifically, Shannon Jackson notes that for some artists, social practice implies political change, while for others, it is an aesthetic and formal endeavor. Furthermore, within politically driven artworks, the degrees of perceived earnestness and irony can vary greatly.[17] Thus, it can be difficult to gauge the degree to which a social practice project is offering critique or formative change. For example, in Adrian Piper's *Funk Lessons*, the purpose of the project – teaching white people to dance funk –

---

[15] Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 6.
[16] Susan Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 396-397.
[17] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2011), 14.

appears on the surface to be facetious. However, as I will discuss later in chapter 2, when we take Piper's intentions seriously, we begin to see the potential for dance as a conduit for change.

Nevertheless, I contend that when the aesthetic is linked to the verbiage of "social," it implies a political frame. In the way that social evokes a relationality among bodies, social also points to the world beyond the frame of the art event or performance. Be it socially engaged or part of a social movement – the use of distinct individuals or communities as the base of a work is generally part of a political statement.

Social as Non-Specialized

Central to social practice is the use of individuals outside the purview of the art world. There are many words through which to understand this individual, or oftentimes, group: amateur, participant, non-professional, and community to name a few. As noted earlier, an interdisciplinary project such as this comes with a variety of lexicons that hold different histories and values according to the discipline. I grappled with finding a word that categorizes this side of my conceptualization of the "social;" no word felt quite right. Or, conversely, all the words felt pejorative. Each word, that I will outline below, seemed to be a shadow, shaped and demeaned by what it is not. For example, non-specialized is obviously shaped by its prefix – not specialized meaning not professional or amateur. Yet, non-specialized encompasses both genealogies of dance studies and art history in indicating the person or form that exists outside of professionalized, even arbitrary, boundaries. And these boundaries are most often ways to maintain hierarchical structures according to race, gender, ability, and class.

In the history of modern dance in the United States, it has been well documented that the formation and ascension of the form was achieved through defining what it is not. Indeed, in an early conceptualization of this project, I was understanding what is "not dance" as an indicator of social and political proclivity. Further, the ways in which the language of what something is not further inscribes what the thing is or the values it holds. Throughout this project, I am particularly concerned with the formation of modern dance in the United States as an institution and the legacy it has in our contemporary moment.

There are many antecedents that established the pathway toward the codification of modern dance – individuals such as Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn. Yet, the codification of modern dance as a genre, and subsequently an institution, transpired in the interwar years through work of critics such as John Martin and the choreography of Martha Graham. Martin, in particular, used his criticism toward a pedagogical end, educating audiences on the high aesthetic value of this new form of dance. To ensconce the value of modern dance as an institution of high-art value meant articulating what it was not to highlight the difference and uniqueness of the form. To that end, Martin and others defined modern dance by separating it from social dance forms, political and leftist dance, and dance for entertainment.[18] Thus, modern dance was professionalized – it was not something to be done for recreation or that anyone could participate in, but rather a form of specialization.

As I will discuss later in chapter 2, the use of modernist language and valorization of abstraction, or what Martin described as "non-representational" movement, also ensured the whiteness of modern dance. Susan Manning, in her formative work, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance*, writes about how modern dance was formulated against what was then described as "Negro dance." Yet the historical "forgetfulness" of Black modern dance ensured the whiteness

[18] For more on separation of dance from entertainment, see Ramsay Burt and Michael Huxley (2019).

of the form despite the ways in which both forms developed contemporaneously. Modern dance, again, is what it is *not* – it is not social dance, it is not Black dance, it is not entertainment, it is not political – thus linking what we might consider "social" to that of non-whiteness and non-professional, or conversely the "social" as racialized and amateur.[19]

Ellen Graff's *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City* and Mark Franko's *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* demonstrates how the early labor-oriented dances of the interwar period have often been conveniently overlooked to highlight and elevate forms more familiar to us as modern dance today, namely the work of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey.[20] However, in their respective writing we can see how elements of participation were used to address labor-oriented concerns. Stacey Prickett highlights how the Worker's Dance League and the New Dance Group used the burgeoning practice of modern dance to address workers' rights during the interwar period. In addition to staged performances, these groups often employed "off-stage" practices that incorporated and performed dance with workers at union meetings and establishing children's dance classes as a way to build a "worker consciousness" among the progeny of laborers.[21] These works highlight how modern dance proper had to eschew these fervent origins in a way to become palatable to the stage as well as separating itself from the overtly political.

The embrace of the modernist notion of the solo artist/auteur could be said to have been challenged by the likes of Merce Cunningham who deferred choreographic organization through "chance" procedures and attempted to level the hierarchy of the arts through collaborative practices that gave equal weight to all elements of the performance from stage design to costumes to sound.

In the wake of Cunningham, the members of Judson Dance Theater railed against the confines of modern dance as defined in the interwar period through the creation of an ethos of dance that privileged a shared philosophy rather than aesthetics. Sally Banes, in her work *Democracy's Body*, highlights how the Judson aesthetic was never monolithic but rather

> a commitment to democratic or collective process led on the one hand to methods that metaphorically seemed to stand for freedom (like improvisation, spontaneous determination, chance), and on the other hand to a refined consciousness of the process of choreographic choice. In general, questions of technique and its perfection were considered less important than formal compositional problems.[22]

Members of Judson Dance Theater expanded upon Cunningham's deferred choreography through their investment in choreographic choices that gave compositional privilege to the collective over the individual. Further, the latter part of Banes's quote highlights a de-emphasis on technique and virtuosity which is most saliently evident in Yvonne Rainer's infamous "No

---

[19] Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
[20] Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Mark Franko, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (Middletown, Wesleyan University Press: 2002).
[21] Stacey Prickett, "Dance and the Workers' Struggle," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 8, no. 1 (1990): 47-61.
[22] Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962-1964* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) xvii-xviii.

Manifesto."[23] Rainer's manifesto can be seen as another iteration of defining a shifting aesthetic and philosophy by what it is not. Central to the manifesto is the stripping away of theatrical elements, such as audience seduction and virtuosity, that lead to a supposed artifice. Thus, movement was prized on its non-specialty often described as movement as task or ordinary movement.

However, the use of task-based and ordinary movement has been complicated recently in historic revaluations. In Catherine Wood's writing on Rainer's dance piece *The Mind is a Muscle* (1968), Wood highlights the Marxist underpinnings of Rainer's work: choreography as antidote to alienated work through Rainer's self-awareness of performance, the visible chain of physical cause and effect, and the de-emphasis of dance as a specialist practice. Further, Wood exposes the contradictions inherent in *The Mind is a Muscle.* For example, Woods's analysis highlights how despite Rainer's conviction that the choreography is accessible for a non-dancer, in reality, the choreography is still quite specialized.[24]

As Woods highlights the material conditions that made Rainer's work possible, Rebecca Chaleff foregrounds the use of the "ordinary" in the work of Judson largely, but in the work of Rainer and Trisha Brown specifically.[25] Chaleff argues that the deployment of the "ordinary" as an aesthetic and ethos in post-modern dance came at a time when Black modern dancers, such as Alvin Ailey, where increasingly viewed as technical and virtuosic. The "ordinary" body and its associated movement further enforced the invisibility of whiteness. Together, Woods and Chaleff articulate how what is sometimes referred to as "de-skilling" challenges conceptions of the specialist or professional in dance while also causing friction between the aesthetic representation and political ethos of the dance.

In the lineage of modern dance, the specter of the "non-specialist" or social dance is always at bay. As dance scholar Julie Malnig writes:

> Vernacular and theatrical stage forms have continually floated back and forth, feeding and informing one another, often giving rise to yet new forms. Social dances get picked up and transformed as staged dances; those staged dances, in turn, circulate back into social realms in yet other modified forms. It is a kind of endless loop of creativity in which steps and styles are continually recycled, recombined, and reborn.[26]

Indeed, the formative work of Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Aesthetic in American Performance*, details the ways in which Africanist and Black social dance informed the development of American ballet, modern dance, and post-modern dance despite the erasure of Black bodies on stage. For example, Gottschild argues that the qualities that have been highly regarded in post-modern dance such as the use of radical juxtaposition, performing oneself, emphasis on improvisation, and interactivity between audience and performer are integral to a lineage of west African dance that has been overlooked by both post-modern dance practitioners and historians. She states: "The problem is that the chroniclers of postmodern performance have

---

[23] Yvonne Rainer, "Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Calles *Parts of Some Sextets,* Performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson memorial Church, New York, in March, 1965," *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (1965): 168-178.
[24] Catherine Wood, *The Mind is a Muscle* (London: Afterall, 2007).
[25] Rebecca Chaleff, "Activating Whiteness: Racializing the Ordinary in US American Postmodern Dance," *Dance Research Journal* 50, no. 3 (2018): 71-84.
[26] Julie Malnig, *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 11.

credited sources from the European historical avant-garde…They have not given credence to the Africanist aesthetic as a pervasive subtext in postmodern performance."[27]

Adjacent to post-modern dance is the form of contact improvisation, which through its historicization has been described as a type of social and folk dance in which anyone can participate. Cynthia Novack contends that central to the development of contact improvisation was the fact that it was a "social space" that anyone could enter as the form was primarily constructed around "jams" rather than performances. Further, she argues that the form of the practice itself mirrored "the social ideologies of the early '70s which rejected traditional gender roles and social hierarchies."[28] While contact improvisers worked to create their own movement vernacular, Gottschild again demonstrates the racialized history of this experimentation. She argues that the centrality of the "jam" to contact improvisation is similar to that of lindyhopping. Further, the emphasis, and perhaps perceived progressiveness, on the reversal of conventional gendered partnering was a staple of lindyhopping well before contact improvisation took shape. Gottschild's work highlights the important racial disparities in who is and what forms are allowed to be labeled innovative.[29]

In this brief history, it is evident that the foundation of post-modern dance is rooted in the abstraction of social dance qualities that enabled the form to be perceived as innovative, thus building upon the ascent of modern dance as an institution of "high art". In our contemporary moment, dance scholars have continued to wrestle with the boundaries of dance as a formal aesthetic and technique. For example, André Lepecki challenges the ontology of dance *as* movement in his work *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*. Lepecki queries how dance has become tethered to the notion of movement. To challenge this assumption, Lepecki traverses across the work of both choreographers and visual artists to demonstrate how slowness and clumsiness, seemingly non-dancelike movement, challenges the connection between late capitalism modernity and mobility.

What I have tracked thus far, is the ways in which the specter of social dance and non-professionalized bodies and movement have informed the development of concert dance. Yet, what does it mean to have non-specialists, seemingly amateurs, dance and perform onstage? Again, we might turn to the leftist dance practices of the 1930s and their use of dance for worker solidarity. We might turn to the Happenings as initiated by Allan Kaprow, the first of which transpired in 1959 and the work of Anna Halprin and her husband Lawrence Halprin in the 1960s and moving forward. We might think of the work of choreographer Liz Lerman and the community-based work of Urban Bush Women. Or even more contemporarily, we might think of Jérôme Bel and works such as *Disabled Theater*, *Gala*, and *The Show Must Go On*.

Yet, this brief list highlights that role of the participant or no-specialist within the work of the artists above are used toward disparate ends. One word that has a long history, but has gained considerable attention recently is "amateur." Indeed, in all my case studies, the participants whose bodies and identities are the basis of the work could easily slip under the moniker of "amateur." The "amateur" is generally understood as the incorporation or appearance of untrained, non-professional bodies which have increasingly moved into the terrain of social

---

[27] Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 51.
[28] Cynthia Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 11.
[29] Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 56.

practice and experimental theater since the early aughts evoking what has been dubbed the "amateur turn."[30] Theater scholar, Sarah Gorman, uses Bel's *Disabled Theater* as a means through which to analyze a relationship between the "amateur turn" and the performance of "failure." Through an analysis of Bel's works, Gorman comes to two conclusions. The first is that her initial instinct that Bel's interest and work with actors with developmental disabilities is less about subverting or challenging perceptions around disability than using the actors to subvert perceptions and expectations of theater and dance. Although she does not explicitly state it as such, this viewpoint suggests that it is *specifically* the actors' neurodiversity that upends theatrical and dance conventions pushing the form into one of failure. Yet, upon second glance, Gorman states "the presence of disabled performers within this oeuvre can be seen to effectively critique the unmarked privilege of the able-bodied performers used elsewhere in examples of performing failure."[31] From either viewpoint, it is still the actors' defiance of theatrical or dance conventions that inform Bel's interest in using performers with disabilities. (Performing failure is like being disabled?)

Indeed, a fascination with the role and practice of the "amateur" has also received recent focus in a special issue in *Third Text.* As Julia Bryan-Wilson and Benjamin Piekut argue in their introduction, the amateur is a "fugitive figure," one that "must be accounted for within discrete time periods and state formations, offering up a wide range of extra-institutional activities, self-organized modes of analysis and improvised systems of distribution."[32] Bryan-Wilson and Piekut thoroughly analyze the way the amateur or amateurism is figured across a range of artistic disciplines, geographies, and popular culture including dance. In terms of the latter, they also cite Bel's work as well as the aesthetic use of amateurism, or more precisely the divide between professional and non-professional, by post-modern choreographers such as Yvonne Rainer. Yet, the amateur in concert dance history is not only situated in the use of non-professionals, but also is found in an aesthetics of amateurism also described as "de-skilling," wherein one attempts to unlearn their technical training. In all, Bryan-Wilson and Piekut address the fact that amateur – as either an individual or aesthetic – is never neutral: "amateurism clings to the non-white makers, the female maker, the non-Western maker, the 'non-educated' maker."[33]

As discussed earlier, the relational or social turn as predicated by the work of relational aesthetics is about an engagement with non-specialized bodies, namely patrons or specific community members, whose interaction with, or performance as, sculpture, installation, or tableaus (depending on your disciplinary vantage point) is the work. Claire Bishop has coined the useful term, delegated performance, to point to the ways in which participants are expected to perform their own socio-economic background.[34] This appears as a remove beyond what Michael Kirby described as non-matrixed performance when describing shifts in performance and visual arts that moved beyond the performance of a role to the performance of being. [35]Yet, participants are not often asked to perform themselves, but rather perform as a representative of a specific class or race. Indeed, in all my case studies the participants are tapped specifically for

---

[30] Nadine Holdsworth, Jane Milling & Helen Nicholson, "Theatre, Performance, and the Amateur Turn," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 27, no. 1 (2017): 6.
[31] Sarah Gorman, "Performing Failure? Anomalous Amateurs in Jérôme Bel's *Disabled Theater* and *The Show Must Go On 2015*," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 27, no. 1 (2017): 93.
[32] Julia Bryan-Wilson and Benjamin Piekut, "Amateurism," *Third Text* 34, no. 1 (2020): 9.
[33] Ibid, 15.
[34] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).
[35] Michael Kirby, "The New Theatre," *TDR/The Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (1965): 23-43.

their lived experiences, whether it being due to their medical diagnoses or their socio-economic background, and are thus expected to perform the expertise of their lived experience.

Social Practice Dance

Outlining these three configurations – the social as relational, political, and non-professionalized – provides the framework for what I term social practice dance. Social practice dance are practices that use dance as a method and material for working across and within disparate groups – the non-professional, the community, the amateur – toward a political end. In particular, I focus on artists who integrate this work into their professional practice rather than artists who pursue this work as auxiliary to their central practice. However, I acknowledge that these boundaries might appear arbitrary, and there is no way to say that an artist's auxiliary practices do not support their central practice, or that there is necessarily a separation or hierarchy between the two. Yet, I am primarily interested with the presentation of non-dancing or specialized communities on stage or in the gallery.

As there are numerous works by artists that fall under the categories I describe, I take inspiration from André Lepecki who proposes a co-formation of these practices that exceeds disciplinary and institutional silos.[36] I consider the ways in which visual artists use dance as material in the creation of the work and, conversely, the ways in which the philosophies of different dance practices map onto the ethos of social practice. This project is weighted toward the latter half of the past century, tracing a through-line from the intense crossovers via Judson and minimalist aesthetics through the development of conceptualism into relational aesthetics. This trajectory foregrounds the aesthetics and ethos of various dance practices as central to the evolution and codification of social practice from the late sixties to the present.

Methodology

In her seminal critique of the emergence of literary criticism and deconstructionism, Black feminist scholar, Barbara Christian, demonstrates the way that the emergence of this theory has led to the reification of the very things it is said to be deconstructing. Indeed, what is the necessity of critique than another way to maintain hierarchies?

Christian is likewise concerned about the demands this new criticism supposes. In balking at the emergence and dominance of the term "method," she states she has none except this:

> I, therefore, have no set method, another prerequisite of the new theory, since for me every work suggests a new approach. As risky as that might seem, it is, I believe, what intelligence means – a tuned sensitivity to that which is alive and therefore cannot be known until it is known.[37]

---

[36] André Lepecki, "Zones of Resonance: Mutual Formations in Dance and the Visual Arts Since the 1960s," in *Move. Choreographing You: Art and Dance Since the 1960s*, ed. Susan Rosenthal (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 157. Lepecki asks: "What if we postulate that the history of dance and the visual arts in the past half-century is essentially a co-formative one? Such a history would bypass narratives of how generational lines of influence are more or less pedagogically transmitted within discrete disciplines, and would propose instead the identification of resonating zones of co-articulation and mutual correspondence between visual arts and dance."

[37] Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique*, no. 6 (1987): 62.

Although it might appear, in hindsight, disingenuous to state that Christian did not have a method, the larger issue is that the method is not proscriptive, but rather comes from the objects themselves. Indeed, that has been my approach to the case studies in this dissertation. Rather than trying to apply the same methodological framework to each case study, I approached each case study as a world unto itself, both in terms of the work itself, but also the historical moment from which the work springs. Further, the framework of social practice dance, when placed upon each case study surfaces different questions and revelations. For instance, there is an abundance of ephemera surrounding Anna Halprin's *Ceremony of Us*. Yet, within that abundance there are many absences, not only in terms of final documentation of the performance, but also the voices of Studio Watts participants, many of whom provide a counter perspective to the utopian vision prescribed by Halprin. After sitting with Adrian Piper's *Funk Lessons* for some time, what on the surface seemed ironic and humorous, actually provoked more questions about the earnestness of the project and the historic ways dance has been used or held up as a method for reconciliation across culture and race. Lastly, at the time of writing, it is seemingly impossible to consider *Still/Here* by Bill T. Jones outside of our current pandemic. In an attempt to acknowledge, but also move past the pejorative of "victim art," *Still/Here* appears now prescient in the way Jones facilitates and choreographs vignettes of collective support across disparate bodies during a time a deep governmental neglect.

Moreover, I seek to create a new pathway for engagement across dance and the visual arts. My argument is multi-fold and necessarily circuitous, but I imagine that circuit choreographically, asking the reader to look from the vantage point of one discipline toward practices that have not been historically compatible to this place of situated viewing. A few pages later, one must shift one's vantage point again, and then again. From the perspective of dance studies, I argue social practice mirrors the conditions of social dance – it is collaborative, improvisatory, participatory, and it transpires in social spaces with non-professionals. However, the historicization of social practice has not acknowledged dance as either an aesthetic or theoretical tactic, despite the fact that much of the framing of social practice uses the rhetoric of dance. From the vantage point of art history, the vocabulary of social practice might help to situate historical turns in western modern dance, foregrounding early manifestations of social dance in a genealogy of what would come to be known as social practice. This re-examination of the historicization of dance from a social practice perspective also chips away at the artificial hierarchies between concert dance and social dance, thus broadening the concept of "social" in dance studies.

Chapters

The chapters of this dissertation follow a chronological pattern, beginning in the late 1960s and ending in the mid-1990s. As such it does not aspire to be a comprehensive picture of all the social practice dance happening during and preceding this period. Earlier examples might include the advent of Happenings in the 1950s or the labor organizing of leftist dance groups during the interwar period, an example I highlight earlier. The significance is that it is a start, and I am hopeful this research will be a call for continued scholarship.

Chapter 1 analyzes the participatory aesthetics of dance pioneer, Anna Halprin, in her work from the late 1960s. In particular, I focus on a work entitled *Ceremony of Us* in which her company of non-Black modern dancers collaborated with a group of Black artists from Studio Watts in Los Angeles. This piece was a conscious move by Halprin to engage more concretely

with the racial politics of the period, rather than the insular way she had been working with her white company and like-minded peers in the San Francisco Bay Area. As a turning point in her career, *Ceremony of Us* addressed the role of participation as not just a conceptual choice, but rather situated the role of participation as grounded in the potential for social change and racial redress. *Ceremony of Us* was not only a shift in Halprin's career to working with various marginalized communities, but brings to the forefront questions around the ethics of community participation that still resonate in the dance and art world today.

Chapter 2 examines the dance-based work of visual artist, Adrian Piper. In particular I explore her 1984 work, *Funk Lessons*, which was a series of documented lessons initiated by Piper to teach white people the history and movement vernacular of funk. In her "Notes on Funk II" Piper deems funk to be the last vestige of Black culture that has not been appropriated by white culture. *Funk Lessons* oscillates between satire and sincerity as white individuals participate earnestly in attempting to learn how to dance funk. In counterpoint to Halprin's work, Piper staged a codified social dance to attend to race relations rather than facilitating interracial social interactions to create a new vernacular. Further, by juxtaposing Black social dance in the white gallery space, *Funk Lessons* is a useful work through which to consider contemporary practices and curatorial trends. These practices include Black dance artists working across dance and visual art institutions such as Ralph Lemon and Trajal Harrell as well as Black visual artists who utilize Black social dance as material such as Rashaad Newsome, Nick Cave, Holly Bass, and Xaviera Simmons.

Moving chronologically, chapter 3 moves into the 1990s and the influential work, *Still/Here* by Bill T. Jones. As visual artists ushered in the "social turn" through choreographed encounters, Jones brought the physical bodies of everyday individuals to the stage in works such as *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land* and *Still/Here*. In particular, at the height of the AIDS crisis *Still/Here* ignited fierce debate about boundaries between art and politics due to Jones's crowdsourcing of choreographic and narrative material from individuals with terminal illnesses. While this work and its critical response has been debated at length, I argue that a social practice lens is useful in considering how the work demonstrates practices of collectivity and care at a time of extreme government negligence. Also, despite Jones's denial that *Still/Here* is about AIDS, I argue the work serves as an example of the overlooked relationship between relational aesthetics and AIDS activist art.

In all, these case studies are not just capsules of their time, but resonate in our contemporary moment. At a time when many of us are necessarily cultivating and choreographing networks of community and sociality in the midst of political and social upheaval, these examples highlight not only the power of bodies coming together, but the amount of labor and care that is needed to build and sustain relationships across disparate communities.

Chapter 1
Countercultural Dance: The Politics of Inclusion and Participation

One of the enduring, and arguably most arresting, photographs from the late choreographer Anna Halprin's *Ceremony of Us* is an image that continues to circulate today despite its age. In 2018 the photograph was on the cover of *ArtForum* magazine and in the year prior, MFA students of famed dance critic, Wendy Perron, recreated the photograph after visiting Perron's exhibition on Halprin, Forti, and Rainer. In addition to being documentation of the workshop and performance, the image has been used as part of advertisements for Halprin's SF Dancers Workshop. And indeed, the image captures the essence or desire that was the project of *Ceremony* as well as Halprin's subsequent work. The photo features a group of young people, both Black and white, laying on the floor. Their bodies are strewn across one another as they directly gaze up at the camera that is ostensibly floating above them. It's difficult to discern where limbs begin and end, or what body parts belong to whom as their bodies are so intertwined. The men are bare-chested while the women wear classic dance leotards. Some have their heads turned toward their companions while others stare directly and openly into the camera. Still, others tilt their head up, eyebrows raised in a look that seems to say "what?" The viewer has caught them, but what they are exactly guilty of, one cannot say. There is a knowingness to their gaze; they are aware they are being watched. Their shared looks and casual recline reveal a cohesion to the group. In other words, there is a you, the viewer, and then there is an *us*.

Ceremony of Us (1969) has been historicized to be about a specific *us* – the Black artists from Studio Watts working and performing alongside Halprin's San Francisco-based company of non-Black dancers.[38] The work was developed over a 10-day workshop with both groups under the tutelage of Halprin. The final performance premiered at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in February of 1969. No final documentation of the performance exists, yet there is a plethora of ephemera including photographs, artist and company notes, participant reflections, and a short documentary of the workshop produced by the San Francisco PBS affiliate, KQED.

This chapter utilizes *Ceremony of Us* as an exemplar of early social practice dance. As discussed in the introduction, like the other case studies, this work could fall under a range of adjectives – community-based, participatory, avant-garde, therapeutic, and reformist, to name a few. It is a complicated piece. What is central to the work, however, is the deliberate use of individuals of a marginalized community. Despite the fact that Halprin was invited to do the work, there are power dynamics embedded in the piece according to race, gender, and class. I understand that the line between collaboration and exploitation can often be thin, yet I contend *Ceremony of Us* is a work of social practice because it uses art as a means for social experimentation.

Ceremony is an oft-overlooked work in Halprin's large and impressive repertoire, and yet *Ceremony* serves as an important linkage between Halprin's earlier avant-garde experimentations and her transition into more community-oriented and therapeutic practices. Despite being instrumental in the development of post-modern dance vis a vis her pedagogy on her famous "dance deck," Halprin's work does not fit squarely within the confines of post-modern dance

[38] Although *Ceremony of Us* is most exclusively historicized as an interracial work between Black and white dancers, photo documentation of subsequent engagements, most notably at Lake Merritt College in 1970, show performers of Asian descent as well. It is safe to assume that the framework of the piece continued to evolve after its premiere, which included new performers in addition to original cast members.

aesthetics and ethos. In analyzing this formative work, I aim to make a genealogical intervention in centering West Coast counter-cultural concert dance within the avant-garde practice of life blurring with art, all toward using art to inoculate broad social change. In *Ceremony,* we see an important amalgamation of practices and ideologies that have yet to be articulated in dance studies – the relationships among post-modern dance aesthetics, countercultural politics, and the emergence of dance therapy.

Additionally, as the binary of East and West is a common framework, I attempt to shift that axis to take into consideration what a comparison between north and south might bring, namely San Francisco and the greater Los Angeles area. For someone whose work is so rooted in her own geographic context, it is curious why Halprin, if searching for ways to work interracially, would not reach across the bay to Oakland? Instead, she travels hundreds of miles south to Los Angeles. Of course, there was an invitation to do so, but what was the white collective imagination about Watts, especially post-rebellion? Was Halprin part of what art historian, Hal Foster, dubs the "ethnographic turn" in the 1960s?[39] Or, similarly, was she practicing another form of colonialism that is often linked to the countercultural? Was she further encouraged to turn her attention to Watts due to the contemporaneous influx of funding and interest in "reforming" urban communities?

At the same time, while attending to Halprin's work, influences, and legacy in dance history, *Ceremony of Us* presents a common predicament for scholars of live performance: no documentation of the final work exists. Instead of seeing the absence as a deficit, I position it as a useful limitation, which compels me to analyze the workshop itself, the voices of the participants, and the aftermath of the project. The work is often overdetermined by binaries – between Black and white, Los Angeles and San Francisco, men and women – by both the photographic documentation and Halprin's own reflections. How can we foreground what is missing rather than what is there? The there-ness overdetermines the work and provides a narrow understanding of what might have, potentially, transpired. Or, from another perspective, we can both acknowledge the limitations and imagine new historic possibilities.

To rectify archival gaps and the dominance of the artist voice, this chapter focuses on the experience of participant and late Black poet, Wanda Coleman, whose reflections, both written and verbal, appear as a foil to the utopian vision of the project as presented by Halprin. Highlighting the experiences of Coleman against the rhetoric of Halprin reveals a central tension in social practice work – namely, the often ambiguous lines around ownership and historicization. Further, the continued proliferation of community-based approaches in the arts begs us to consider whose voices get privileged in collective processes and what we might uncover when we decenter the primary artist.

Participant Voices

Performances are not generally evaluated or read through an understanding of the performer's experience. However, in social practice or community-based work, where the participants' and/or performers' personal lives are the substance of the work, is there a way to understand their experiences as unmediated by the artist? Clare Croft's, *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange*, is a recent example of a work that centers the dancers' voice as imperative in understanding the cultural diplomacy the artists embodied as representatives of the United States. For Croft, focusing on the experience of the dancers is a

[39] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

way to situate dance as a collective process away from the (often male) solo choreographer.[40] *Ceremony* was unquestionably a collective endeavor; although Halprin was the leader of the workshop and thus shaped the content of the performance, within this unique laboratory of experimentation, the dancers' personal experiences and interactions comprised the material of the performance. Halprin may have shaped the form, but the dancers themselves constitute the subject. In addition, as dance and performance have increasingly entrenched their position within the art world, recent history has shown how the performer's voice is important to understanding the ethical implications of a work. In 2011, dancer and choreographer Sara Wookey wrote an anonymous letter to Yvonne Rainer describing the conditions and demands of her performance in a Marina Abramović work for a MOCA fundraiser. The anonymous letter was published with an accompanying letter by Rainer to the director of MOCA, Jeffrey Deitch.[41] Wookey then revealed herself and her motivations more fully in another published letter.[42] What the ensuing dialogue highlighted were the grueling conditions the performers were subject to: sitting on a lazy Susan with their heads serving as centerpieces at tables for donors. The performers were encouraged to make eye contact with patrons, but could not speak to them. They were also warned that patrons may try to feed them or degrade them in other ways, but they were to remain in "performance" mode. The performers were to be paid $150 total for three days of work despite the fact that cost of attendance at the gala ran upwards of $100,000. Wookey and Rainer's letters sparked a dialogue around the conditions of performers who do not enjoy the security of a union and can easily be roped into exploitive conditions by major artists and institutions supposedly in exchange for "experience."

I bring up these examples, not as salacious material, but to highlight the importance of the performer's voice in considering the ethics and historicization of performance-based work that depends on the use of individuals as content. As already noted, in many works of social practice, the parameters of a completed "project" are ambiguous. Further, social practice works often involve many individuals with varying degrees of power, from institutions with curators/programmers to the participants themselves.[43] The ambiguity of a finished project thus produces questions about whose voice narrativizes, thus historicizes, the work.

Mapping Aestheticized Participation

The conscious enfolding of audience or a community into the creation of an act, can be situated alongside the broad umbrella of "blurring art and life." Aestheticizing the everyday did not originate in relational aesthetics or social practice; obviously, the deliberate blurring of "art and life" can be seen in the experimental theater practices and visual art practices of the mid twentieth-century, including the work of Allan Kaprow and his Happenings or the experiments of Black Mountain College. While such works have been chronicled extensively in visual art history, they also received sustained treatment in experimental theater and proto-performance studies scholarship. Notably, as discussed in the introduction, in 1965 Michael Kirby, dubbed

---

[40] Clare Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 25.

[41] "Yvonne Rainer Blasts Marina Abramović and MOCA LA," The Performance Club, July 21, 2019, https://theperformanceclub.org/yvonne-rainer-blasts-marina-abramovic-and-moca-la/

[42] Sara Wookey, "Open Letter to Artists from Sara Wookey," Another Righteous Transfer!, November 26, 2011, https://anotherrighteoustransfer.wordpress.com/2011/11/23/open-letter-to-artists-from-sara-wookey/.

[43] See Miwon Kwon (2004) for further discussion on the ways in which curators often serve as brokers between artists and communities in socially engaged art such as new genre public art.

these practices "New Theatre" and proposed several qualities that these works shared. Among those qualities were the use of "non-matrixed" performance, meaning the performer is not "acting" or specifically performing a role, as well as a focused interactivity between audience and performer and challenging the assumed boundary between the two.[44] Within the framework of this "New Theatre," although boundaries are blurred and questioned, the work is more concerned with aestheticizing rather than interrogating the everyday. Put another way, the "everyday" is used as a way to challenge form rather than interrogate lived experiences that are central to quotidian life. While visual art history contextualized Happenings as a break from the object world of painting and sculpture, theater historians saw happenings within a continuum of acting and the everyday, or matrixed and non-matrixed performance.

The practices highlighted above are generally a reflection of East Coast experimentation that has been historicized as avant-garde both visual art and performance disciplines. However, tracking to the West Coast, we might consider what aesthetic and participatory experimentation was transpiring contemporaneously. In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue of "West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977," Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner write about the ways in which the artistic projects of the counterculture of the 1960s has been dismissed by both avant-garde histories and the New Left.[45] To highlight the tension between countercultural art and avant-garde experimentation of the 1960s, they point to the "Experiments in Environment" workshops conducted by architect, Lawrence Halprin, and his wife, dancer/choreographer, Anna Halprin in Northern California. "Experiments in Environment" was a collaborative workshop held by the couple alongside colleagues in both architecture and dance that sought to facilitate learning across disciplines through phenomenological and experiential activities. By employing kinesthetic activities such as blindfolded walks and the building of driftwood villages, the artist couple sought to create a laboratory for kinesthetic and corporeal engagement with nature that would feed their respective artistic practices. Although the Halprins' work relates to the avant-garde experimentation transpiring in New York at the same time in a conscientious blurring of life and art via Happenings and Fluxus, there is a marked difference between West Coast and East Coast, or countercultural and avant-garde, experimentation. Auther and Lerner state:

> [T]he Halprins went much further than their New York counterparts in seeking to impact the lives of their participants. While the New Yorkers were primarily focused on transforming art, with the hope that art might ultimately transform society, the Bay Area couple sought to transform lifestyle directly. This distinction between "Experiments in Environment" and the Happenings and Fluxus performances reveals the contrast between the broad project of the counterculture and the narrower aspirations of the avant-garde. Not to deny the utopian threads running through the New York avant-garde, the Halprins' workshops speak to the distinct countercultural objective of direct, personal, and social transformation.[46]

Rather than trying to inspire or emulate the political changes they desired through art, as Auther and Lerner suggests of the avant-garde, the Halprins' experimentations were a praxis,

---

[44] Michael Kirby, "The New Theatre," *TDR/The Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (1965).
[45] Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner, eds., *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
[46] Ibid., xviii.

specifically, a laboratory for enacting radical politics through a combination of aesthetic, embodied, and social experimentation. Yet, Auther and Lerner deem that the Halprins have ultimately been sidelined in the histories of the avant-garde due to their emphasis on broad social transformations through art.

What Auther and Lerner suggest is a hierarchy of coastal experimentation that validates the practices of East Coast, or avant-garde, practitioners in art history against those of the West Coast. A similar geographic hierarchy of this time period is evident in dance history as well. The 2018 exhibition "The Work is Never Done: Judson Dance Theater" at the Museum of Modern Art could be considered an exemplar of what has come to be known as post-modern dance. The exhibition centered many of the icons of Judson –Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Deborah Hay, Steve Paxton, Lucinda Childs, David Gordon, and Simone Forti – while also locating New York City as an aesthetic incubator for radical experimentation.[47]

The centering of New York as the hub of dance evolution and revolution is a recurring narrative in dance history. However, in a few brief photos in the exhibition, the lush images of northern California appear in contrast to the other images of urban landscapes marked as such by the abundance of concrete, tall buildings, and iconic New York City fire escapes. Of course, the photographs of northern California are of Anna Halprin's famed dance deck in Marin County, just north of San Francisco. On her deck, built by her husband, are many members of the avant-garde art community – from Merce Cunningham to La Monte Young to those formative to Judson such as Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti. Halprin's inclusion in this decidedly New York-centric exhibition signals both Halrpin and the landscape of Northern California as formative to the legacy of post-modern dance. However, Halprin is also distinguished from post-modern dance legacy through the absorption of West Coast countercultural practices in her dance work. Namely, her use of Gestalt therapy as a method for instigating and/or assuaging group dynamics in her collaborative choreographic processes.

The remainder of the chapter aims to consider Halprin's *Ceremony of Us* as a crux in Halprin's work, but also a crux in what often appears as a hard line between genealogies and aesthetics of the avant-garde and community-based practices. *Ceremony of Us*, is a foundational work that pushed her into the unique experimentation of blending of dance, counter-cultural politics, and community and provides insight into the limits and ethics of inclusion in the arts. I position the development of Halprin's work as a unique, if imperfect, amalgam that challenges the formalization and separation of the above aesthetic and political lineages. Thus, her work is an exemplary case study that speaks to the political potential, and personal limits of, proto-participatory practice, or social practice dance.

Situating Halprin

Anna Halprin sits at many historical and theoretical junctures in dance history. Born in 1920, she began her dance training in the post-war era and is a conduit between modern and post-modern dance. Like her (perhaps more famous) peer, Merce Cunningham, she railed against the formalities of modern dance such as the hierarchy of choreographer to dancer. In particular, she was not interested in technique as a mode of emulation and had no desire to simply replicate

[47] Technically, Forti was not a part of Judson and much of her dance experimentation transpired in the world of the visual arts with her former husband, the minimalist sculptor, Robert Morris, and Fluxus. However, Forti, because of her relationships and shared aesthetics with members of Judson Dance Church, often is included in the collective of Judson. In fact, her work, *Dance Constructions*, featured prominently in the exhibition.

the techniques of modern dance pioneers such as Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. Instead, Halprin was interested in dance not as a virtuosic display, but rather as an exploratory mode of understanding the anatomical self and the natural world. Her methods and philosophies were developed and influenced by extended contact and relationships with individuals such as biologist and dance pedagogy innovator, Margaret H'Doubler; gestalt group therapy with Fritz Perls; her often collaborative relationship with her husband, landscape architect, Lawrence Halprin; and the countercultural politics of the 1960s in San Francisco. The unique constellation of these diverse influences allows us to see the various threads of Halprin's approach in her lifelong career: the importance of pedagogy, healing, collectivity, environment, and social engagement through movement. Recently deceased in the year 2021 at the age of 100, her work continues to be performed, most notable is her *Planetary Dance* that has transpired yearly since 1981 near her home on Mount Tamalpais. *Planetary Dance* was originally created as a response to reclaim Mount Tamalpais from the threat of a serial killer at the time and has subsequently evolved to an annual and worldwide ritual call for peace among people of all abilities and ages. In addition, her historic work continues to be presented and re-performed at venues all over the world.

In analyzing Halprin's oeuvre, we can see from hindsight that the 1960s proved to be a fertile and transformative period of experimentation for Halprin. Her work shifted from the presentation of concert dance in a traditional sense (meaning an evening-length production that would happen on stage), toward one of embodied experimentation that sought to break down boundaries between artist and observer as well as transcend the space of the studio or theater in terms of social impact. In this era, Halprin's work began to forge aesthetic and social experiments that can retroactively be read as social practice dance. One of the major shifts that occurred in Halprin's work was the conscious incorporation of audience. She states in a TDR essay from 1973:

> I became fascinated with the role of the audience, and began to question how we could extend the sense of meaningfulness and appropriateness of what we were experiencing as people and as artists, and extend that to include the audiences. The next period, then was a period of ten years in which I began to work exclusively with what I called "audience participation" events. Audience participation events ("happenings") began to take place in all kinds of environments, such as bus stops, busy streets, beaches, prisons, churches, museums, any place but a conventional theatre. All types of people (non-dancers) were involved. Diversity was encouraged.[48]

Here are some of the beginning threads of early social practice philosophies: the participation of non-artists in the creation of a work and a diverse array of institutional and site-specific spaces. Halprin is actively concerned with de-centering the privileged space of the theater and the role of the artist. She cites urban spaces, nature, and even institutions as varied as prisons, churches, and museums as settings for performance while also pointing toward the inclusion and absorption of the audience as co-creator.

Through the citation of "Happenings," Halprin is clearly in dialogue with other avant-garde performance and art practices of the time, however, Halprin began to see the limits of audience inclusion as not a democratizing aesthetic strategy, but one that ultimately maintained

[48] Anna Halprin, "Discovering Dance," *Lomi School Bulletin*, Summer (1981): 16.

an insular community of like-minded individuals. Prior to "Experiments in Environment," Halprin's seminal work *Parades and Changes* from 1965, marked a pivotal shift in the focus of her work. *Parades and Changes* is often considered one of Halprin's seminal works, historically significant for the fact that it was one of the first works that explicitly used nudity in a concert stage dance. *Parades and Changes* premiered in Sweden in 1965 and eventually toured to other sites in Europe and back to the States.[49] Halprin notes that when the company arrived in New York to perform the piece, there was an attempt to arrest her because of the explicit nudity in the work. She narrowly avoided arrest and arrived to her home base of San Francisco with newspapers proclaiming: "The no-pants dancers arrive home."[50] In terms of her practice, for Halprin, the furor produced by *Parades and Changes* marked the ending of an era steeped in the aesthetics of the avant-garde and ushered in a new era of experimentation. Halprin states: "Although our intimate community of artists managed to break down all the barriers of convention that inhibited our artistic growth and personal expression, what about the social impact?"[51] Thus, while *Parades and Changes* can be viewed as a seminal work, it is also a formative and transitional work. *Parades* bridged her focus on challenging the conventions of modern dance, which she viewed as an internal project to those within the community of the avant-garde, to practices that had the potential to enact a broader social impact.

The desire for her art to have a broader social impact beyond the confines of the studio and stage continued to permeate Halprin's work in the 1960s. Transpiring in the same year as the premiere of *Parades and Changes*, "Experiments in Environment" was transformational for both Anna and Lawrence, albeit in different ways. Anna noted this difference between her husband and herself stating: "My husband, Lawrence Halprin, was concerned how this workshop would relate back to environments in terms of communities. I was concerned that we were not in a true perspective, reflecting community diversity. We were all white."[52] This difference is further reflected in Janice Ross's biographical account of Anna Halprin. Ross notes that, for Lawrence, the "Experiments in Environment" workshops enabled Lawrence to consider the links between "meaningful urban design and the right process of bringing together disparate elements and experiences that make up an urban environment."[53] Ross considers how the workshops directly contributed to his process for his pathbreaking 1968 design study for New York City which proposed that Black residents of the Morningside neighborhood around Columbia University should have equal voice, alongside university officials, in redesigning their community. This shift in Lawrence's work is an example of racial redress through participatory urban planning.

For Lawrence, Ross notes, the workshops were useful as he worked to engage more fully with the communities his architectural practice impacted. However, for Anna, similar to her revelation of the exclusive nature of the avant-garde, the workshops led her to the stark realization that the group gathered for "Experiments in Environment" did not reflect any sort of racial diversity. In fact, you could go so far as to say in addition to race, the participants of "Experiments in Environment" were likely of similar class as well. What would come for Halprin a mere four years after "Experiments" was, as noted in the introduction, a unique opportunity to address the racial disparity in her work through an interracial workshop and

---

[49] The work has continued to be staged and performed to this day, most recently as part of Halprin's retrospective at the de Young Museum in San Francisco in 2018.
[50] Anna Halprin, "Discovering Dance," *Lomi School Bulletin*, Summer (1981): 16.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ann Halprin, "Community Art as Life Process: The Story of the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop," *The Drama Review: TDR* 17, no. 3 (1973): 71.
[53] Janice Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 249.

performance. The invitation would culminate in a workshop and performance that would help her further refine her interest in the use of dance and therapy to address social issues and cultivate community.

"Ghetto Renaissance" and Settler Desires: The Beginning of *Ceremony of Us*

In 1968 a small article in the San Francisco Examiner entitled, "The Ghetto Renaissance," asked the proverbial question: "What is art?"[54] To which the author, Eloise Dungan, responds citing both artists and their corresponding institutions: "Rembrandt in a museum, Margot Fonteyn on the Lincoln Center stage." Yet, as she continues she notes that increasingly artistic production is not only bound to institutional spaces such as the stage or museum, but rather is actively proliferating within the urban landscape. As evidence of this "renaissance," Dungan points to, "The Jungle," a film produced by a "Philadelphia slum gang that knows lots more about street fights than splicing film." She further highlights the collective transformation of these individuals as their participation in the film prompted their return to school. Lastly, in addition to the film, she highlights the National Study of the Performing Arts for Urban Youth for bringing to light the fact that: "Art is livelier than ever in the ghettos."

Through the use of racially coded language Dungan iterates stereotypes about the place of both white and Black Americans in the art world, but also their place within the urban landscape. As art historian Kellie Jones notes, in the years following the Great Migration, the word "ghetto" became synonymous with Black.[55] Dungan's opening question and answer reflects the assumption that painting and ballet are the forms of "high art," while museums and stages are the spaces in which those forms manifest. In contrast to her descriptions of "high art," she uses the words "gangs" and "ghettos" as a way to signal Black youth and communities without ever naming them as such. Her argument hinges on an assumption that art and the institutions of said art, museums and stages, equate to whiteness, while ghettoes, ostensibly the outskirts of major cities such as Philadelphia, are impoverished and lacking in art. Thus, the surprise to her reader is that there *is* cultural activity, perhaps in places not far from them.

In addition to highlighting a "renaissance" happening in urban Black communities, Dungan's article also evidences a growing concern among white people: the continued racial unrest and Black militancy happening across the country. Art as reform is then a useful, if pacifying, tool for the white majority. Historian, Daniel Widener, notes how in places like the post-rebellion community of Watts, there was a growing "cultural liberalism" among Black artists, sympathetic and affluent whites, and philanthropic organizations who "saw the arts as a key element of urban reform, insisting that writing, music, and other creative endeavors could provide opportunities for blacks and heal the divisions reflected in events like the Watts riot."[56] In fact, the main point of Dungan's article is to highlight the upcoming Associated Councils of the Arts' National Arts Conference in San Francisco, the theme of which was "The Role of the Arts in Social Issues."[57] More specifically, the conference aimed to address "urban social issues and whether there can or should be a separation between art and social change." Halprin's work

---

[54] Eloise Dungan, "The Ghetto Renaissance," *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), June 2, 1968.
[55] Kellie Jones, *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 4.
[56] Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 94.
[57] The Associated Councils of the Arts is now known as Americans for the Arts.

was already addressing questions about the separation between art and social change. As such, the conference was serendipitous in providing Halprin with the opportunity to put those questions in action outside of her home in the Bay Area.

At the conference, Halprin's company performed the piece, *Lunch*, which was, appropriately enough, performed during a luncheon at the conference. The piece featured dancers among the delegate members, well, eating lunch. However, the dancers distinguished themselves from the delegate members by eating in exaggerated ways – eating slowly, stealing from each other's plates, and playing with tempo whilst consuming their food.[58] *Lunch* was not merely simple or naïve, but for Ross, the work "resonated with social satire, providing an acid commentary on the overdone social ritual of the business luncheon, in contrast to people's simple need to take in midday nourishment."[59] In addition, Halprin could be said to be highlighting the performativity of sanctioned social rituals by framing a performance within an act that is not normally seen as performance. Further, *Lunch* could also be understood as provoking the group at large, most likely funders and administrators, to consider the arbitrary lines that are drawn around performance, who performs, and for whom.

The story goes, Halprin's *Lunch* made an impression on James Woods, founder of Studio Watts. Perhaps for the ways in which Halrpin was able to embed social commentary and audience provocation into the performance of a quotidian act such as a meal. Woods reached out to Halprin to see if she might be interested in creating a new work with artists from Studio Watts for the Los Angeles Festival of the Performing Arts at the Mark Taper Forum. According to Halprin: "It was part of [Woods's] plan that people from the Watts community would come to the Mark Taper Forum, most of them for the first time, and mingle with the affluent whites who attend the Mark Taper regularly. That theatre itself, a status symbol of "let me in," was to be, as he said, "a tool for social change.""[60] On one hand, the work that Halprin was hired to do was to highlight the artistry and community of Watts, post-rebellion, to the white and affluent theater community of Los Angeles. However, Halprin took the invitation a step further. In her desire to address the lack of diverse racial representation in her own work and community, Halprin proposed a collaborative work between her white company members and the Watts artists. She proposed working separately with both groups, traveling from San Francisco to Los Angeles on the weekends. Then, she would bring both groups together for a week-long rehearsal period that would culminate in the performance. Like "Experiments in Environment," Halprin would create an incubator of dance, movement, and therapy for embodied exploration that would, this time, address social issues explicitly.

Studio Watts Workshop was founded in 1964, a year before the Watts Rebellion, by Woods and Guy Miller, with initial funding provided by Woods and his wife. Studio Watts Workshop was one of many burgeoning local centers that flourished in the year prior to the Rebellion that aimed to use the arts to address social issues at the community level. Although there was a dearth of cultural and artistic institutions such as galleries and museums, the goal was not to replicate bourgeois or white institutions, but rather "redefine the concept of the artist as one who works in the community to engage, involve, and activate."[61] In particular, the manifesto of Studio Watts Workshop charged: "We must facilitate the individual's regaining an

---

[58] Janice Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 261.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ann Halprin and James Burns, "Ceremony of Us," *The Drama Review: TDR* 13, no. 4 (1969): 131.
[61] Curtis L. Carter, "Watts: Hub of the Universe Art and Social Change," in *Watts: Art and Social Change in Los Angeles, 1965-2002* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2003), 8.

awareness of himself as an instrument of change. Studio Watts Workshop supports a cultural democracy to deal with the broad scope of social, technical, and economic problems."[62]

Historian Daniel Widener notes how a growing white liberal interest in South Los Angeles broadly helped to fuel the burgeoning art scene through a shift in interracial politics. He states:

> The development of a community-focused interracial cultural politics marked a shift from earlier patterns. In a reversal from the war years, Hollywood now came to South Los Angeles, and African Americans were asked to represent themselves instead of being forced to contest externally produced images.[63]

Widener analyzes this reversal– wherein white producers are more explicitly interested in facilitating Black representation – through the influential Watts Writers Workshop founded by white screenwriter Budd Schulberg. *Ceremony of Us* mirrors this trend of white interest and engagement with Black urban communities through the arts at the time, but the degree to which these initiatives served the communities or rather themselves is an ongoing debate. Further, in Halprin's case if she was truly interested in working with Black communities – why the distance? What was the pull of South Los Angeles as a site for this project as opposed to, say, Oakland?

Although *Ceremony* transpired four years after the Watts Rebellion, the repercussions of the uprising were seemingly palpable for Halprin. In an interview she stated:

> Before the nature of what was happening became clear [in the workshops] I noticed a major difference between the San Francisco group and the Watts group: the Watts people seemed to have a built-in loyalty. I had the feeling that they would really help each other, they really were together, they really had a sense of unity – perhaps because they *were* unified, by the Watts riot.[64]

She continues and describes her white company, in contrast to the Watts artists, as independent and self-sufficient, even unwilling to help their own community in distress. For Halprin, the Watts artists filled a void she found in her own company and, by extension, her own life. Halprin's well-intentioned desire, and perceived right, to seek out the seemingly unknown and recoup the benefits can be seen as a part of the American mythology, and white right, of westward expansion. Halprin's comments and the intensified interest in Black communities by white artists and funders can be seen as a part of the ever evolving mythology of the American frontier, which was likewise represented in counterculture ideologies and popular culture.

Take for instance, the rise of B-movie western films contemporaneous to Halprin's *Ceremony*, such as the 1966 film *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*, directed by Sergio Leone and starring Clint Eastwood. Although it may seem an odd comparison, the character of Blondie to that of Halprin, the narrative of the anti-hero who saves the community of which they are not a part might not be that far of a stretch. Janice Hocker Rushing argues that the turn in 1960s western is steeped in countercultural values of rejecting society and forging one's own path. The

---

[62] Ibid.
[63] Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 91.
[64] Ann Halprin and James Burns, "Ceremony of Us," *The Drama Review: TDR* 13, no. 4 (1969): 132.

cowboy of the 1960s and 1970s differs from his predecessors in that society is no longer in need of protection, but rather *is* the enemy. Further, Rushing states: [I]ndividualistic values were heavily favored over communal ones. In fact, society had to be escaped or fought against in order for a person to maintain any sense of individuality.[65] Although Halprin's desires for the project are based in a radical social transformation for her community of artists, it also can be seen as part of an individualistic desire. Halprin had depleted the potential of northern California, both the city and its surrounding landscapes, and needed to reach outside of the confines of her comfort zone to find further inspiration. What better place than the rugged urbanism of Los Angeles.

Influenced by their Gestalt therapeutic practices, the Halprins upheld the notion that broader change can only begin at the individual level. Lerner and Auther echo this sentiment in the countercultural movement by tracing the roots of the term. They summarize historian Theodore Roszak who helped popularize the term stating:

> Roszak's characterization of the counterculture, as both cultural and political, organized around a "personalist style" and directed toward liberation from the alienating forces of technocratic domination, highlighted it as a form of cultural radicalism wherein personal transformation was embraced as the key to revolution.[66]

Citing personal transformation as the key to revolution may seem at odds with the communal impulses of the countercultural. What is evident in these examples is that there is a tension between the individual and the community. Further, although individual transformation is privileged, it is obvious that it is through the individuals encounter or proximity with the "other" that change occurs even if it is not explicitly stated as such. Part of the goal of this chapter is address and interrogate these points of contact more thoroughly.

Re-reading *Ceremony of Us*

As I have mentioned, *Ceremony of Us* is a work that evokes both critique and laudation. Although there is no visual documentation of the actual performance, the ephemera from the work is plentiful – reviews, scores, interviews, photo and video documentation of the process, meeting notes, and reflections by participants and collaborators. These fragments capture *Ceremony* in both its incubation period and its denouement. Often, the absence of a final product is one of the challenges of social practice. The parameters of the "art piece" are not clear as the arrangements, conversations, and reflection are part of the work beyond something that can be contained by a single event or object. The fragments provide us with more to consider in terms of the ethics of community-centered practice, namely whose voice or voices are privileged and the outcomes of the process.

The film *Right On/Ceremony of Us* reads more as an experimental film than a traditional documentary.[67] There is little narration to provide context to what is happening, so what we get

---

[65] Janice Hocker Rushing, "The Rhetoric of The American Western Myth," *Communications Monographs* 50, no. 1 (1983): 21-22.

[66] Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner, eds., *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press: 2011), xx.

[67] *Right On/Ceremony of Us*, directed by Anna Halprin and Seth Hill (1969; San Francisco, CA: Dilexi Foundation for KQED-TV).

are a series of scenes ostensibly of movement exercises and prompts. The cinematography of the film is its own choreographic endeavor: intimately shot, often showing close-ups of body parts in motion, abstracting the bodies as segments of flesh rather than capturing the broader whole. The dancers have ample skin exposed as the men are mainly topless and the women wear dark colored leotards with sarongs across their hips. The tightness of the camera frame mirrors the intimacy of the dancers as they touch, carry, and press into one another evoking a voyeuristic fetishization of skin tone and the differentiation found among the dancers.

In comparing the film to Halprin's score, it is easy to match up the two as the score is mainly comprised of words that describe actions. By watching the film, you can somewhat easily match up Halprin's scores to the exercises present. One of the first images we see in the film is seemingly the "Snake Dance" in Halprin's score. The dancers are separated according to race, in two close-knit lines, holding each other's hips or shoulders and moving throughout the room. A Black man and white man play drums off to the side emitting a medium-tempo beat. The bodies of the white dancers are very close to one another, pelvis to pelvis, moving fluidly as one long organism. They synchronously transfer their weight from right to left. Halprin is at the head of the line; her eyes are closed, seemingly entranced. The white dancers move over the rhythm – no punctuation – riding on top of the beat.

In contrast, the line of Black dancers have more separation between their bodies and move more dynamically – there's a ripple effect that moves through the line as the leader reaches up and pulls her arm straight up and down. The others mirror her movements together, holding hands, moving in time to the beat. The rhythm of the Black dancers is in opposition to the white dancers as their bodies reflect the beat through their torsos.

As the film progresses, the clear separation between the groups does not last for long, but often in the film and photographic documentation, individuals are paired or ordered in either racial or gender contrast to one another. In other words, the dancers are often paired in contrast to their race and/or gender, so white women working or dancing with Black men or in lines they often alternate accordingly by race and/or gender. Yet, there is a repetitiveness to these binary pairings that are reinforced by Halprin's comments – Black man to white man or Black man to white woman – leaving out Black women entirely. The archive presents binaries that reinforce stereotypes of white masculinity and a fetishization of interracial relationships, specifically between Black men and white women. More importantly the archive positions whiteness as the central viewpoint of the work. *Ceremony* is thus less about an interracial, and assumingly, egalitarian project than it is about the relationship of whiteness to Blackness.

In Halprin's personal reflections of the project, she notes the rehearsal period brought out strong sexual tensions among the performers, in particular, between the white women and Black men. Halprin states that the initial excitement of the performers was part of "powerful sexual tensions" that became a unifying theme for the work.[68] In particular,

> On Friday night it was on a level of unbelievable sexual potency. The white women were so liberated by the black men that I've never seen such dancing in all my life. It was completely beautiful, but, well one white man's first reaction was that the women were being raped. And it was quite the other way around. My impression, as a white woman watching it, was wow! those white women are really seducing those guys and they're really going right to it.[69]

[68] Ann Halprin and James Burns, "Ceremony of Us," *The Drama Review: TDR* 13, no. 4 (1969): 132.
[69] Ibid, 132-133.

From Halprin's vantage point, the Black men liberated the white women's sexuality leading to uninhibited dancing. Yet, this liberation apparently came at a cost as white men felt seemingly emasculated and Black women excluded.[70] A lot of the photographic documentation of the piece supports these claims by Ross as there are many images of interracial heterosexual pairings. Further, in the images of heterosexual duets, often the performers are in physical contact with one another in intimate embrace – a torso draped across a back, eyes closed and heads thrown back in seeming ecstasy, sweat glistening on skin. Conversely, in images of the white men and Black men together, their bodies reveal confrontation. In one particular image, two men stand facing each other with palms touching. The back of the white man is toward the camera, so the face of the Black man is the focus of the photograph. The Black man's eyes are narrowed on the white man. His elbows are taut with tension.

Halprin's assertions reinforce the stereotypes that white women are seen as the property of white men and that Black men as egregiously sexual. Further, these assumptions leave out other possibilities for what was felt or seen by others in the group. Additionally, Halprin's reading assumes that the white men are jealous of the Black men, but couldn't they in fact be jealous of the white women? Despite the 1960s being deemed a sexual revolution, the revolution seems to only extend to the white women and their sexual liberation.

Reviews, likewise, read the performance as titillating for both the performers and audience. In his reflection, James Burns generously asserts: "Sex united the group as a whole, white and black women and men grooving each other in a powerful tableau that really got to the audience (as testified to by murmurs and giggles and seat shiftings in the auditorium)."[71] Burns's review opens up the possibilities that the sexual tension wasn't only contained to heterosexual pairings, but to the group as a whole.

Although the film easily aligns to Halprin's score, there is little context provided as to what is actually happening. In fact, the only time there is any context provided is at the beginning of the film in a voice-over by Halprin. Halprin matter-of-factly describes the invitation by Studio Watts and her interest in bringing the group together with her company. Further, she describes that the process is to lead the group to mutual understanding and trust through collective effort, hence the title, *Ceremony of Us*. The only other time there is text is when the dancers are doing the "when I look at you" exercise that is outlined in the score of the performance. This exercise was part of the opening sequence of the performance that began in the lobby wherein the dancers state their seemingly objective observations about audience members. Halprin's notes state: "In lobby, report, 'When I look at you I see…' Comment precisely what you see, no more. As the audience goes into the auditorium follow them in and continue the reporting, allowing for the incorporation of their responses."[72] In *Right On*, the dancers practice this section about halfway through the film on each other. The dancers sit or stand facing each other in pairs, usually one is sitting next to or holding a mirror for the other and is speaking objectively about what they say. The majority of pairs are white women with black

---

[70] Janice Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). Ross relates the interracial sexual tension and power dynamics evident in *Ceremony of Us* to the cultural interest in interracial relationships at the time as evidenced by work such as Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (277). Scholar Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn notes that the post Jim Crow era and Civil Rights Movement inoculated new modes of etiquette between Black and white people. In particular, she highlights how films such as *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* served as instructive material for how white liberals engage with Black people.

[71] Ann Halprin and James Burns, "Ceremony of Us," *The Drama Review: TDR* 13, no. 4 (1969): 143.

[72] Ibid, 139.

men. They describe each other's hair, skin, and clothing. The individuals being described sometimes smile self-consciously or other times remain serious as trying to determine the validity of the observations.

Out of the exercise comes other prompts such as: "When I look at you I don't see…" "When I look at you I imagine I see…" and "I want to see…" These prompts conjure poetic ruminations that the filmmaker uses as a voice-over as the dancers move into a new activity. The next segment of movement is sensuous as the dancers, mostly in gendered pairs, although there are is one male/male pair, dance slowly with one another. Some hold hands while moving their hips in a type of slow dance, others roll around on the floor, often times on top of one another in a missionary position. There are other moments when one dancer lies supine on the floor and the other kneels next to them, placing their hands on their bare belly. This pose registers as a type of energy transfer seen in somatic practices such as rolfing. During this sequence of movement, the observations from the dancers move from objective observations to opinions and comments on other dancers and/or their own personal experience. The dancers state:

> "I want to see if Johnny Hopkins can cry."
>
> "I imagine the cold wind sliding down the ribs. I imagine sweat running. I imagine I see the panthers standing."
>
> "I don't see peace, mind, money."
>
> "I see me saying words to people I never will say."
>
> "I don't see love, true love, the way it should be."
>
> "I don't see myself in your eyes. I don't see the condition of your soul."
>
> "Odesssa bathing her baby. Cheryl tiptoeing in a tutu."
>
> "I see eyes closed, tears, smiles, laughter. And I know that there is love. I see the ceremony of us changing our environment. I see me interrelating on a more wholesome basis. Thank god."

These poetic ruminations are overlaid with the images of sensuous and slow-moving duets. Further, it is the only time in the documentary that the dancers' voices are heard.

As alluded to earlier, intimacy was not the only feeling produced by the group. Returning to the documentary, in one scene in particular, the dynamic of the movement between couples moves into aggressive partnering, akin to wrestling. Although it is difficult to ascertain the context of the exercise, dancers are dragging one another across the room or attempting to hold each other down. In fact, writing from the Watts performer and late writer, Wanda Coleman, reveals the tension she felt as a black woman amongst the group. In her prose, *War of Eyes*, she describes her experience in detail.[73] Although, Coleman refers to Halprin by the nickname the group gave her, Blue-Eyed Soul-Mama, it is clear that Coleman has complicated, and even

[73] Wanda Coleman, *A War of Eyes and Other Stories* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1996).

contradictory, feelings for Halprin. Coleman describes Halprin, in one instance, as someone who holds the group together:

> Half of us are black, half of us white. She has handpicked us for an artistic statement on racial harmony. But even as we move toward that day of completion – a theatrical performance – things come up and out. Our hatreds, our frustrations, our deep inner madnesses. And sometimes they overwhelm us, threaten to devour everyone. But Blue-Eyed Soul-Mama keeps us collected.[74]

At the same time, Coleman describes how Halprin initiates the group in a "war" of which there are two rules they must abide: no speaking and no physical contact. Coleman describes Halprin as unable to "know" her: "War. What is it for me? How will I wage it? Does Blue-Eyed Soul-Mama know me? Her big Black Doña? Her one-hundred-and-sixty-pounds of molten maroon, six feet in stockings? No. She does not."[75] What Coleman goes on to describe is a room filled with tension, in particular, her vulnerability as a black woman seemingly alone amongst a group that she does not completely trust. Coleman is calculated in her attacks, seeking out one white woman, a "princess," with whom to engage in combat. Although a physical battle never ensues, for Coleman it is clear that the prospect of battle was simmering beneath the surface.

Confrontation was a theme prevalent throughout the workshop and was revealed in the final performance as well. Much of the first half of *Ceremony* involved childhood games like Red-Light/Green-Light and Tug of War eliciting convoluted competition and alliances within the group. Again, James Burns states: "It seemed to me less a celebration than a series of evocative confrontations – black and white, male and female, female and female, male and male, participant and spectator."[76] The confrontations and tensions do not contradict the togetherness or unity that certain members of the group may have felt, but it does highlight the limits to the ceremony or ritual Halprin was trying to induce. Further, Coleman's perspective stresses the fact that a collective is comprised of individuals whose experiences within a group vary significantly. This fact has not been adequately contended with in the framing of *Ceremony*. Halprin's work, in addition to being performances, are also often situated as rituals which is evident in the use of the work "ceremony" in the title. Further, performances, rituals, and ceremonies are often conceived as processes for catharsis, a pathway to another side. So, what was on the other side of this ceremony?

Post-Ceremony

As mentioned earlier, according to Halprin, the move to address social issues more directly, and explicitly issues of racial exclusion, came out of the collaborative workshops with her husband, Lawrence Halprin, "Experiments in Environment." In particular, her participation in the workshops forced her to acknowledge the ways her work spoke toward inclusion across disciplines, but did little to make that a true reality in terms of inclusion across lines of race and/or class. However, the desire to address race through a concerted, at times confrontational, manner can also be seen as part of a larger movement in psychotherapy in California at the time. Robby Herbst's writing on *Ceremony of Us* connects Halprin's practice and use of Gestalt

[74] Ibid, 167.
[75] Ibid, 168.
[76] Ann Halprin and James Burns, "Ceremony of Us," *The Drama Review: TDR* 13, no. 4 (1969): 143.

therapy to the group therapy workshops that were being conducted concurrently by white journalist, George Leonard, at the Esalen Institute.[77] The series of workshops at Esalen, entitled "Racial Confrontations," used Gestalt therapy as a method to stage racial encounters between white and Black individuals. Herbst notes, via the documentary *The Century of the Self*, that the encounters were volatile with Black participants verbally berating the white liberal participants. Although the workshops continued into the early 1970s, they were eventually deemed a failure and funding for the workshops ceased. Herbst states: "Esalen's Gestalt-influence project of confronting individual blocks (i.e., mutually racist attitudes) toward the goal of a *deracinated* subjectivity was inherently destructive to the source of Black power itself – a collective Black identity."[78] Defining the "failure" or "success" of something is often a subjective judgment. However Herbst's analysis reveals the ways in which the workshops centered on absolving white guilt rather than working toward racial reconciliation. A starting place for this type of work would be to situate the needs and desires of Black individuals over that of the white facilitators.

Was *Ceremony of Us* a "failure" akin to the Esalen workshops? The examples from Esalen help situate Halprin's work as part of a larger countercultural interest in confronting racism at an individual level that ultimately centered the interests of white individuals. Further, this narrow focus does not take into consideration the ways in which racism exists at a macro level – embedded in institutions, policies, and society at large. Yet, for Halprin, the long-term aftermath of the performance yielded change and growth in Halprin's company as she continued her trajectory in engaging directly with social and political issues through the inclusion of those directly affected.[79] However, in again thinking about the parameters of social practice and when a piece might "end" or by what standards we deem a work's "success," it seems appropriate to consider some of the repercussions of the work that transcended the final product.

Documented in Halprin's archives is a transcription of a post-performance meeting with Halprin, Woods, and the performers from both Watts and San Francisco.[80] The transcription provides a snapshot of a group divided according to their allegiances to their respective groups. In particular, the Watts performers were upset about the fact that their names were not used in marketing and programmatic materials. Their grievances appear appropriate as their labor and presence as not only artists, but representative of Watts as well, was essential to the performance. Over the course of the meeting, it becomes clear that the name placement was only a small part of larger issues regarding acknowledgement, remuneration, and trust.

A letter by psychologist and friend, Paul Baum, reinforces these sentiments.[81] Baum served as "Human Relations Consultant" for *Ceremony* and had been meeting with Halprin regularly to discuss the process.[82] At the start of his letter, Baum notes that, as the Watts performers were coming into the meeting, there was discussion amongst themselves about the lack of name inclusion on the marketing brochures as well as additional performance engagements, payment, and unauthorized release of workshop recordings. He states: "What

---

[77] Robby Herbst, "Ceremony of Us," *East of Borneo*, (2014).
[78] Ibid.
[79] Examples include: *Blank Placard Dance* (1970), *City Dance* (1976-1977), *Planetary Dance* (1981-present), *Carry Me Home* (1990), *Seniors Rocking* (2005).
[80] Notes about post-performance meeting on *Ceremony of Us*, 1969 (February 27, 1969), 995.005, Box 2, Folder 34, Anna Halprin Archive, Museum of Performance + Design, San Francisco, CA.
[81] Observations by Paul Baum, 1969 (n.d.), 995.005, Box 2, Folder 30, Anna Halprin Archive, Museum of Performance + Design, San Francisco, CA.
[82] Baum was also a co-organizer of the "Experiments in Environment" workshop and notes that he was receiving his regular consultant fee for his work with Halprin on *Ceremony of Us*.

seemed very clear was that now that the performance was over certain issues of trust and inclusion, which apparently had been either suspended or bypassed before the performance, were now being raised in a very direct way."[83] Further, there seemed to be a lack of transparency in regards to funding and what payment, if any, Halprin and Woods were receiving. Baum provides a snapshot of the tensions evident within the workshop itself, but also between Halprin and Woods as representatives of their respective institutions (San Francisco Dancers Workshop and Studio Watts respectively). He states that Halprin did not feel supported by Woods and Studio Watts, but that the Watts performers had an allegiance to Woods and Studio Watts that made them uncomfortable when Halprin pushed to absorb the group and their proceeding commitments.

Having historical hindsight, we know that the performance of *Ceremony of Us* at the Mark Taper Forum was to be the only time the work was performed with the original group. However, despite the disagreements above, some members of Studio Watts continued to work with Halprin. In turn, Halprin worked to establish a multi-racial dance group that met the summer after at Sea Ranch. In her description of the beginnings of this group, she notes that there were twenty-three artists that came together across race, class, and education. However, briefly after, she states, rather casually, that they lost all of the Black women in the first three days, before they even reached Sea Ranch.[84] Why is this significant? What does it mean to Halprin that the Black women of the group, for whatever reason, purposefully removed themselves from the group? The significance of this might be attributed to what was highlighted earlier about the alienation of Black women from the process of *Ceremony of Us*.

Returning to Wanda Coleman, in a letter dated March 27, 1969, Coleman wrote to Halprin to officially resign from the group.[85] What Coleman articulates over the brief page and a half is the difference between her material conditions and that of the group. In particular, the disregard of the group toward her needs as a single mother. Coleman balks at the amount of money the artists are offered to continue working stating it would not be enough for her to travel to the Bay Area, let alone pay someone to care for her children. She states: "In other words, I can't afford the group. You're far too affluent for me."[86] Coleman understands the limitations of the group, but her words evidence hurt and the material gulf between herself and Halprin's company. One cannot live on art alone. She states: "I don't expect you to support me or my kids. After all, that's not your responsibility. But I can no longer continue to make sacrafices [sic] when I receive nothing in return. After all, art is a luxury not afforded the poor."[87] Taking this letter in consideration with Coleman's prose, it is clear that Coleman wanted to believe in the reconciliatory and utopic process Halprin proposed, but was never able to find a space for herself within the group as both a Black woman and mother. Coleman's exclusion from the group shows the limits to aestheticized participation. Ross notes that "[w]hen these feelings came up at the post-performance seminar, Ann countered by trying to drag the discussion from status, power,

[83] Observations by Paul Baum, 1969 (n.d.), 995.005, Box 2, Folder 30, Anna Halprin Archive, Museum of Performance + Design, San Francisco, CA.
[84] Ann Halprin, "Community Art as Life Process: The Story of the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop," *The Drama Review: TDR* 17, no. 3 (1973): 71.
[85] Wanda Coleman letter, 1969 (March 27, 1969), 995.005, Box 2, Folder 30, Anna Halprin Archive, Museum of Performance + Design, San Francisco, CA.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid, 2.

and money back to art" (281).[88] When Halprin pushes the limits of the avant-garde philosophy of art merging with life, "life" means the absence of personal responsibility, along with the suspension of racial inequity, and the material conditions caused by slavery. And, more insidiously, "life" means having the material resources and freedom to shape what you want your life to look like and mean.

In the introduction I utilize three pieces of criteria to define social practice dance: political, relational, and non-specialized. Central to the concept of "non-specialty" in social practice dance is the idea that the "non-specialist" or participant functions in two opposing ways. First, they are seen as a non-specialist in terms of dance knowledge thus making their contributions to the art form "pure" or more specifically unencumbered by specific dance training. Conversely, their lack of dance knowledge is augmented by another form of specialist knowledge: their lived experience. Yet, as evidenced here, their specialty is exalted in, or perhaps extracted for, the performance process, but is rarely compensated appropriately.

Although, as I have shown, Halprin has been both praised as a cultural vanguard while also being sidelined from various histories, most scholarship situates Halprin as an innovator with a long and illustrious career. However, like other recent scholarship on Halprin's post-modern dance peers such as Yvonne Rainer, historians have begun to wrestle with the significance of the material conditions through which Halprin's work developed.[89] Olive McKeon's historical materialist analysis of Halprin's seminal piece, *Parades and Changes*, troubles the easy relationship that is often made between Halprin and the New Left, as well as Halprin's proximity to wealth – through her husband's work and her own generational wealth – that allowed her to be self-sufficient as an artist.[90] One of the main reasons that Halprin was able to create *Ceremony of Us* is that she funded her own transportation to and from Watts. The economic disparity between artist and community as evidenced by Halprin and Coleman is not unique, but bringing it to light highlights a gulf that often exists in community-engaged work. While Halprin moves on from the work, many that were essential to the realization of the work get left behind. That isn't to say that Halprin's work was not a success in other ways, but rather it is often easier to celebrate the artist's attempt than wrestle with the material disparities that cannot be resolved in a ten-day workshop.

---

[88] Janice Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 281. In chapter 3 I discuss a similar contentious discussion between Bill T. Jones and Steve Paxton in relationship to money, aesthetic legibility, and audience and like Halprin, the moderator of the discussion, Mary Overlie, continues to press the two to talk about art, not money.

[89] Catherine Wood, *The Mind is a Muscle* (London, Afterall: 2007).

[90] Olive Mckeon, "Rethinking Anna Halprin's *Parades and Changes*: Postmodern Dance, Racialized Urban Restructuring, and Mid-1960s San Francisco," *TDR: The Drama Review* 64, vol. 2 (2020): 87.

Chapter 2
Abstracting the Vernacular: Social Dance in the Gallery

Adrian Moves to Berlin (2007) is a celebratory durational dance performed by the visual artist, Adrian Piper, at Alexanderplatz in Berlin. Documented by camera, Piper performs in solo for an hour to early 2000s Berlin house music. She bounces and claps in rhythm to the music then begins to swing her arms as she steps forward in an easy, loose gait. Sometimes the camera is stationary providing a steady frame as Piper moves from right to left, testing the bounds of the camera to contain her. Sometimes the camera is down low, capturing her movement from the concrete as the bright sun flares out from behind her head and shoulders like an aura. She is dressed conservatively in what appears to be a tweed blazer, dark slacks, and black, nondescript shoes. One element of style is the bright red scarf that dances with her. Dark sunglasses cover her eyes, but her eyes could be closed for all we know as her gaze is downward and her movement quality is that of someone dancing in a club, for their own pleasure and purpose. Her synchronicity with the music is infectious. She does not acknowledge the urban landscape around her – the people passing by with double takes nor the city trains careening above her head. Curiously, the sounds of the city are not present in the video, only Piper's musical soundtrack making her internal world the viewers' world as well.

In a 2018 article in *Artforum,* "Reveries of a Solitary Dancer," editor David Velasco meditates on the way dance permeates Piper's work, further focusing on Piper as a solo dancer. He draws comparisons to his own experience dancing in clubs as well as his attunement to his own movement. He states:

> I thought about the lawlike constancy of the four-four rhythm, how it gave me just enough time to anticipate and slide into the next beat, how the complex syncopations offered just enough predictable *in*constancy for me to adjust and find new spaces inside the divisions, how the melody radiating out through the meter would prompt me to lift or sink and how my hands or head would work with or against it. It was that implausible place of proprioception, where the mind and the raw, unsynthesized material of the universe meet in the body, whose responses enact a kind of synthesis.[91]

What Velasco describes is the kinesthetic feeling of dance or the bodily, sometimes perceived as involuntary, response to music and rhythm. He goes on to quote philosopher Diarmuid Costello who uses similar language to describe Piper's dancing thus encapsulating Piper's use of dance as a method for transcendence. Yet, in considering the breadth and range of dance within Piper's oeuvre, her engagement with dance is not only as a soloist, nor is it only deployed as a vehicle of transcendence.

In *Adrian Moves to Berlin* (2007) the absence of the urban soundscape and the pervasiveness of the German house music draws the viewer into Piper's internal experience. Yet, although Piper is performing in solo, she is never really alone. The piece figures a relationality between Piper and the viewer as well as to the site around her. The busy background offers opportunities for surprising duets and other group formations that ebb and flow provoking the question of the extent to which a site-specific performance can ever be a solo. Piper describes the work as a celebration of her relocation to Berlin "in which two formerly segregated societies are

[91] David Velasco, "Reveries of a Solitary Dancer," *Artforum* 57, no. 1 (2018).

finding intelligent ways to come together."[92] She goes on to state that dance spaces in Berlin have been the site through which the East and West have come together since the Fall of the Wall. In contrast to seeing this as a decidedly solo work, Piper's dancing indexes the club, the collective pulsing of multiple dancing bodies, as not only a site, but also a practice of reconciliation.

Please, God (1990), which features a group of young Black schoolgirls performing in front of a window on a busy sidewalk, demonstrates Piper's earlier investments in the collective. The camera appears to be behind the window as the viewer watches from the inside peering out, at eye-level with the young girls. The young girls perform such nineties dances as the running man and the roger rabbit. They are visually joyful as they move in unison in their plaid school uniforms before they dissipate into laughter. However, the sound and text that accompanies the video punctures the exuberance of the girls' movement with the realities and histories of anti-Black racism and violence. The text scrolling across the top of the screen is a stream of conscious prayer to an unnamed god to protect the young girls from the racism they will undoubtedly be subject to. Meanwhile, the musical soundtrack plays a loop of three Billie Holiday songs: "God Bless the Child," "Stormy Blues," and "Strange Fruit." The songs are anachronistic to the girls' movement, thus anchoring their bodies to historical atrocities, such as the lynching described in Holiday's "Strange Fruit."

From one vantage point *Adrian Moves to Berlin* (2007) and *Please, God* (1990) appear celebratory and communal, yet the joy is complicated either through direct commentary as in *Please, God* or in the contextual knowledge of Piper's celebration. For Piper, the practice of dance reveals itself as both emancipatory and always racially coded. Understanding dance as the bodily expression of culture and history, these claims highlight a duality – dance as something that can both free and bind. Piper challenges or exposes the ways in which bodies are "trained" to move and the potential to re-wire one's "training" in one of her most popular works, *Funk Lessons* (1984). *Funk Lessons* is the documentation of a participatory art project wherein Piper coordinated large-scale workshops to teach funk dancing to white people specifically. Piper's stated goal was as follows:

> The long-term goal of the small and the large-scale performances is to restructure people's social identities, by making accessible to them a common medium of communication – funk music and dance – that has been largely inaccessible to white culture and has consequently exacerbated the xenophobic fear, hostility and incomprehension that generally characterize the reaction of whites to black popular culture in this society.[93]

Although *Funk Lessons* transpired across a variety of settings and with numerous participants over the course of two years, the culminating art work that is presented in galleries is a 15-minute documentation of her 1983 lesson at the University of Berkeley, California. However, *Funk Lessons* is not a strict document of the workshop, but rather the video intermixes Piper's lecture on funk with the demonstration of steps such as the "two-step" or "head nod" alongside footage of people practicing said steps to the music of Bootsy Collins and James Brown.

---

[92] "Funk Lessons," Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin, accessed May 11, 2022, http://www.adrianpiper.com/vs/video_fl.shtml.

[93] Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Volume I, Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992* (Cambridge, MIT Press: 1999), 198.

Funk Lessons is perhaps the work that comes to mind most frequently when considering Piper's engagement with dance. In looking back on *Funk Lessons*, the work feels especially prescient. It is emblematic of both nascent histories of dance in the museum and that of social practice. Because *Funk Lessons* is both about dance and participatory, the work highlights increasing trends in museum or gallery curation around dance – the first being a continued investment in bringing dance into the museum and the second being the focus on "experiential" or "participatory" modes of aesthetic engagement through the use of dance.

In the past decade, museums have looked back at historical crossovers between dance and visual art, often elevating white post-modern/minimalist dance artists such as those associated with Judson Dance Theater and their descendants. Examples include recent exhibitions such as *Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done* and *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer.* In addition, major art institutions such as The Walker and The Museum of Modern Art have acquired performance ephemera and archival material of Merce Cunningham and Forti, respectively. Yet, increasingly, there has been broader curatorial frameworks on the intersection of dance and visual art in international contexts. For example, the exhibition, *Histories of Dance*, curated by Adriano Pedrosa, Julia Bryan-Wilson, and Olivia Ardui at the Museu de Art de São Paulo took an expansive view of dance and highlighted the work of Piper alongside other artists engaged in the history of African diasporic dance practices such as Trajal Harrell and Senga Nengudi.

In tandem with the continued influx of museal engagement with dance, there has also been a surge of scholarship in both dance studies and art history that aim to expose the often obscured linkages between dance and visual arts. However, the growing discourse between the two disciplines has often focused primarily on dance artists thus missing the ways in which visual artists, in particular artists of color, have used dance as both material and object. This omission is due, I argue, to the continued legacy of modernism in modern dance that is evident in the revival of dance in the museum wherein white abstract dance is hierarchized over forms that stem from Black and Africanist vernacular and social dance.

Yet, as I will discuss later, this designation between what is considered abstract along racial lines is increasingly difficult to maintain as there are numerous Black visual artists who have critically engaged with Eurocentric forms and histories in the gallery space. For instance, Black Canadian visual artist, Brendan Fernandes, whose work, *Master of Form* (2019), was featured as part of the 2019 Whitney Biennial. *Master of Form* (2019) was a sculptural exploration of ballet positions by 10 dancers set amidst a grid-like cage structure. The work explored linkages between the discipline of ballet and that of sadomasochistic culture. Additionally, visual artist Kandis Williams's 2021 solo show, *A Line*, at 52 Walker deftly engage with the histories of ballet and modern dance. Through analog forms such as xeroxes and video, Williams repurposes canonical images of Black dancers or inserts Black dancers into genealogies often pervaded by whiteness to challenge perceptions of dance history. Her long titles directly connect to not only the history of dance, but also the historicization of dance. For example, *blackbox, 4 points: Wading in Water, Archipelago, Myth, Revelations – B. Gottschild principle – muffled lines and rupture – hyper-interpretation of Africanist presence(s)*, makes linkages between Alvin Ailey's seminal work, *Revelations*, alongside dance scholar, Brenda Dixon-Gottschild's canonical work on the overlooked use and appropriation of Black vernacular dance in the formation of white avant-garde innovation such as Judson and George Balanchine. As I will discuss later, and what these contemporary examples highlight, is that abstraction is not

inherently a form, but rather a historical framework that primarily situates white bodies as universal.

In addition to the above examples about the presentation of dance through museal exhibitions, there has been an increase in engagement in social dance forms; in particular, voguing is a popular genre presented in museum and gallery contexts.[94] However, museums often use voguing as a practice to activate the museum through classes and performances, but it has yet to be validated in the US through a dedicated exhibition.[95] Thus, dance becomes a form of social practice curation wherein the participatory and communal nature of social dance practices are used to activate gallery spaces. *Funk Lessons* fits between these spaces of social dance as both form and mode of activation. In addition, it is an example of social practice that uses social dance to activate communities outside the purview of the museum toward a political end.

This chapter uses Piper's seminal dance-based visual art work, *Funk Lessons*, as a microcosm through which to historicize and analyze social practice dance. The intersection of these seemingly disparate artistic lineages is an aesthetic and political movement that has not been appropriately taken up in dance studies, in particular it has been neglected by the burgeoning discourse around dance and the museum as well as recent art historical revisionist scholarship on dance. Thus, foregrounding the elasticity and amorphous nature of the "social" in Piper's work – as a form of social practice explicitly using a social dance form – provides a new lens from which to consider visual art and dance lineages as co-formative. Further, examining the work of Piper allows us to see how her practice foreshadows the cross-institutional work of choreographers such as Trajal Harrell, Ralph Lemon, and Will Rawls, as well as visual artists actively engaged in dance as a medium such as Holly Bass, Kandis Williams, Brendan Fernandes, Nick Cave, and Xaviera Simmons.

Social Dance as Social Practice

In order to map the continuities and discontinuities between social dance and social practice, we need to confront differences of vocabulary and sensibility. In the field of dance studies, social dance is closely tied to – and often interchangeable with – terms such as popular dance and vernacular dance. That language rarely appears in the discourse of social practice in visual art. That said, the terms of popular, vernacular, and social dance have been the source of many debates within dance studies itself, particularly as dance scholars train their attention to the study of dance off the concert stage. True, the meanings of social, vernacular, and popular overlap, but each speaks to a specific context. For instance, vernacular dance most often relates to forms of African-American social dance. Dance scholar Jonathan David Jackson defines African-American vernacular dance as "a complex family of forms and steps" that span from plantation-era practices to the present day.[96] Meanwhile, popular dance can be formed from a vernacular tradition, but often has economic or mass cultural implications. As dance scholar Sherrill Dodds notes, popular dance never stays at a "grass-roots level" as corporations seek to

[94] A sampling of examples include: Trajal Harrell's *Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning at Judson Church*; the Berkeley Art Museum has hosted voguing workshops with Sir JoQ; Works and Processes at the Guggenheim have featured Les Ballet Afrik's Creative Director, Omari Wiles; Nick Cave Upright Performances, most recently at New York Live Arts, featured a variety of Black social dance lessons.
[95] In 2017-2018 the Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo Comunidad de Madrid presented the exhibition *Elements of Vogue*.
[96] Jonathan David Jackson, "Improvising in African-American Vernacular Dancing," *Dance Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (2001): 42.

utilize burgeoning forms of dance for commercial use.[97] Julie Malnig has also tracked the categorical fluidity of social, vernacular, and popular dance:

> One of the fascinating aspects about the category of social dance itself is the variety of styles it encompasses and the continually fluid interchange among what we call social, vernacular, and popular dances. Although we associate social dance with what people do, as recreation, in clubs, dance halls, and other meetings spots, there is enormous variation in styles, level of expertise, and professionalism.[98]

Despite aesthetic and historical variation, the unifying feature of these frameworks is that these dances derive from a shared tradition or practice, one developed and refined over time in a specifically self-defined community.

As discussed in the introduction, the language of the "social" has been explicated over the past two decades through the development of social practice and with a quite different vocabulary. The broad discourse on social practice in the visual arts follows a lineage from conceptualism, institutional critique, and relational aesthetics; the so-called social turn has often designated practices that employ participatory, performative, community-based, and/or discursive practices where the art is contingent on the presence and participation of an audience. As noted in my introductory chapter, formative work on 'relational aesthetics' by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud foregrounds a co-presence and relationship between the artwork and the viewer.[99] Art historian Grant Kester, in his work *Conversation Pieces*, highlights the ways in which modern artworks of the late 1990s and early 2000s utilize dialogue and conversation among performers, participants, and audience, often addressing social issues, as the core of the work.[100] Claire Bishop foregrounds the role of "participation" in her work, *Artificial Hells*, where she coins the useful term "delegated performance" to describe artwork wherein members from, most often, marginalized communities perform their socio-economic background.[101] Finally, coming from a performance studies perspective, *Social Works* by Shannon Jackson tracks the aesthetic and political paradoxes involved in both defining and claiming social practice.[102] Jackson notes that for some, social practice implies political change, while for others, it is an aesthetic and formal endeavor. Furthermore, within politically driven artworks, the degrees of perceived earnestness and irony can vary greatly.[103] Thus, it can be difficult to gauge the degree to which a social practice project is offering critique or formative change. Much of Piper's work fits comfortably in this space between earnestness and irony. For example, in *Funk Lessons* the purpose of the project – teaching white people to dance funk – might appear facetious, but as I will discuss further later, the premise that dance can be a bridge for understanding difference is a ploy or practice that has been used in diplomatic efforts and by artists. Although the extent to which Piper's work challenges or accepts this premise is debatable, all the artists in this dissertation are engaged with this belief in some capacity.

---

[97] Sherrill Dodds, *Dancing on the Canon: Embodiments of Value in Popular Dance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 63.
[98] Julie Malnig, "Introduction," *Dance Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (2001): 7.
[99] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du Reels, 2002).
[100] Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013).
[101] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012
[102] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2011).
[103] Ibid, 14.

Further, André Lepecki's theories of "choreopolice" and "choreopolitics" highlights how visual artists who center their work on the deployment of bodies in space are employing techniques of choreography, thus dance.[104] A basis for social practice is "relationality," the constructing of situations wherein disparate bodies interact with one another forming an amorphous and temporal art work. Of course, *Funk Lessons* employs this central premise of social practice – eliciting disparate individuals to move in space and time, thus creating a work that is choreographic. However, Piper goes a step further to utilize a codified technique of dance, specifically Black social dance, adding another layer with which to contend. The superimposition of funk upon the "choreographic" tendencies of social practice reveals the ways in which social practice mirrors a central tenet of Black vernacular dance: improvisation.

Early on in *Funk Lessons* Piper tells the viewer: "Funk is modular. Funk is improvisational. Funk is participatory." These three short phrases reveal that for Piper funk is a moldable form based on collective practices of improvisation. Instinctively improvisation is often thought as impromptu, unplanned, and spontaneous, yet much work has been done across music and dance to highlight the fact that improvisation is not about a lack of control or plan, but rather the heightened ability to navigate within a framework of a shared aesthetic or style. Jonathan David Jackson pulls from Albert Murray's theory of improvisation in Black vernacular music to show how dancers utilize the musical improvisational concepts of vamping, riffing, and the break in dance.[105] The form of the dance is a space within which one can amend and embellish. Further, Jackson is quick to note though that within these improvisational practices is the knowledge of or relationship to the collective.[106] Similarly, social practice artists create containers within which participants improvise, albeit to a less sophisticated degree than seasoned dancers. However, this is often one of the exciting aspects of social practice – the degree to which the unknown can happen.

Dance and the Museum

Considering the wealth of dance found in Piper's oeuvre, it is significant that she has been missed by the nascent dialogue around dance and the museum. Above I have shown how the ethos and practices of social dance have been overlooked as a critical resource in the development of social practice. Next, I consider this nexus from yet another scene of cross-disciplinary experimentation: the recent upsurge of choreography and dance within a museum context. As noted above, recent museum programming has included the presentation of Black vernacular dance, such as voguing. However, this speaks more to the way museums are increasingly engaging their audiences in experiential ways and participating in what has been coined as an "experience economy," thus activating the museum through dance. Yet, the presentation of said dance as "art" in an exhibition context has been nil. Although public programming and exhibitions work hand-in-hand, there is more legitimacy attached to an exhibition rather than a public program. From the perspective of dance studies, the analysis of dance in the museum has focused on dance artists, primarily white, that fall within the genealogies of art history more easily. The nascent discourse has largely ignored Black visual

[104] André Lepecki, "Choreopolice and Choreopolitics: or, the task of the dancer," *TDR: The drama Review* 57, no. 4 (2013).
[105] Jonathan David Jackson, "Improvising in African-American Vernacular Dancing," *Dance Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (2001): 40-53.
[106] Ibid.

artists such as Piper, as well as the likes of Senga Nengudi and Nick Cave, whose performance-inflected art work is indebted to social and vernacular dance and art forms. One might consider a variety of reasons for this omission, but it is hard not to notice how much dance-based museum installation carries forward a modernist legacy of abstraction, one that once served to legitimate and elevate modern dance as high art against the practices of popular, leftist, and social dance. Implicitly, if not necessarily, this tendency toward abstraction serves to universalize, and valorize, a white dancing body.[107] The concept of abstraction is not static across time, disciplines, and institutions, but the rhetoric and choreographic practice of abstraction in dance have served, in both historical and contemporary instances, to maintain the whiteness of modern dance. The rhetoric of abstraction is a veiled form of modernist thinking that upholds values of white supremacy.

In the 2012 Dance Research Journal special issue on Dance in the Museum, co-editors Mark Franko and André Lepecki state:

> The fact is that it seems to be impossible at this point to imagine a history of "visual" art after World War II without considering dance and choreography. This, of course, offers tremendous possibilities for dance to reimagine itself as well – to reimagine itself away from its longtime privileged apparatuses (the proscenium stage, the darkened theater, the evening-length program, the company) and thus launch a whole new project for choreography's and for dancing's imaginations.[108]

Many art historians have taken up the first part of this call as evidenced by the numerous monographs and articles written recently on the progenitors of post-modern dance from an art historical perspective. Examples include Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Simone Forti, and Carolee Schneemann.[109] In addition, Ramsay Burt's 2006 book *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* also examines the formative group in relationship to discourses in art history.[110] What the second part of Franko and Lepecki's call asks is for concert dance to imagine itself away from its institutional apparatuses, namely the theater and company models.[111] In addition, I think this call extends to dance scholars as well and challenges us to examine and open the canons of dance to include visual artists and examine the ways in which the legacy of modernism in concert dance has given rise to this moment.

Rather than focusing on canonical dance figures in the dance and museum discourse as evidence to support my claims around the legacy of modernism, I find it more productive to put pressure on the recursive history of dance and the museum and focus on what *isn't* there. Piper's work, I argue, serves as a microcosm to think through the racialized absences in the discourse on dance and the museum while at the same time providing an alternate genealogy for contemporary, cross-disciplinary, and cross-institutional dance.

As it happens, there is a long overlap amongst the genealogies of museums of and culturally specific social dance history. In the 1933 publication of *The American Magazine of*

---

[107] See Mark Franko (2002); Ellen Graff (1997); and Ramsay Burt (1998).
[108] Mark Franko and André Lepecki, "Editor's Note: Dance in the Museum," *Dance Research journal* 46, no. 3 (2015): 3.
[109] See Elise Archias (2016); Anna C. Chave (2000); Carrie Lambert-Beatty (2011); Susan Rosenberg (2012); Julia Bryan-Wilson (2015); Meredith Morse (2016); and Virginia Spivey (2009).
[110] Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (United Kingdom: Taylor and France, 2006).
[111] Mark Franko and André Lepecki, "Editor's Note: Dance in the Museum," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (2015).

Art, there is a brief article entitled "The Dance in Two Museums." The article features a quote from an article by modern dance pioneer, Ruth St. Denis. She is quoted as follows:

> I picture an auditorium within a museum in which the dances I am referring to – the movements, manners, gestures, mimetic expressions of the people whose cultural achievements are exhibited in the various departments of the museum – might be presented in the living arts of dance and drama…That such performances might be offered becomingly in the austere precincts of the museum appears to us reasonable.[112]

Ultimately, the unnamed author of "The Dance in Two Museums" agrees with St. Denis stating: "Just as music is finding an acknowledged place in museums of art, so does the dance, either from the aspect of interpretations of foreign cultures or from that of music read with the body as instrument, find its place – and a deserved place – in art museums."[113] Although St. Denis is advocating for a concurrent exhibition of cultural and indigenous dance and art, the core argument of the article is that dance, as a cultural artifact, deserves a place within the museum and that, further, the museum provides cultural and artistic legibility.

Despite the fact that the ephemerality of dance may seem at odds with the preservationist practices of the museum, the museum provides aesthetic legibility and historicization that is advantageous for dance practitioners, particularly those interested in securing their legacy. The museum can be a repository for multiple modes of preservation while also offering a new framework for creating and engaging with dance outside the dominance of a proscenium space or touring circuit. In terms of preservation, the museum provides a space to collect and display photo, video documentation, performance ephemera such as props and costumes, and historically contextualize work in terms of legacy and aesthetic genealogy. For artists working contemporarily, the museum can untether choreographers from the demands of the modern-day theater, namely, creating evening-length works, selling tickets, and adhering to a lighting grid. For example, choreographer Trajal Harrell speaks to the artistic freedom he finds in a museum space which allows him to craft work that is more nimble and able to move across a variety of institutional spaces. Further, the work he creates in a museum or gallery space can be part of a larger art ecosystem seen by a diverse array of art patrons and tourists thus relieving him of the demand to sell tickets.[114]

In returning to "The Dance in Two Museums," we can see that curators, companies, and choreographers are actively working to create more room for the "deserved" place of dance in the gallery and museum.[115] However, the recent museum turn in dance should not be surprising. As I will show, the "turn" aligns with the modernist values, namely abstraction, found in the codification of US-based modern dance during the interwar years; despite well-intentioned efforts, the residue of modernist rhetoric and hierarchies continues to persist in the dance world today.

The Continued Legacy of Modernism and Abstraction in Dance

---

[112] "The Dance in Two Museums," *The American Magazine of Art* 26, no. 1 (1933): 49.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Trajal Harrell, "Revisions in Time: Curating Across Time" (Panel Discussion, Berkeley, CA, November 16, 2015).
[115] "The Dance in Two Museums," *The American Magazine of Art* 26, no. 1 (1933): 49.

It has been well documented that modern dance was elevated to the status of "high art" through the conscious use of modernist language deployed by dance critics such as the late John Martin during the interwar period.[116] Through public lectures and his work at *The New York Times*, Martin's work was a type of critical pedagogy that gave befuddled audiences a new framework through which to understand the "new modern dance."[117] Martin's rhetoric valorized the abstractionist qualities of modern dance thus separating and elevating modern dance from the practice of dance as entertainment and/or pleasure, specifically the chorine and social dance. Modern dance thus demanded critical engagement and thought, not passive enjoyment.

In *The Modern Dance,* which comprises four lectures Martin delivered at the New School for Social Research in New York in 1931 and 1932, Martin explicates his intention in the foreword stating that the lectures were intended to "introduce a series of lecture-demonstrations on what was then a largely unfamiliar subject"[118] (Martin, np). The unfamiliar subject at the time was burgeoning modern dance performance. Further, in addressing audience confusion, he states:

> In considering the modern dance it is well to be perfectly clear on the use of this term, for the most common accusation that is hurled against the modern dance is that it has no power of beauty, which is an accusation decidedly removed from the truth. The more accurate statement of the case would be that some people have no aesthetic response to the modern dance. This puts the limitation on those individual minds where it belongs, instead of wiping out an entire movement.[119]

Here, we see that the "problem" of understanding modern dance is not the problem of modern dance as a genre or technique; rather it is in the mind of the spectator who cannot see the beauty and power of the form. Martin's pedagogy of critique aimed to educate the audience, in turn valorizing the form. His passionate advocacy is one of the reasons modern dance was able to reach the category of "high art."

In this series of lectures, modern dance is not only Martin's subject, but the means through which he espouses his aesthetic philosophies. Martin emphasizes formalist qualities such as rhythm, structure, and music, to name a few, thus building his criteria by adhering to modernist principles for legitimating "genuine art." Another aspect of his treatise is valorizing what he describes as "non-representational movement," which is part of the core of modern dance. "Non-representational movement" is one of the "problems" that audiences struggle with in terms of the "new dance" and which Martin spends considerable time describing. Although he doesn't name it as such, "non-representational movement" could be synonymic with "abstract movement."

To assuage audience discomfort with "non-representational movement," or what I see as "abstract" movement, Martin uses the Greek term "metakinesis" to propose that audiences focus on their kinesthetic response to this "new dance." In the theories he describes, there is a transfer between the dancer and the spectator wherein meaning can be found. He likens modern dance to music – there is a whole to be ascertained as the movement is the substance, not the representation of something else.[120] Thus, the "meaning" of the work is not based in the

---

[116] See also Mark Franko (2002); Ellen Graff (1997); and Ramsay Burt (1998).
[117] John Martin, *The Modern Dance* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., Inc., 1972).
[118] Ibid, np.
[119] Ibid, 36.
[120] Ibid, 7.

narrative, but rather through an exchange between bodies – those of the moving dancer and the still spectator. He states: "The maker of the movement has a purpose, an intention, in making the movement; the movement is transferred in effect by kinesthetic sympathy to the muscles of the spectator, and because he is used to associating movement with intention, he arrives by induction at the intention of the particular movement under consideration."[121] The transference of meaning is body to body and thus allows a way for modern dance to differentiate itself from other forms of performance focused on narrative or spectacle. In these two connotations, we might note at the time the advent of Balanchine's Americanized ballet and the chorine. It's not a transference between intellect or visuality, but firmly rooted in the body. This insistence perhaps set precedents in dance studies for how the study of western concert dance developed through its emphasis on the kinesthetic, rather than considering the context and content of what is being danced on stage and by whom. While Martin managed to legitimate dance as a modernist art form, there were arguably costs to the terms of legitimation. A wide swath of dance history – Negro dance, leftist dance, social and popular dance – was backgrounded in the attempt to situate modern dance in a modernist framework.

Moving away from rhetoric, Susan Manning, in her work *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion,* shows how modernist abstraction was used as a choreographic method to safeguard the whiteness and universality of modern dance.[122] Manning argues for the co-formulation of American modern dance alongside Black concert dance prior to and around mid-century despite its separation at the time, which enforced values of "high" and "low" culture. Manning utilizes the terms "metaphorical abstraction" and "mythic abstraction" to show how white modern choreographers utilized strategies of abstraction to maintain the whiteness of the form. For Manning, metaphorical minstrelsy was the ability for white dancers to reference non-white culture and dance, particularly in the 1930s. Manning states: "In contrast to blackface performers, modern dancers did not engage in impersonation. Rather their bodies became the vehicles for the tenors of nonwhite subjects. Modern dancers did not mimic others but presented an abstraction or personification of others."[123]. As an example, Manning highlights choreographer Helen Tamiris's *Negro Spirituals* where Tamaris performed "choreographic metaphors for the spirituals" playing with "moods of jubilation and lament [and] historically and culturally specific experiences of oppression and liberation."[124] Although Manning argues that the deployment of metaphorical minstrelsy was a practice that consciously appropriated and referenced Black culture for the benefit of white modern dance, Manning also notes that the practice was not considered explicitly racist at the time. In fact, Tamaris's use of Black spirituals was viewed as in solidarity with leftist, liberal, and antiracist politics at the time.

For Manning, the choreographic shift from metaphorical minstrelsy to mythic abstraction transpired as the separation of modern dance and "Negro dance" began to dissipate. Manning states that mythic abstraction

> staged universal subjects without the mediation of bodies marked as culturally other. Mythic abstraction involved a continuum. At one end of the continuum, choreographers represented dancers as actors in mythic dramas. At the other end of the continuum,

[121] Ibid, 85.
[122] Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
[123] Ibid, 10.
[124] Ibid.

> choreographers represented dancers as inhabitants of abstract worlds. Many works existed along the continuum, layering myth and abstraction. Yet nearly all works of mythic abstraction figured a universal subject and in this way redefined modern dancers' staging of whiteness.[125]

The movement between metaphorical minstrelsy and mythic abstraction, for Manning, is most apparent in Martha Graham's 1938 *American Document* and the dance's subsequent removal from her repertoire in the 1940s. *American Document* was patterned after a minstrel show and employed both metaphorical minstrelsy and mythic abstraction in the various sections of the piece. Manning argues that, in the sections that used mythic abstraction, "the choreography staged the white body as the universally American body, bypassing the mediation of subjects of color."[126] What becomes apparent in this formulation between metaphorical minstrelsy and mythic abstraction is that as "Negro dance" continued to make ascensions in the public sphere of concert dance, modern dance had to find ways in which to reinstate whiteness to further institutionalize modern dance as high modernist art. The process of abstraction in the reach toward universalism, Manning argues, continued to work its way through to Cunningham—even if he is historically posited as rebelling against Graham and other predecessors of modern dance. Manning's thorough analysis and argument for the continuous reinstatement of whiteness in modern dance, in contrast to Black dance, relates to the current discourse and presentation of dance in the museum. Paying close attention to the early formations of modern dance allows us to view modern dance as an aesthetic institution whose "purity" was maintained through a continual separation from dancers of color and the abstraction of ethnic and vernacular practices.

The modernist elevation of abstract dance against dance rooted in social or theatrical conventions is evident in the artists' work who has received the most attention in the recent museum-turn in dance. Dance scholar Ramsay Burt argues that choreographers from the post-modern era such as Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, and Lucinda Childs have received the most attention in terms of museological presentation because they "presented work with a minimalist formality that implied a cool impersonality" as opposed to artists such as David Gordon or Carolee Schneemann who have received less critical legitimacy because their work is more personal and theatrical.[127] Consider this assertion next to the one art historian Claire Bishop makes in her article "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA, and Whitney." Bishop argues that the museum privileges dance lineages that are non-narrative and lacking in emotion and character which in turn reinforces the museum's distrust of theatricality.[128] Bishop is clearly invoking theatricality in the sense of art critic Michael Fried. Fried infamously disparaged "theatricality" when discussing the advent of minimalism and the contingency of the minimalist work upon the interaction with the viewer. Extending this thought, we can also see this distrust of theatricality replayed in the critical demotion of social dance, a sidelining of practices of vernacular and popular dance, forms that are performative, interactive, and in dialogue with social spaces often separated from high art. For example, the 2010 exhibition *Move: Choreographing You* at the Hayward Gallery in London purported to focus on "visual artists and choreographers from the last 50 years who create sculptures and installations

---

[125] Ibid, 118.
[126] Ibid, 127.
[127] Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (United Kingdom: Taylor and France, 2006), 55.
[128] Claire Bishop, "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA, and Whitney," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (2014): 72.

that turn the audience into active participants, becoming more aware of their body – or even becoming a dancer."[129] The exhibition featured gallery favorites such as Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, Boris Charmatz, La Ribot, and Bruce Nauman, but not choreographers or artists who draw from social or vernacular dance such as Piper or Senga Nengudi or even more contemporary choreographers and artists such as Trajal Harrell, Ralph Lemon, and Holly Bass. The presence of these aforementioned artists would have signaled an acknowledgment that the incitement for one to "move" is not merely found in formalist frameworks, but also explicitly in the practices of social dance whose formations are predicated upon everyone being a dancer, not the dyad of artist/observer or choreographer/dancer.

The question of abstraction as tied to a whiteness has also come up recently in two shorter essays – one by choreographer Miguel Gutierrez and the other by dance scholar Jasmine Johnson. In the former, the title of Gutierrez's essay explicitly asks: "Does abstraction belong to white people?"[130] Through a series of personal reflections and anecdotes, Gutierrez builds to a resounding yes. Gutierrez sees abstraction present in the dance world today not by what he necessarily sees on stage, but by the ways in which colleagues and mentors talk about their processes. In one compelling section, Gutierrez writes about being in a workshop with Thomas DeFrantz entitled "The Afterlives of Slavery: Experimental Performance and the Specters of Race." Gutierrez reflects on a disjuncture when one of the participants, a prominent white choreographer, spoke about creating dance from a place of motion and kinetics. Her comment contrasted with that of other choreographers of color speaking explicitly about race and identity. The dissonance between herself and the others becomes evident when she approaches Gutierrez aside and states that she doesn't know how one can *dance* these ideas. Gutierrez ruminates:

> I'm not sure exactly what she is referring to. Afro-pessimism? Race? Ideas in general? I haltingly try to tell her, "Well, um, I sort of think some people are already doing this…have been doing this…" To explain this to her feels so awkward. Obvious. I feel suddenly thrust back to the edge of the chasm – how can she not understand that for some people it's not about a "choice" to make dances about this?[131]

While just one example, this anonymous choreographer's focus on motion and kinetics harkens back to Martin's rhetoric, as if the pathways and spaces in which bodies move are not raced, as if dance can ever merely be about neutral bodies in motion. In Gutierrez's examples, white artists are able to abstract themselves as white individuals from race and their work is able to stand outside of markers of identity: universal and unmarked. Gutierrez's framework anchors abstraction not to a specific genre or technique of dance, but rather as a method toward maintaining white supremacy in dance.

Dance scholar, Jasmine Johnson, also queries to whom abstraction belongs.[132] However, Johnson works from the inverse, questioning not whether abstraction belongs to white people, but why the abstractionist framework of Black women dancers goes unrecognized. Johnson analyzes the music video "Cranes" by R&B artist, Solange, noting the seemingly quotidian and pedestrian ways Solange and the attendant group of Black women around her move and dance

---

[129] "Move: Choreographing You," e-flux online, October 19, 2010, https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/36332/move-choreographing-you/.
[130] Miguel Gutierrez, "Does Abstraction Belong to White People?" *Bomb Magazine* (2018).
[131] Ibid.
[132] Jasmine Johnson, "Solange and Her Dance," *Aster(ix)* (2016).

with one another that appears to be unusual or unprecedented. Johnson highlights the ways that post-modern choreographers never had to attend to the racialization of their movement, thus their practices were unmarked, read: white, and they became easily positioned against the more nationalist Black choreographers working at the time. Thus, Black dancers who employed the abstract choreographic strategies of post-modern dance, namely non-virtuosic and pedestrian movement, were seen as not Black enough. What Johnson recognizes in Solange is the expectation that Black women bodies move in what she states is either "the moral shaming that attends twerking or the virtuous awe afforded to black women who master European forms like ballet."[133] Johnson's dichotomy is easy to see in contemporary examples such as the scorn shown to rapper and former stripper, Cardi B, and the adulation given to American Ballet Theatre principal dancer, Misty Copeland. Johnson foregrounds the expectations that Black women move in a particular way. Whereas the simple, unadorned movement of white bodies gets heralded as abstract and thus elevated to high art, the same is not offered to Black women.

Modernism, as an aesthetic movement, validated the concept of "abstraction" as a marker of aesthetic legitimacy in the codification of modern dance. Although, we might not consider the works that Martin deemed "abstract" in the same way today -- for example many view Graham's work as overtly narrative today-- the rhetoric of abstraction continues to reverberate across the institution and legacy of modern dance. Abstraction, as an adjective, does not remain attached to one type of aesthetic, but is rather a discursive framework that shifts across time to uphold values of Euro-centricity such as "universality" and "neutrality." Bringing together the voices of Burt, Bishop, Gutierrez, and Johnson highlights how the modernist legacy of abstraction continues to produce expectations around whose body can move in what ways. Further, these racialized expectations determine the perceived heirs to aesthetic lineages and thus the recipients of institutional legitimacy. Although contemporary Black male choreographers such as Trajal Harrell and Ralph Lemon have had ease in crossing the thresholds between proscenium and gallery spaces, their lineages are often grounded in a white post-modern dance lineage, rather than seeing work, such as Piper's, as antecedents, or at least in relationship, to their respective practices. This leads one to wonder: does the oversight of Piper relate to the difficulty in framing the work of Black women artists as abstract?

Despite the fact that Piper's work draws from the abstractionist visual art genealogies of minimalism and conceptualism, Piper has been missed by the discourse on dance in the museum. In my review, the modernist ethos described above, that continues to validate abstract dance against dance rooted in vernacular and social dance traditions, continues to invisibilize even well-renowned artists within this genealogy.

The Lessons of Funk

As I have stated in the introduction, dance has been central throughout Adrian Piper's oeuvre as both medium and object. By medium, I mean dance, but specifically Black social and popular dance, is the material through which she situates layers of embodied, performative, and racialized meaning. By object, I mean that the specific dance forms she uses become an object of analysis rather than an abstract or amorphous means to an end. Although dance permeates almost every decade of her work, her scholarship in philosophy and yoga practice has received considerably more attention. The absence of scholarly focus on Piper's use of dance is glaring. What does the lack of attention on the use of dance in Piper's oeuvre reveal about blind spots in

[133] Ibid.

the recent scholarship dance and art history? One possibility to consider is the uneasy way in which Piper's dance styles translate into recent art historical scholarship on dance. However, as I have highlighted the recent attention of art historical dance scholarship has focused on artists associated with what is termed "minimal dance" in art history or "post-modern" in dance studies, namely artists working in the 1960s, such as Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti, who were inspired by and worked closely with minimalist sculptors at the time. Minimalist or post-modern dance artists created works and improvisational practices that were rooted in artistic democracy and technical accessibility in an effort to challenge the hierarchy and virtuosity present in modern dance. The choreographic strategies and values in post-modern dance yielded dance perceived as "abstract," as Johnson notes earlier, because they are seen not as virtuosic, technical, or narrative.[134] Further, post-modern dance tends to appear simple and unadorned despite the complexity of the choreographic or improvisational structures.[135]

Piper, whose artistic practice was also birthed by the advent of minimalism in visual art, works differently than post-modern dance artists in that she is not using dance to challenge the parameters of a modern dance lineage. Rather, she elevates the practices of everyday social dance in the gallery space. She has used the practices of go-go dancing (*Some Reflective Surfaces)*, Black social dance (*Funk Lessons, Aretha Franklin Catalyst,* and *Please, God*), solo dance (*The Mythic Being: Dancing* and *Adrian Moves to Berlin*) and participatory dance (*Shiva Dances with the Art Institute of Chicago)* as material through which to explore racial stereotypes, appropriation, transcendence, and voyeurism. Piper is not a choreographer, per se, but dance is one of her many mediums. Thus, her work situates social and popular dance practices as an aesthetic object to be analyzed.

The use of dance in Piper's work is marked by a duality of potential and doubt – at once dance can be seen as celebratory, participatory, and fun. At the same time, the presentation of Black dance and music in the gallery space highlights the history of Black culture, in particular minstrelsy, used as pleasurable entertainment for the white dominant culture. This duality is present in the works I describe at the beginning of the chapter. *Please, God* (1990), features a group of young Black schoolgirls performing the running man and other popular dances from the 1990s in front of a reflective storefront on an unnamed city street. Their movement is background to a small scrolling text atop the scream that is pleading to God for these girls' protection from racial harm and violence. In addition, the voice of Billie Holiday provides an anachronistic soundtrack, dampening the joy of the girls' movements.

Piper's autobiographical dance piece, *Adrian Moves to Berlin* (2007), is also marked by duality. Despite the celebratory dancing Piper performs, the broader context of the work gives the viewer more to consider. *Adrian Moves to Berlin* (2007) is a play on both her physical relocation to Berlin (Piper moved to Berlin upon discovering her name had been put on the United States' "No Fly List") and the physical expression of that cross-Atlantic exile, which one might assume as celebratory. Piper dances for an hour, one upbeat song moving into the next, she appears unbothered by the bewilderment and indifference to those passing by and the camera itself. Who is this performance for? Is it a celebration of: Her move to Germany? Her self-inflicted exile from the US state surveillance that marked her body and associated activity as suspicious?

These examples highlight how on the surface, the dance which Piper employs can be read as celebratory, but when one considers the broader context in *Adrian Moves to Berlin* or the

[134] Ibid.

[135] See also Catherine Woods (2007); Carrie Lambert-Beatty (2008); and Rebecca Chaleff (2018).

juxtaposition of text in *Please, God*, the semblance of joy is punctured. This complicated duality is present in *Funk Lessons*. The contrast between the affect produced by watching funk dance and its subverted meanings and histories, particularly in *Funk Lessons*, but also in Piper's use of dance broadly, relates to the dual transcripts of "public" and "private" meaning that dance scholar Thomas DeFrantz states is always present in Black social dances.[136] For DeFrantz, the "public" meaning relates to the reception by an "immobile" or white audience where the dance or performance merely provides "a largely unmodulated measure of pleasure."[137] While the "private" meaning of Black social dances is one of protest and resistance understood by only those initiated in Black social dance styles. For DeFrantz, the duality between the "public" and "private," or "amalgamation of pleasure and critique," form the basis of the power present within hip hop dance forms and recent 20th century Black social dance.[138] What DeFrantz articulates as a dual transcript, or insider/outsider knowledge, also relates to the humor and other layers of pleasure found in watching *Funk Lessons*, namely watching white people trying, and often failing, at embodying the "coolness" of black culture. However funny one may find the intention and display of *Funk Lessons*, Piper's performative lecture never fades from treating the seemingly "low-brow" funk dance with professorial earnestness despite the subtext running at the bottom of the video which often pokes fun at the event itself. When Piper begins to talk about the presumption that white people can't dance, the subtext tells the viewer *White people can't dance,* but as Piper works to debunk the myth, the word "can't" changes to "can." The humor involved throughout the piece presents doubt regarding the earnestness of Piper's intent – is *Funk Lessons* satirical or sincere? Or could it be both in speaking at once to an immobile audience and a black audience much like the form of Black social dance itself?

Funk Lessons has an air of sincerity and earnestness due to its pedagogic format – Piper is indeed providing a lesson and the mainly white participants appear to be actively listening and rehearsing the steps. Yet, there are different viewpoints from which to view Piper's pedagogic framework. From the vantage of social practice, *Funk Lessons* can be read as a pedagogic project in the vein of the post-2000 social practice work art historian Claire Bishop describes in *Artificial Hells*.[139] To understand contemporary pedagogic social practice, Bishop uses the work of artist Joseph Beuys as a precursor to the post-2000 work she analyzes. Beuys created pedagogic art through his prolific lectures (where he was the main transmitter of knowledge and critique) and the development of his educational center, Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research. Beuys was concerned with educating a working class, and much of the pedagogic work that Bishop describes from the 1960s and 1970s had similar concerns. Bishop notes that these artists aligned their aesthetic interests with the politics of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* published in 1968. Freire was similarly concerned with the uplifting of the masses through a critical pedagogy that viewed learners as vital contributors to their education and social standings. However, Piper reverses this order of transmission by bringing funk – a Black working class dance form – to elite white audiences. Piper is not concerned with the education of the "poor" or "working class," but rather educating the white majority on the culture of Black dance in attempts to challenge the usual flow of appropriation.

---

[136] Thomas DeFrantz, "The Black Beat Made Visible: Hip Hop Dance and Body Power," in *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, ed. André Lepecki (Middletown: Wesleyan University, 2004), 64.
[137] Ibid, 65.
[138] Ibid, 66.
[139] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).

At the same, *Funk Lessons* is similar to Beuys's pedagogic work in that Piper creates an educational space where Piper, the main artist, is the transmitter of knowledge as opposed to an outsourced professional. The model of artist as educator is in contrast to the post-2000 examples that Bishop highlights where the work of educating or facilitating is often reliant on selected professionals outside of the art world. In this latter model, the artist is then responsible for conceiving the structures and organizational partnerships within which the work will transpire, whereas in Piper's model she has the educational onus of the material. In fact, this pedagogical approach is present in much of her work and might relate to her dual professions as an academic professor and artist. In general, her work and performative self often carries a professional demeanor and even-keeled form of address. Consider her 1988 work, *Cornered,* in which she confronts the viewer, presumably a white individual, about the history of miscegenation in the United States, highlighting her own identity as a mixed-race person. In the video Piper sits behind a desk dressed conservatively in a blue blouse and pearl necklace. Her tone is even and deliberate, akin to a public service announcement despite the invocation about the likelihood that we are all mixed race. Like *Funk Lessons*, her matter-of-fact demeanor presents an assumption of rationality and earnestness. Piper's performance in both *Cornered* and *Funk Lessons* begs the question if learning a cultural dance or about the history of miscegenation could undo and redress the history and continued presence of anti-Black racism and violence.

In addition to the scholarly framework Piper provides in *Funk Lessons*, there is the actual dance lesson at hand. Piper's attempt to "make accessible" the medium of funk to a white audience recalls the racialized history of dance lessons in the United States. In *Modern Moves: Dancing Race During the Ragtime and Jazz Eras,* dance scholar Danielle Robinson meticulously documents and articulates the ways in which the forms of early 20th century Black social dance were taken up, performed, and taught by white dancers.[140] Further, Robinson shows how this cross-cultural mode of practice formed the base of the ballroom dance industry and modern-day dance studios. Robinson asserts that during the industrial era, many white dancers used industrial era techniques – publishing in magazines, partnering with businesses, endorsing products – to commodify social dance techniques into a product and industry that is still alive today.[141] At the heart of this practice was appropriation. Robinson states:

> This period established the practice among European Americans of borrowing, stealing, and/or being influenced by dance forms thought to be black. In this way, early twentieth-century dancing laid the groundwork for swing, rock and roll, disco, and hip hop's cross-cultural moves; it helped normalize dancing "otherness" in American culture.[142]

Piper reverses the historical order of appropriation in the teaching of culturally Black dance to white people, from jazz to tap to swing to hip-hop. Instead, Piper explicitly offers the dance and music of funk to a white audience as a form of intercultural education staking a claim in the ownership and dissemination of the form. Yet, Piper's reversal of transmission, as interesting as it may be, is also unsettling. Is Piper merely making Black culture palatable to a white audience? Is her lesson not simply an enactment of respectability politics and the corresponding assumption

[140] Danielle Robinson, "Modern Moves: Dancing Race During the Ragtime and Jazz Eras," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[141] Ibid, 13.
[142] Ibid, 13-14.

that if white culture is able to "understand" Black culture then anti-Black racism and violence might somehow dissipate?

Thus far I have proposed viewing *Funk Lessons* through a variety of lenses – as an absence in the dance and museum discourse (despite Piper's genealogical alignment with minimalism), as a duality oscillating between pleasure and critique, and as a pedagogic framework that reverses the transmission of knowledge. By extension, I would like to consider *Funk Lessons* as not a means to an end, but a performative construct that displays an object: the idiom of funk. In *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Performance* by Uri McMillan, McMillan uses the work of Piper alongside Black avant-garde artist, Howardena Pindell, fugitive slave, Ellen Craft, and the exhibited "ancient negress," Joice Heth, to showcase how Black women have utilized the means of performance to become objects, thus performing objecthood.[143] McMillan states: "[P]erforming objecthood becomes an adroit method of circumventing prescribed limitations on black women in the public sphere while staging art and alterity in unforeseen places."[144] Objecthood, for McMillan, is a performative strategy in which one becomes an object toward personal political ends. Again, McMillan states:

> I argue for rescrambling the dichotomy between objectified bodies or embodied subjects by reimagining objecthood as a performance-based method that disrupts presumptive knowledges of black subjectivity. What happens, I ask, if we reimagine black objecthood as a way toward agency rather than its antithesis, as a strategy rather than simply a primal site of injury?[145]

In McMillan's framework, which necessarily challenges the art historical understanding of object and objectification as negative, he articulates political potential for Black women performance artists to "perform objecthood" toward emancipatory ends.

In his chapter on Piper, he explores the historical conditions and emancipatory possibilities present in works such as *Mythic Being* (1973-1975) and *Aretha Franklin Catalyst* (1971-1972). Both performance art pieces are comprised of multiple discrete public performances wherein Piper explores the gendered and racialized responses to her performances of drag and Black social dance respectively. In particular, I am interested in *Aretha Franklin Catalysis* in which Piper memorized Aretha Franklin's *Respect* and subsequently danced to her internalized version of the song in public. Piper describes: "The piece consisted of my listening to the song in my mind and simultaneously dancing to it. I did a mixture of the Bugaloo, the Jerk, the Lindy, the Charleston, and the Twist, with a high degree of improvisation."[146] For McMillan, Piper's use of dance is "a method to explore objecthood's limits and render her physicality a moldable, plastic presence."[147] Thus, in McMillan's estimation, Piper's physical body is the object and dance is the vehicle for exploring the varied reactions from both the public and herself. However, I wonder what it means if we consider the dance itself the object? Piper explicitly names several social dances that she performed in *Aretha Franklin Catalyst* thus taking

[143] Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: NYU Press, 2015).
[144] Ibid, 7.
[145] Ibid, 9.
[146] Ibid, 119.
[147] Ibid, 125.

racialized dance forms out of the private physical space to which it is germane, such as the club, and placing it in an open street for public consumption.

Piper employs a similar strategy in *Funk Lessons* juxtaposing Black vernacular dance in the predominately white gallery space under the guise of making the form accessible to a white audience. What would it mean to consider funk dance the object rather than the means to something else? Understanding dance as a method, and not an end in and of itself, posits dance as a vehicle of expression or an avenue for transcendence or transformation. Obviously, dance is considered an expressive art, but I am curious about how the assumption that dance is inherently about internal experience usurps dance forms from their cultural and historic specificity. Put another way, dance is never just movement, dance styles or the ways one moves are dependent on the training one receives as well as the expectations society has for your body. So, although I think it is useful to take Piper to heart when she states that the purpose of teaching the dance is to "restructure people's social identities," for those of us not participating and witnessing from the inside of the gallery, Piper is also allowing the viewer to see the contours of funk as an aesthetic? Object.[148]

Scholar Diarmuid Costello, in his chapter "Xenophobia, Stereotypes, and Empirical Acculturation: Neo-Kantianism in Adrian Piper's Performance-Based Conceptual Art," tracks Piper's meta-performances alongside her use of and investment in Kantian philosophy and proposes a similar formulation in positioning Piper's use of dance as a means to an end.[149] By analyzing Piper's more recent participatory dance-based work, *Shiva Dances* (2004), alongside the original and meta-performances of *Funk Lessons,* Costello states these works fulfill

> a role that is (in Kantian terms) a condition of the subsumption of particulars under universals, and doing so by bringing individuals into alignment or harmony with the feeling of others, Piper's gamble may be that the experience of dance can realign, so to speak, our empirical conceptions and the judgments that accompany them.[150]

Costello positions Piper's participatory dances as a method toward collective cohesion that can potentially realign our biases or judgments. Further, that collective movement can be a transcendental experience that has the potential do reparative cross-cultural work. Viewed at more than thirty years after the documentation, does Piper – as Costello suggests – really believe in the premise that funk, or any African-American vernacular form, is something that can be simply taught and learned? Is there truly a reconciliatory moment in learning how to combine the two-step and head nod in coordination to the music of Bootsy Collins? Can dance be a bridge for racial divide?

Many scholars have articulated the malleability of *funk* as a theory and practice.[151] Robert Farris Thompson traces the term from the Ki-Kongo word "lu-fuki" meaning body odor, yet Tony Bolden notes how the term, once associated with degrading stereotypes about Black people

---

[148] Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Volume I, Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992* (Cambridge, MIT Press: 1999), 198.

[149] Diarmuid Costello, "Xenophobia, Stereotypes, and Empirical Acculturation: Neo-Kantianism in Adrian Piper's Performance-Based Conceptual Art," in *Adrian Piper: A Reader*, eds. Cornelia Butler and David Platzker (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018).

[150] Ibid, 204

[151] See also L.H. Stallings (2015).

has become re-shaped through Gates's practice of "signifyin.'"[152] For Bolden, funk is at once associated with vigorous creation, hence the perspiration and odor, thus fusing leisure and labor. He clarifies further: "funkativity bespeaks a kinetic epistemology comprised of dynamic principles stored in a virtual archive of cultural memory, replete with (pre)configuring riffs and rhymes, twists and turns, shakes and breaks that are perpetually (re)sampled and (re)mixed in a manner comparable to electricity."[153] Funk is not only a vernacular of dance and music, but it is an embodied way of knowing. Thus, funk is not only a series of steps; although Piper does break down the movements, funk is tied to the Black cultural practices of re-mix and sampling – an ability to maneuver, change, and adapt to the dominancy of whiteness. For Piper, funk is modular; it can be taken apart and put back together again, in an endless number of ways. Yet, when approaching funk as epistemology, Piper's proposition, that white people's social identities could be potentially restructured and bias absolved, appears to fall flat.

Much has been written about the complicated proposition that dance can be used toward reparative cultural ends. SanSan Kwan highlights this difficulty in contemporary works such as *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* choreographed by Jérôme Bel.[154] The 2005 work is both a dance lesson and dialogue between French choreographer, Bel, and Thai dancer, Pichet Klunchun. Although often seen as a celebrated and highly successful work, Kwan highlights how *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* often reinforces stereotypical dichotomies of the East and West. Dance scholar Clare Croft's monograph, *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange*, tracks how dance has been used as a method for diplomacy by the United States government from the Cold-War era to the present.[155] Present in Croft's work are the unsurprising skirmishes and unease in the assumption that dance can translate easily into different geographic and cultural contexts, or that dance is a skill that one can simply "teach" or "learn" and not a complicated system of cultural heritage and history embedded in bodies over time. Both Kwan and Croft's work shows that despite proficiency or eagerness in learning the dance of the "Other," the acquisition of bodily technique does not dispel the racial presumptions and pejoratives associated with specific types of movement and bodies. In fact, many Black cultural thinkers have shown us that movement is always racialized or marked. Poet Amiri Baraka has said: "A way of walking is as profound as a system of judgment."

In returning to *Funk Lessons*, there is a Matryoshka doll effect, wherein there are expanding layers of watching and doing. As viewers we are not only taking in Piper's lesson, but also watching the outcome of her pedagogy. Piper may be pushing her white participants to dance funk and challenging whether white people can indeed change their social identity or biases. However, viewers are not actively participating in the lesson. Instead we are voyeurs of the experiment and thus not privy to the embodiment of funk. Yet, as the work plays in the gallery, viewers are being offered funk as an object, a thing that has edges and curves, rhythms and qualities that gives funk shape. So, instead of positioning dance toward an exploratory process or reconciliatory ends, what does it mean to engage with dance as is, as an object? Despite its continual disappearance returns and reforms, dance is a system of interlocking and

---

[152] Tony Bolden, "Theorizing the Funk: An Introduction" from *The Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture,* ed. Tony Boldon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 15.
[153] Ibid.
[154] SanSan Kwan, "Even as We Keep Trying: An Ethics of Interculturalism in Jérôme Bel's Pichet Klunchun and Myself," *Theatre Survey* 55, no. 2 (2014): 185-201.
[155] Clare Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

changeable movements that continuously connect back to a historical time, place, and people[156] Is a focus on these qualities possible and, perhaps, key to the potential of placing dance in a museum?

Conclusion

In a short chapter on the Pentecostal roots of Sly and the Family Stone's music, Mark Anthony Neal writes about the multicultural idealism embedded within Sly Stone's (Sylvester Stewart) music.[157] Stewart's parents were part of the Great Migration, leaving Texas for California before Stewart was born and thus his music was born out of San Francisco during the post-civil rights movement. Neal notes how the single, *Stand!*, is emblematic of the multiculturalist vision of the post-civil rights era. Yet, he continues:

> [T]here was an element to *Stand!*, particularly in the case of "Everyday People," that reflected the earnest naivete of Stewart's vision, which when removed from the Haight-Ashbury scene and others like it, was dangerously out of sync with political realities at the dawn of Richard Nixon's administration. The soundtrack was surely different just across the bay in Oakland.[158]

Stewart's vision was the use of funk as a bridge to multiculturalism despite the continued realities of racial oppression. The presentation of *Funk Lessons* in 1984 may be seen as transpiring after the height of funk music and dance in the 1970s, yet there is a reclamation process that Piper is taking part of in educating audiences in how contemporary bands such as the Talking Heads and The Clash who were profiting off the appropriation of the sounds of funk. Piper also appears to approach funk, like Stewart, as a pathway toward reconciling racial conflict. As Stewart sings in *Everyday People*, in an appeal to a collective humanity, "We got to live together."

[156] See Danielle Goldman (2010) for more on the relationship between dance studies and ephemerality.
[157] Mark Anthony Neal, "Prelude from the Funkmaster," from *The Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture,* ed. Tony Boldon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[158] Ibid, 6.

Chapter 3
Relational Choreography and AIDS Activist Art: Reconsidering *Still/Here*

"The profoundest questions that I can ask can be answered with other people who are not in the dance world. Literally the issue of life and death: what does it look like, what does it feel like, taste like, smell like." Bill T. Jones, Still/Here with Bill Moyers[159]

Introduction

This chapter focuses on choreographer Bill T. Jones's 1994 work, *Still/Here*. A now canonical work, *Still/Here* is emblematic of the contentious debates around the role and subject of art during the AIDS crisis and the concurrent culture wars in the United States. To develop the work, Jones travelled across the country conducting "Survivor Workshops" with people with terminal illnesses, which were subsequently documented by PBS's Bill Moyers.[160] If we consider performance as research and development, the workshops were Jones's research. From the workshops, Jones sourced movement and narratives that were then refined in Jones's development phase and placed on the bodies of his dancers. Jones additionally collaborated with the late artist, Gretchen Bender, who designed the media environment which featured roving video screens of the participants and abstracted images. The score was performed live by musicians Odetta, Lark String Orchestra, and Vernon Reid.

The presence of death, and specifically death by AIDS, is an integral part of Jones's company and work in multiple ways. The first is through his adherence to the name of Zane and his company, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company, despite the death of Zane in 1988 from AIDS. The company was founded by Jones and Zane in 1982 after 11 years as a duet and continues today with Jones at the helm. Secondly, although Jones was criticized for bringing "sick" people to the stage in *Still/Here*, it was not the first time he had done so. *D-Man in the Waters* (1989) was a work created specifically for company member, Demian Acquavella aka D-Man. By the time the work premiered Acquavella, who had AIDS, was so physically ravaged by the disease that he did not have the strength to perform. In one of the performances, Jones physically carried Acquavella onstage to support him as Acquavella performed his solo. Ann Cooper Albright writes about her experience viewing the piece:

> I remember seeing this performance at the Joyce Theater in New York City and being amazed at the stunning differences between the smooth, quick, powerful dancing of Arthur Aviles (who won a Bessie award for his dancing in this work) and the spasmodic gestures of Acquavella's upper body (he was suffering from milopathy (sic), an AIDS-related condition that affects the nervous system). Watching his frail body struggle among all the glowing, healthy, virtuosic bodies of his fellow company members made me realize how deeply disability and the grotesque body are at once embedded (and repressed) in dance.[161]

---

[159] *Bill T. Jones: Still/Here with Bill Moyers*, dir. Bill Moyers (1997, Public Broadcasting Service).
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ann Cooper Albright, *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance,* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 75.

Albright's reflection highlights the ways in which the disabled or "grotesque" body is a haunting absence on the proscenium stage. The specter of illness and death is always present despite the representation of "health" through the athleticism of dancers. Since Acquavella's death, *D-Man in the Waters* remains a seminal piece in the company's repertoire, yet his solo remains unfilled. Yet again, another absent presence (or present absence) in the repertoire and institution of the company.

Arlene Croce's volatile critique of *Still/Here* as "victim art" has been much debated, both in mainstream press at the time and in dance studies subsequently.[162] In this chapter, I use the now all-too familiar debates spearheaded by Croce as a way to paint a picture of the cultural, aesthetic, and economic shifts in concert dance in the 1980s and 1990s that were also prevalent in the artworld and AIDS activism. Most importantly, in creating a web of connections across artists and time, I demonstrate how Croce's rhetoric echoes in surprising places within the dance world and anachronistically in social practice. In attempt to shift away from the pejorative label of "victim art," I use the lenses of AIDS cultural analysis and relational aesthetics to propose a new term, "relational choreography," bringing to light overlooked connections between relational aesthetics and AIDS activist art. I use the framework of "relational choreography" to trouble and expand assumptions about the insertion of "untrained" or "non-professional" bodies onstage. Finally, to establish the parameters of "relational choreography" I move between the documentation of the workshops and the performance itself, demonstrating how the form of the work is grounded in relationality, collectivity, and care.

Still/Here **and AIDS Dance**

Still/Here, as a final work, could be described as a staged diptych. Most traditionally conceived of as a religious painting or document, a diptych is a work of art that is bound together by a hinge, two parts of a whole, often able to close on itself as if a book. The work tells stories and offers vignettes of the lives of individuals with terminal illness. *Still/Here* is comprised of two sections: the first being *Still* and the second being *Here.* When Jones states the title of the work to Bill Moyers he says the word "still" and then gestures largely with his arm to imply the forward slash before uttering "here," marking the forward slash as an embodied hinge. In the roughly 25 years that have passed since *Still/Here* was performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, *Still* has become the more iconic of the two sections with its flowing white costumes, emotive soundscape filled with Odetta's piercing voice, and gentle group lifts that create an ethereal air. There is a rage to be found in *Still*, but it is not to be found in the choreography.

Religious associations with diptychs also make it an apt comparison for *Still/Here*. In early Christian literature, diptychs were used to keep record of the living on one side and the deceased on the other. A diptych, in this sense, is not a static document, but rather records the movement between the living and the dead. Although the dance itself is focused on a sense of survival (hence the titles *Still/Here* and "Survivor Workshops"), Jones is likewise concerned with both the living and the dead, life and death, and the movement between. In a 2011 lecture on the history of *Still/Here,* Jones notes that many of the Survivor Workshop participants didn't live long enough to see the premiere of the work or have since passed.[163] An HIV+ diagnosis in

[162] Arlene Croce, "Discussing the Undiscussable," *The New Yorker Magazine* (1994): 54-60.
[163] Bill T. Jones, "A Meditation on Still/Here Lecture," November 14, 2011, University of Virginia Medical Center Hour, Charlottesville, VA, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Onh3udBsDrU.

1994 was thought to be imminent death. Jones was distinctly interested in drawing knowledge from individuals facing their own mortality.

If the production of *Still/Here* is a diptych as an official document, perhaps the workshops are the palimpsest. As I will show later when comparing the two, the workshops imbue the work as gestures, narratives, and moving images become transfigured on the stage. Not only is Jones actively shaping the material the participants produce, but the participants themselves are borrowing from each other, transforming their stories into a collection, making it difficult to attribute movement to specific individuals. Their gestures and stories move and morph through one another and Jones's company members, taking on different meanings.

The documentary showcases Jones leading a diverse range of individuals through movement and narrative exercises, posing a variety of prompts aimed at getting the participants to both talk and move. The testimonies and accompanying movement are equally profound and mundane. He asks the participants to walk the group through their life making a physical and narrative path that leads the group from one significant point to the next. He asks the participants to imagine, and describe, the day of their death. To this last question, as participants balk or hesitate, Jones presses: who's with you, what does it smell like, what do you hear? One woman vividly describes what she imagines. She states it is early evening, about the time that "Roseanne" comes on. She wants to go out with some laughter. Her family is cramped into her bedroom, and her husband tells her he will always love her. Another woman describes hearing bells in the distance as she is surrounded by her sons. She says she's trying not to cry; she doesn't want to make them sad. Another man describes hearing waves on the shore and a foghorn. Jones presses, "what happens next?" He says he joins the waves on the shore and the foghorn.

When Jones is prompted by Moyers to do a similar exercise, Jones easily obliges and walks Moyers through his life from his youth in Wayland, NY to his athletic proclivity as a teen, to the moments he fell in love: first with performing and then with his future romantic and artistic partner, Arnie Zane. He grits as he recounts the moment he unknowingly revealed his HIV+ status to a reporter, who then publicly outed him thus altering his public persona. The segment closes as Jones recounts Zane's death and the breeze he felt pass as Zane took his last breath. He ends with a recitation of Hare Krishna.

Still/Here is an oft-cited piece in both the canon of AIDS-based performance and dance history for a number of reasons.[164] It is one of several artists and artworks that have become shorthand for the culture wars in the 1980s and 1990s from Andre Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987), to the cancellation of Robert Mapplethorpe's show at the Corcoran Gallery of Art (1989), to the debates over the obscenity in art and the NEA Four. *Still/Here* is one of many touchstones of the period that ensued large debates about the place of politics and the presentation of "sick" bodies in art. That said, although *Still/Here* is cited ubiquitously in both the histories of the culture wars and on AIDS performance, it often serves as a parenthetical or is not seen separate from the debates that surround it.

Despite Jones's vehement denial that *Still/Here* is about AIDS, it is one of many canonical AIDS dances, but one of the few that featured explicitly terminally ill people as

[164] David Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 20-24. Although Gere has strict guidelines for what constitutes an "AIDS dance," Gere argues that *Still/Here* nonetheless "silently speaks" AIDS and gets situated as an AIDS dance because that is how critics and viewers have contextualized the work.

performers. However, as we know from the work of disability scholars, the line between wellness and illness is often an arbitrary social construction. Nonetheless, a framework such as this exists in *Still/Here* as well as in choreographer Anna Halprin's AIDS-related work. Halprin, whose work is discussed in length in chapter 1, also took up a community-based dance initiative that utilized dance as a healing and somatic practice for those afflicted with HIV and AIDS. Her work, albeit as a white heterosexual woman, specifically turned the "sick" into performers of their own solos. Differently, the "sick" in *Still/Here* work in two different ways. First, they provided narrative continuity to the piece, their stories edited to provide vignettes around a variety of crucial, perhaps universal, moments and feelings for those with diagnosed terminal illnesses. These include the moment of diagnosis, treatment, feelings of guilt at surviving, and contemplation and acceptance of death. Although Halprin's work veered into the therapeutic – using dance as a method for healing, not necessarily toward creating evening-length work, in one way the survivor workshops also fall into a type of therapeutic practice. In another way, they can be situated as extractive as is the critique of much social practice.

The Culture Wars: Theatricality, Funding, Criticism, and the Rise of "Victim Art"

As noted, *Still/Here* cannot be known separately from the critical debates that surrounded it and continue to resonate today. In the December 1994 issue of The New Yorker, dance critic, Arlene Croce, wrote a scathing review *prior* to the premiere of *Still/Here* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.[165] The review is shocking not only in Croce's personal attacks against Jones, but in the fact that Croce never witnessed any of the dance. In her "non-review," "Discussing the Undiscussable," Croce defends her decision to not see *Still/Here* by stating:

> A critic has three options: (1) to see and review; (2) to see and not review; (3) not to see. A fourth option – to write about what one has not seen – becomes possible on strange occasions like "Still/Here," from which one feels excluded by reason of its express intentions, which are unintelligible as theatre.[166]

From her last claim, that a critic can choose to not see a work and still review it, Croce begins a series of tirades about issues ranging from changing aesthetics in dance to the inclusion of "sick people" in art. Her rants ultimately serve her most personal concern: her perception of the increasing irrelevance of the critic.

Croce's antagonism toward Jones began in 1982 in regards to his work *Social Intercourse: Pilgrim's Progress*. In Jones's recollection of *Social Intercourse* criticism, he states: "Reviews were thoughtful, but it was then that Arlene Croce in *The New Yorker* first condemned Arnie and me as stars, saying that 'Bill T. Jones has marched the New Narcissism right into the fever swamp'… I took this criticism as my marching orders."[167] And he did, naming the company's subsequent work and first commission for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, *Fever Swamp*. Croce's criticism speaks to a general anxiety in the concert dance world of the entrance of "identity politics" into dance during the 1980s and 1990s.[168] *Still/Here*, however, served as a cultural scapegoat where fears about bodies outside the "classical" mold, specifically

[165] Arlene Croce, "Discussing the Undiscussable," *The New Yorker Magazine* (1994): 54-60.
[166] Ibid, 54.
[167] Bill T. Jones, *Last Night on Earth: Bill T. Jones with Peggy Gillespie* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), 166.
[168] See also Deborah Jowitt (1984) and Sally Banes (1987).

"sick" bodies, could be upheld on the proscenium stage. For Senator Jesse Helms and other Republican politicians, the choice word at the time to lambast art that was explicit in its use of nudity, sexuality, and gender was "obscene." With this review Croce added a new phrase to the lexicon of the right: "victim art."

Croce's "non-review" is overtly abrasive and defensive; it can be easy to dismiss it as the discomfort and anger of a middle-aged white woman with the changing and diversifying field of dance at the time. However, her "non-review" is not wrong in articulating the aesthetic and political changes that were happening. Further, there were people who agreed with her sentiments either in part or whole.[169] Although I acknowledge the pain caused by the review, I argue Croce's claims are a useful, if volatile, diagnostic for understanding the aesthetic, cultural, and political shifts within the concert dance world specifically, and the art world broadly, at the time. Further, I attempt to place Croce's concerns alongside other contemporaneous discourse that surprisingly echo her sentiments.

The Politics of Funding

For Croce, the shifts in aesthetics were also partly due to arts bureaucracy, more precisely, government and private funding that she saw as increasingly favoring community-oriented or "utilitarian" art. Croce states: "The arts bureaucracy in this country, which includes government and private funding agencies, has in recent years demonstrated a blatant bias for utilitarian art – art that justifies the bureaucracy's existence by being socially useful" (56). She goes on to point out that in her previous work for the NEA, community engagement used to be a separate program, but has increasingly merged into artist funding: "By the late eighties, the ethos of community outreach had reached out and swallowed everything else; it was the only way the N.E.A. could survive."[170] For Croce, private funding followed the pathway of government funding. Thus, she implies that the aesthetic "freedom" of the sixties was because artists were not tethered to grants and granting conditions.

A similar discourse around funding and artistic innovation played out about ten years prior to Croce's review. In 1983 Jones participated in The Studies Project alongside post-modern dance pioneer and contact improvisation founder, Steve Paxton.[171] After Paxton and Jones showed their respective work in progress, they joined Mary Overlie for a discussion that quickly turned contentious. Both artists were on the defense as the conversation volleyed quickly between the two, but the tension heightened once they began discussing aesthetics and funding. Jones appears exacerbated by what he perceives as the expectation that avant-garde dance must adhere to a postmodern ethos, namely that avant-garde dance must be anti-audience, non-virtuosic, and uninformed by other artistic histories. Much of the defensiveness for Jones, as a still burgeoning artist at the time, appears aligned with his desire to make a career out of dance,

[169] After the publication of Croce's review, the New Yorker reached out to academics and artists to solicit feedback on her review. The results ranged to those who vehemently denied her rhetoric such as bell hooks and Tony Kushner, to those whose responses were more moderate. In addition, dance scholar Roger Copeland also responded to Croce in his own article where he again dismisses her harder edged claims, while validates others.

[170] Arlene Croce, "Discussing the Undiscussable," *The New Yorker Magazine* (1994): 56.

[171] "Movement Research 30th Anniversary Timeline," Movement Research online, accessed October 10, 2021, https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/movementresearch/about/Movement-Research-30th-Anniversary-Timeline-History.pdf?mtime=20180108164753. The Studies Project was a curatorial series founded by Mary Overlie, noted choreographer and founder of Danspace, to "thresh out and clarify critical issues and to bring an audience closer to the process, intention and working vocabulary of choreographers and performance artists."

as a choreographer and leader of a dance company. Jones speaks pointedly about the need to think about audience so as to be able to book shows and receive funding. He calls out Paxton's disapproval for assumingly placating to audience. Paxton then disparages companies like Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and ballet companies stating that there is a glut of that "type" of material out there. What is derived from his comments is a disapproval of virtuosity and popular appeal, thus entrenching the hierarchy between the avant-garde and popular concert dance. Placing value upon what is challenging or unpopular over the pleasure and entertainment of dance sets up a dichotomy of value for dance produced by white bodies as opposed to those produced by Black bodies, even though much of the dance qualities birthed from post-modern movement relied on the ethos and style of Black vernacular dance[172] (Dixon-Gottschild, 50-57).

As the conversation progresses it becomes obvious that Paxton also disapproves of government and corporate funding stating he has never written a grant in his life. Overlie also admits she has never written a grant and attempts to steer the conversation away from funding back toward artistic content. However, what Jones is trying to show by continually bringing the conversation back to money and audience is the need for artists to be economically viable to sustain a career. Jones's protectiveness of his artistic content can be seen as stemming from a history of appropriation and theft of Black culture, a history that Jones is acutely aware when he moves between descriptions of his art to relationships to audience to funding. For Jones, who is now considered one of the most prolific and provocative choreographers of our time, there is no separation between the economics and aesthetics of dance. Jones, at the time perhaps, did not have the luxury as an affluent white artist to not think of the two together. Further, Overlie trying to steer the conversation from economics to aesthetics fails to recognize that the two are explicitly linked.[173]

What is seen in Croce and Paxton's thinking is the assumption that funding sullies artistic innovation. Further, neither connect the ways in which economic in/stability relates to race. For Paxton, funding demands audience palatability in terms of virtuosity, which is seen by his specific naming of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and ballet companies. For Croce, funding produces criteria that artists must uphold in order to receive money. Thus, the growing importance of community-engaged or "utilitarian" work means that artists are producing work to meet the criteria of funders, not the other way around. For Croce, these broad funding shifts are the reasons why there has been a move from the seemingly "formalist" conventions of dance in the 1960s and 1970s toward more representational, narrative, and political dance.

The TV Generation

From the diminishing prominence of post-modern aesthetics to the influence of funding, another cultural shift that is entangled with the production of "victim art" for Croce is the increasing ubiquity of television or new media, not just in dance, but in everyday life. Croce states: "Artists today, whether their medium is popular art or not, work in a climate dominated by TV and the passive narcissism of the TV audience."[174] The pervasiveness of television at the

[172] Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 50-57.
[173] Catherine Wood, *The Mind is a Muscle* (London, Afterall: 2007). Wood highlights the economic privilege of Yvonne Rainer in the early creation of her work. Rainer's privileged background allowed her the space and time to experiment as a dancer and choreographer.
[174] Arlene Croce, "Discussing the Undiscussable," *The New Yorker Magazine* (1994): 60.

time gave users greater freedom in their choice of entertainment content, centering the viewer as arbiter of cultural value, producing passive, self-centered viewers for Croce. Sally Banes notes the increasing use of new media was a way for artists to use all available means of communication, which included a broad array of shifts in technology not limited to television, but also included video, computers, lighting, film, and music.[175] It is not surprising, then, that Jones, who has stated his alignment with trends, used technology liberally in *Still/Here*. Screens onstage were used to project the individuals who participated in Jones's *Survivor Workshops* as well as featuring imagery of x-rayed body parts, from a pumping heart to teeth. At the end of the work Jones appears, disembodied and careening across the stage, as tv sets with Jones's head in full view are manipulated by the dancers. The late visual artist, Gretchen Bender, collaborated with Jones in designing the array of screens and televisions that populate *Still/Here*, the presence of which I will discuss more in full later.

The intersection of new media and dance at the time was not only about incorporating technology into dance, but also about documentation. Again, Sally Banes notes this as a shift in ethos around the preservation of dance. She states:

> The notion of letting go [in the post-modern era] also manifested itself metaphorically in the "one-night stand" – a refusal to hang on to dances and to store them in a repertory, an acknowledgment of dance's ephemeral nature – and, further, in the method of improvisation, in which the dance is created for the moment and instantaneously disappears. In the 1980s, this impulse has reversed. The spirit is one of survival. Dances are preserved on film and videotape.[176]

According to Banes, post-modern dancers embraced the idea of a "one-night stand" or, put another way, held a reverence toward the ephemerality of dance. Dances were not created to become part of a repertory, but rather as works of art that vanished as instantly as they appeared.[177]

In describing the spirit of the 1980s as one of survival, Banes evokes not just the financial austerity of the time, but also the AIDS epidemic. The relationship between survival and documentation is seen in the way the media-savvy techniques of ACT UP used self-documentation as a form of activism, preservation, and survival. Alissa Solomon, in her formative account of the theatricality of ACT UP protest tactics, highlights the way ACT UP used the increasing accessibility of recording technology to produce their own documentation and attract media attention in effort to challenge dominant media narratives around the AIDS epidemic and to use all means available to expedite the release of drugs.[178] Critics tried to dampen the efficacy of ACT UP by naming them a "TV generation" or their political interventions as "MTV activism" that simply emulated mass media. Solomon quotes ACT UP activists, who echo Jones in attention to style: "'We have reclaimed style as a weapon…Well-designed propaganda products provide revenue for the group's actions. And through our media

---

[175] Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).
[176] Ibid, xxvii.
[177] Although many post-modern works were documented, such as Babette Mongmolte's film of Trisha Brown's *Watermotor* (1978), because the film was manipulated through the use of slow motion, it might be seen less as a documentation than another form of choreographic experimentation.
[178] Alissa Solomon, "AIDS Crusaders ACT UP a Storm," in *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology*, ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz (New York: Routledge, 1994).

work, we have seduced other communities into recognizing why we fight.'"[179] Embedded in ACT UP's activism was an awareness of the power of media to disseminate a message. In an interview with activist Maxine Wolfe, Wolfe states:

> The New York ACT UP style was wonderful—writing leaflets that you could read and I think, more importantly, not relying only on the written word but also visual media…They were media generation people who had grown up with television and multimedia. They were well aware, any time we did a demo, that there would be TV cameras present and what these cameras would be looking at."[180]

Whereas Croce labels the use of television and media as the preferred method of "victim art," ACT UP shows us how the use of media is a strategic political tactic. Banes, then, shows us how the tactic of self-documentation was also a form of survival against a government that actively ignored the mass sickness and deaths associated with AIDS. Jones, likewise, documents the survivors in these workshops so their stories and voices go on, even when their bodies don't. Jones has acknowledged that many of the participants did not live to see the premiere of the work and many have passed since.

Sickness on Stage and the Bounds of Criticism

What I have outlined above are the conditions through which Croce argues "victim art" is produced: the twilight of sixties post-modern dance, changes in arts funding, the proliferation of mass media, in particular, television, and how this has produced a solipsistic proclivity for contemporary choreographers such as Jones. For Croce, these conditions have shaped a generation of "victim art" artists who use bodies and movement not as form, but as subjective beings thus indulging in an inappropriate blurring of art and life. For *Still/Here,* "victim art" is produced through the presentation of "sick" bodies on stage and Croce's claim that Jones has taken refuge among the unwell. For Croce, an appropriate representation of death is found within Romantic art, which she sees as transcendent and spiritual. Croce celebrates the "spiritual," which she situates as a higher consciousness, but lambasts the "church" as a practice of blind following. She states: "Only the narcissism of the nineties could put Self in place of Spirit and come up with a church service that sells out the Brooklyn Academy."[181] Yet, it is precisely a type of Romantic transcendence at which critics such as Douglas Crimp balked at the time. As I will discuss later, Crimp's criteria of AIDS art is that it needs to be useful, to not "transcend" AIDS, but to end AIDS.

Susan Sontag's essay, "Illness as Metaphor," is a useful place to consider what is at stake in representations of illness. Early on she states:

> Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we

[179] Ibid. 49.
[180] Laraine Sommella, "This is about people dying: the tactics of early ACT UP and Lesbian Avengers in New York City: an interview with Maxine Wolfe" in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, eds. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillete, and Yolanda Retter (Seattle: Bay Press: 1997).
[181] Arlene Croce, "Discussing the Undiscussable," *The New Yorker Magazine* (1994): 60.

> all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.[182]

Sontag reminds us that although most of us would like to imagine there are clear demarcations between the well and unwell, none of us are exempt from illness, or "that other place." As is implied, the knowledge that there is another side that we will all be obliged to enter at some point is not a comfort. Confronting or contemplating mortality is something most would prefer not to do, yet people do not have that privilege. As we see in our contemporary moment in the continued police violence against Black people and the Coronavirus epidemic that has continued to adversely afflict the poor and communities of color at disproportionate rates. So, perhaps the two halves of the coin are different than what Sontag suggests. If our proximity to death corresponds to race and class, some of us cannot *not* be born "sick" or already in "that other place."

Later, Sontag notes the "punitive notions of disease" and she brings up that fateful word: victim.[183] She states: "Ostensibly, the illness is the culprit. But it is also the cancer patient who is made culpable."[184] Although Sontag is comparing tuberculosis and cancer, the former romanticized and the latter demonized, the idea that having a disease can make one culpable similarly relates to Croce's "victim art" where the word "victim" is a pejorative. It is not that illness or sickness is represented on stage, classical ballet is rife with romantic portrayals of illness and death, just think of the dance of the dying swan in *Swan Lake* or Giselle at the end of the first act afflicted with her "poor heart" dancing herself to death. For Croce, it is that the dying is not metaphorical, but literal. The stories, voices, and images of a variety of individuals is that of people afflicted with terminal illness. They are not a romanticized metaphor of illness or death, they are actually dying and when presented with their stories you may be compelled to reflect on your own mortality as well.

Again, Croce's critiques ring true with concerns at the time about the role of art during an epidemic that desecrated the arts community. Her discomfort of the insertion of "real life" onto the stage bears a similar resemblance to discussions of social practice. As I have discussed in the introduction, Claire Bishop's, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, has been a foundational text for the historicization of social practice.[185] *Artificial Hells* focused on the politics of "participation" in both historical and contemporary social practice, meaning art practices that utilize the participation of communities or non-artists as integral to the realization of an artist's work. Although in *Artificial Hells,* Bishop is more generous to the work she writes about, in earlier writing she has been critical about social practice works that erred on the side of creating, rather than critiquing, community. Case in point is her article from 2004, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, in which she derides French curator and writer, Nicholas Bourriaud, and his conception of "relational aesthetics."[186] For Bishop, Bourriaud's championing of artists such as Rirkrit Tirivanija and Liam Gillick supposes a communal coziness, where building relationships among the audience is privileged over aesthetic objects or design. Bishop argues the work of Tirivanija and Gillick ultimately neutralizes any form of antagonism that is essential to the workings of democracy. Further,

---

[182] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 1990), 3.
[183] Ibid, 57.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).
[186] Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110, (2004): 51-79.

Bishop is disgruntled at the fact that the "feel-good" position of the participatory work of Tirivanija and Gillick has made them darlings of the international art circuit.[187] In the end, Bishop champions the work of artists Santiago Serra and Thomas Hirschorn as exemplars of what she calls "relational antagonism," which allows inherently divided subjects to contemplate the work as individuals, not in a false togetherness.[188]

Bishop's derision of practices that consciously seek to create communities through aesthetic practice is not unique and, in consideration of dance, resonates with Croce's criticism. Again for Croce, *Still/Here* was unreviewable because it compels the critic to feel pity thus compromising the integrity of the critic. Similarly, for Bishop, the work that Bourriaud championed, such as that of Tirivanija and Gillick, sets up a false democracy that neutralizes any form of antagonism, which she sees as necessary for aesthetic evaluation and critique. For both Bishop and Croce the shortened distance between form and content implicates viewers into feelings, obscuring the critic's ability to remain, assumingly, objective.

What interests me about Bishop, Croce, and others' discomfort with artists who consciously source and/or create communities through their work is not whether these works are duping audiences into a "false" senses of democracy or sympathy. Rather, I am interested, instead, in how rhetoric around what can and cannot be critiqued validates and maintains hierarchies around what can or cannot be claimed as valid "art." What Bishop, and others suggest is that there needs to be a distance between the art work and the world or the individuals it addresses; the two cannot be combined in any way because then it compromises the viewers' ability to maintain a critical distance. Their critiques presuppose a distinction between an aestheticized use of a community and the use of a community that seeks to enact or address social change either on an individual or macro level. As the spaces between artist and viewer or community continue to collapse in interesting and unsettling ways, one might wonder, what are the unspoken parameters between participation as a practice of the avant-garde and participation as a mode of community engagement? Both have political implications, but the former often is situated as having more aesthetic clout.

In this section I have attempted to highlight debates related to 1980s and 1990s dance through Croce's argument. By bringing her in conversation with other critics and historians I show how her argument was not an outlier as many would like to assume, but rather part of a discourse that attempted to reconfigure whiteness as the norm by pushing against aesthetic and funding changes. Additionally, her argument highlights Jones's work as part of a broader shift of activism that was tied to the use and exploitation of new media. Further, Croce's argument is recycled in the discourse of social practice of which I argue *Still/Here* is a part.

One keyword Croce uses in describing the new genre of dance and performance is "utilitarian," meaning the work prioritizes function or usability over beauty. Although she doesn't label the work as such, another word for this type of work might be activist in its attempt to make change. In the next section I discuss how *Still/Here* relates to the discourse of AIDS activism in art. Although it may seem antithetical to Jones's intention as he is concerned with death as universal rather than the specificity of death from AIDS, what I hope to show is the debates surrounding the role of art during the AIDS crisis and the varying criteria artists and critics had for, lack of a better word, a correct approach and aesthetic for art-making during this time. *Still/Here* aligns with those criteria in multiple ways and helps build a bridge toward relational aesthetics.

---

[187] Ibid, 79.
[188] Ibid.

AIDS Cultural Analysis and Activism

The role of art during the AIDS crisis was a much-debated topic. The late art historian and critic, Douglas Crimp, was a leading voice in articulating what he deemed "AIDS Cultural Analysis," which situated AIDS as not simply a disease absent of politics, but a conglomeration of cultural practices inextricable from the public's understanding of the virus.[189] He states: "AIDS does not exist apart from the practices that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it. We know AIDS only in and through those practices."[190] In his essay, "AIDS Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism" he notes the ways in which individuals from different sectors of the art world, from critics to arts administrators, note the "positive" benefits of the disease on the arts. Responses ranged from the impact the epidemic had on cultural production thus ushering in a "renaissance," to the idea that art will outlast and transcend the epidemic, to seeing art as a commodity through which to raise money. Crimp argues these responses articulate the assumption that art is merely reflective of society, but does not have the ability to intervene nor initiate an end to the disease. Crimp held a higher standard of art during the AIDS pandemic, he states:

> [Art] *does* have the power to save lives, and it is this very power that must be recognized, fostered, and supported in every way possible. But if we are to do this, we will have to abandon the idealist conception of art. We don't need a cultural renaissance; we need cultural practices actively participating in the struggle against AIDS. We don't need to transcend the epidemic; we need to end it.[191]

What Crimp is describing is a divide within the arts community – on one side an idealist conception of art and on the other an activist orientation toward the power of art to enact change, what he later terms as engaged art practices.[192]

Crimp uses the piece *Let the Record Show…* presented in the front windows of the New Museum as an exemplar of engaged artwork. *Let the Record Show…* was a collective work by a group within ACT UP called the SILENCE=DEATH Project. The work featured a large photomural of the Nuremberg Trials with life-size photos of "AIDS criminals" in front. These individuals included people such as Jesse Helms (US Senator), Jerry Falwell (televangelist), and Cory Servaas (Presidential AIDS Commission) dubbed "AIDS criminals." Each "criminal" has a personal quote below them that implicates them as a criminal. In addition, the work has a running text with statistics related to the government negligence of the AIDS crisis. For Crimp, *Let the Record Show…* encompasses several pieces of criteria he sees as necessary to creating engaged art practices. The first is that the work is a collective endeavor and not tied to a singular person. Second is that this piece is integral to the activism of each individual of the collective. Third, the work must engage beyond the walls of arts institutions. Although, technically, this place transpired in the New Museum in New York, its place in the window of the museum meant that it was accessible to anyone who passed by, so access was not prohibited by admission cost or (lack of) interest in contemporary art. Crimp states: "Activist art therefore involves questions

[189] Douglas Crimp, "AIDS : Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism," *October* vol. 43 (1987): 3-16.
[190] Ibid, 3.
[191] Ibid, 7.
[192] Ibid, 11.

not only of the nature of cultural production, but also of the location, or the means of distribution, of that production."[193] Although, Crimp does concede that aspects of the content of the work still spoke to an elite audience, one that would understand the reference to the Nuremberg trials simply through photograph. Despite that reference, the information provided within the art work was pedagogic in educating what many AIDS activists say as a continually misinformed public: "By providing information about government inaction and repressive intentions in the context of shocking statistics, its purpose is to inform – and thereby to mobilize – its presumably sophisticated audience."[194] The pedagogic aspect of this last piece of criteria relates to much of ACT UP new media activism that sought to use the materials of mass media to combat the misinformation, or lack of an information, provided by the government to help combat the disease and educate the US public.

Yet, as artists attempted to address AIDS from the stage, many were critiqued for "preaching to the choir." In the co-authored article, *Preaching to the Converted,* theater artist, Tim Miller and scholar, David Román discuss the critique of artistic AIDS activism that came from both the conservative right and the LGBT community.[195] Critics dismissed queer artists for having a limited range and scope, equating artistic work to propaganda. Critiques within the LGBT community were rampant as well. Miller and Román allege that from within the LGBT community the view is that community-based work or work explicitly made for a queer audience is naïve. They state: "The dismissive 'preaching to the converted' response assumes queer artists to be didactic and queer audiences to be static."[196] Further, these works are never assumed to have value, consequently disempowering the queer community. Thus, Román and Miller are advocating *for* preaching to the converted as a method of building and sustaining community.

Still/Here was commissioned by several top tier US institutions and funded by large foundations such as The Rockefeller Institution. Because of this, it could be comfortably described as a mainstream work with a built-in audience. So, perhaps in consideration of Román and Miller's argument, *Still/Here* is a bridge between the derision of community-based art and mainstream theater. Further, it could be seen as representative of a growing shift in the acceptance of "non-dancers" onstage, which will become more prevalent in avant-garde performance and the "amateur" turn discussed in the introduction. Nevertheless, it defies easy categorization, but it is imbued with the sensibility of practices and discourse taking place across the arts and activism at the time.

Relational Choreography

In a traditional gallery there is generally a separation between the viewer and the art, which is assumed to be immobile or static. As part of a lineage stemming from minimalism that challenged the permanence of art objects, relational aesthetics helped usher in the "social turn" as artists continued working to dissolve boundaries between viewer and object. Relational aesthetic artists, thus, orchestrated situations or tableaus that provide the conditions within which the art transpires. Moreover, the viewer interacts with and, in some instances, becomes the material and are integral to the creation, or activation, of the work. Yet, it is not always the gallery viewer who becomes material, but individuals outside the purview of the art world,

[193] Ibid, 12.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Tim Miller and David Román, "Preaching to the Converted," *Theatre Journal* 47, no. 2 (1995): 169–88.
[196] Ibid, 173.

whose bodies and social identities are displayed for contemplation. In this scenario the viewer again is removed from the situation to behold what's on display akin to an audience member for Theatre of the Oppressed, making what transpires inherently theatrical and choreographic. In discussing the role of those outside the assumed boundaries of the artworld, Bourriaud states:

> It seems possible, in our view, to describe the specific nature of present-day art with the help of the concept of creating relations outside the field of art (in contrast to relations inside it, offering it its socio-economic underlay): relations between individuals and groups, between the artist and the world, and by way of transitivity, between the beholder and the world.[197]

Relational aesthetics is concerned with creating physical encounters that encourage interrelationships among artists, individuals, and communities beyond and absent from gallery walls. For artists working in relational aesthetics, answers to existential, political, or social questions are found outside the world of art, just as Jones suggests in the opening epigraph. Engagement with those outside the frame of the art world – non-artists, amateurs, laypeople – are conduits for uncovering truth. As a work steeped in the time of relational aesthetics, *Still/Here* stitches together the narratives, images, and gestures of individuals living with terminal illnesses, but the documentation of the workshops are as much a part of the work as the performance itself. Further, through the lens of relational aesthetics, the interplay between the workshops and final performance are perhaps where the relationality is most overtly seen.

In slight contrast to AIDS cultural analysis, whereas Crimp is asking for art in the AIDS crisis to work toward actively ending the epidemic – not merely represent it, nor leverage art for fundraising efforts, but actually ending the disease – Bourriaud argues relational aesthetics present us with new ways of living. He states:

> [T]he role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realties, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist…The artist dwells in the circumstances the present offers him, so as to turn the setting of his life (his links with the physical and conceptual world) into a lasting world.[198]

Relational aesthetics are not rehearsals for a new way to inhabit and be together in the world, but are actual modes of being together. What does it mean to take this viewpoint, that the creation and practice of art are not rehearsals, but actively creating ways for new modes of inhabitation? Relational aesthetics, in its emphasis on the coordination of bodies in space, is inherently choreographic. Yet, is emphasizing the choreographic in relational aesthetics, and the ensuing social practice, simply an insertion of dance practices that have been ignored despite the obvious symbiosis between the two? Or, conversely, does relational aesthetics provide dance studies with discursive traction to consider participatory dance practices that don't neatly fit within community-based paradigms? What is it about this historical moment that opens up, or perhaps demand, new possibilities for interdisciplinary, intercommunity engagement?

I propose the term relational choreography as a symbiosis between relational aesthetics and AIDS cultural analysis. Relational aesthetics proposes art as a potential for new worlds,

---

[197] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du Reels, 2002), 26.
[198] Ibid, 13-14.

relationships among a range of different people, from artist to amateur to viewer, it is distinctly choreographic in its emphasis on experiential and embodied interactions. Crimp's AIDS cultural analysis, again, was about ending AIDS through art – not scapegoating the suffering and devastation produced by the AIDS epidemic through fundraising or an arts renaissance. Additionally, these works are engaged in political change through the dissemination of knowledge that reaches beyond the bounds of an arts space – it must be accessible to a broad audience. *Still/Here* represents both forms, thus producing relational choreography. Relational choreography is not about format or form, but about a conscious engagement or entanglement with bodies outside the general purview of the dance studio or stage. In dance, one may assume a dancer is always in relationality with another be it a partner, other dancers within a group, or an audience. What I am proposing is a conscious relationality beyond those frames – folding a broader community into the world of dance in attempt to actively create a new one. Through Bourriaud's work, relational aesthetics and the ensuing social practice began to take a discursive form. It is not that artists were not doing this work prior, but the language had not come to fruition. Whereas my other case studies – Anna Halprin's *Ceremony of Us* and Adrian Piper's *Funk Lessons* – are not situated in the historical moment where relational aesthetics formalizes or becomes codified, they are works that foreground a relationality with those outside of their artistic purview to answer questions or as practices, not of rehearsals, but new modes of living as Bourriaud suggests. Each of these projects hold varying degrees of success in terms of lasting change, but each uses dance as a way to build new possibilities for living. For *Still/Here,* however, the way to see the relationality is most obvious when moving between the documentary and performance.

In the documentation for Jones's "Survival Workshops," Jones has the group begin in a circle.[199] The participants vary in age, gender presentation, and race. As the camera pans across the group while Jones is speaking, the participants appear open and eager. They move through the circle shaking hands, stating their names, and nodding in acknowledgment. Jones has the participants begin by finding a gesture that represents themselves at the moment. The participants turn away from the circle, closing themselves off to the group to focus on the task at hand. When they return to the circle, they take turns introducing their gesture and associated phrases. Much of this material is featured in the beginning scenes of *Still/Here*. In call and response fashion, dancers in solo perform simple gestures toward the audience stating the names of the participants while the other dancers echo the movement and text.[200]

The documentary of Jones's process in creating *Still/Here* moves between footage of the survivor workshops, which dominate the first half, and footage from company rehearsals, which dominates the latter half. Throughout it all is Jones's voice in interview and monologue as he narrates his process and thoughts. In the survivor workshops Jones pushes the participants with provocative prompts asking them to find a gesture that encapsulates them as a person or to map their lives with physical movement, taking the others on their journey and then conjecturing about their own death. In turn, in the interviews Moyers often turns the table on Jones asking him to do the tasks he asks of the participants. Jones always complies easily. In one segment Moyers asks Jones how he maintains joy amidst the sorrow and sadness of the process. Without missing a beat, Jones responds: look at them. Moyers nods in agreement as Jones continues to describe the way the participants show up each day despite their illness and knowledge of imminent death. The comment is imbued with the disability rhetoric of inspiration – if they can do it, so

[199] *Bill T. Jones: Still/Here with Bill Moyers*, dir. Bill Moyers (1997, Public Broadcasting Service).
[200] For more on "call and response" as a Black cultural tradition, see Thomas DeFrantz (2004).

can I. Upon first listen, Jones's response is so ordinary and usual that Moyers does not even pause revealing the implicit acceptance of a statement such as this. Yet, Jones asks us, by way of Moyers, to "look at them," he is also articulating a difference between the participants and himself.

Here, I would like to pause to consider the multiple ways the participants can be figured. I have been using a social practice language in referring to them as "participants," which is in line with the idea of participatory art and denotes a collective creating experience, a democratic process of art making. Yet, that term does not always rest so easily on this group as they are clearly contributing to the process of art making, their creative output is actively manipulated through Jones's choreography and multimedia video and voice on stage in the final product. As discussed in the introduction, the designation of the "non-professional" or "amateur" varies across time and discipline, but as noted, Julia Bryan-Wilson and Benjamin Piekut highlight how the amateur is never neutral and often marked by what they are not: non-white, non-Western, not male, and/or non-educated.[201] In the case of *Still/Here*, the participants are marked by their illness and apparent proximity to death.

Jones's use of individuals with terminal illness is less concerned with their supposed naivete of dance and movement, rather than the use of their lives and stories to answer questions about, for lack of better words, life and death. It is the expertise of the amateur or non-professional. If they are chosen for any reason, it is the knowledge they have accrued through their proximity to debility and death. Their specialized knowledge is their embodied experience of living with a terminal illness and their task is to present Jones with that varied knowledge. Put another way, they are performing what Bishop terms "delegated performance," wherein individuals who participate in social practice art are expected to perform their socio-economic background, their distinct marginalization.[202] For the participants of the survivor workshops this would be performing illness or sickness, or alternatively, performing inspiration. Returning to Croce, although she precedes the language of delegated performance it is this type of framing that upsets her. Yet, by analyzing both the documentary and the performance I propose we can see the participants as less a representation of illness than in a synergetic exchange of movement, knowledge, and histories across bodies.

After Jones commands us to look at "them," we do indeed. The video cuts to an impassioned solo by one of the participants, Carol. She is dressed in white sneakers, purple sweats, and an oversized t-shirt with a black sweater tied around her waist. Upon first watch it is not obvious, but her gestures are a series of borrowed movements from the other participants in segments already viewed that she has incorporated into her body and pieced together seamlessly.

The group, per usual, is in a loose circle. Carol moves into the center in a wide stance with knees bent, a slight smile on her face. Her hands are cupped in front of her as if she is holding a ball as she twists them back and forth as if dowsing for something unseen. The gesture is a replica of one that Jones does earlier when asking participants to create a gesture representing them in that moment. Jones's gesture is static, however, as he holds his hands in front of his sternum and says: "I hope this means something to you."

Carol moves on from divining and slides one foot forward reaching with one hand while her opposite foot and arm reach back. Perched on one leg, she reaches to the other participants and smiles, appearing like a cherub readying a bow. Again, this gesture is seen earlier when, Tawny, who is afflicted with cystic fibrosis, performs a similar gesture. In performing this

---

[201] Julia Bryan-Wilson and Benjamin Piekut, "Amateurism," *Third Text* 34, no. 1 (2020): 15.
[202] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).

gesture, Tawny reaches out with one arm, but holds back with the other. She describes herself as reaching out to help others, but being held back by her illness. Jones nods in approval and says a choreographer looks for that. It is not clear what "that" is, perhaps the contradiction or the tension between the push and pull. On Tawny the gesture is subtle, her feet remain planted, but her body is turned protectively while her one arm reaches delicately, softly. For Carol the gesture has transformed dynamically. It is no longer a held shape, but rather the gesture enables her to move throughout the circle as she reaches for the others, again smiling.

Carol, then, transitions back into her wide stance, knees bent as she reaches up and gently rocks forward. She stops. She returns to her own gesture from earlier – the heels of her hands move to her temples as her torso folds over slightly. Her eyes close and she folds in on herself in contrast with her earlier openness. Her hands press into her head and fly off once the pressure can no longer hold. Carol had described this gesture as a struggle between knowledge and mortality, stating, if she could just understand better, have a better outlook, perhaps she could accept mortality. The gesture as it appears in her solo is one of frustration, the feeling that your brain cannot comprehend your body.

Finally, her hands press up and her arms open softly. There is a sense of relief as if acceptance has come. She reaches out to Jones in her cherub-stance and then comes back and repeats another participant's gesture as she wildly flails her arms in the air. The other participant, an elderly white woman with spindly glasses, gifted this gesture earlier when she stepped forward, reached one arm up and stirred the air above her head like a hand-mixer. When Jones asked what she was doing, she replied that she was stirring it up. "What's it?" he pushed. She smiled and then responded, "everything." The elderly woman's gentle mixing turns into a tornado for Carol, propelling her throughout the space. At her limit, she stops, exhales, and releases her arms. She nods gently and returns to her place within the circle.

Jones asks her if she could repeat the solo and, this time, dictate the movement. Carol obliges and again the solo morphs as more frustration and anger are present. She describes multiple times: if she could just be free, if she could just help someone, perhaps her suffering would not be in vain.

Later, we see Carol's solo transposed onto the bodies of Jones's dancers. They pose, balancing like a bird on one leg, they thrash their heads from side to side in attempt to release the burden of the knowledge of death, they "stir it up" before rolling away. Carol's gestures, absorbed from her own life and the group, thus both her and their story, transfers to the bodies of the dancers, becoming embodied by them. Yet, although Carol, the dancers, and Jones will understand the significance of this transfer it doesn't mean it is necessarily read as such by the audience.

The image of birds is present throughout the piece. Carol's cherub pose, which was originally Tawny's gesture, which became part of the group work, appears again in another dancer solo. During *Still* a petite male dancer whose silky shirt is buttoned strategically at only the top so it billows evocatively as he moves is in solo. Upstage in a stark light he holds Carol's pose perched on one leg the other in a soft attitude behind him. Instead of a movement that takes one across the space, he hops while holding the pose, his back reverberating as he lands. He appears as a faltering bird attempting to take flight, but never finding the velocity needed to do so. His shirt swells and falls behind him like a breath, the lights dim.

When observing this transference of movement – as Carol takes on the movement of her peers, adapts them, and the movement then moves onto the stage in yet another manifestation –

Carol is actively choreographing. She is developing and transposing movement, her own solo, from the collective.

On stage, particularly in the first section of *Still*, the dancers appear as angels or apparitions – graceful, long-limbed, virtuosic. They are dynamically a collective – moving often in unison or if there are moments of smaller groups or solos, the others are not far away. The movements are delicate and performed with care. One sequence that has become emblematic of the work is when a dancer stands downstage left with the other dancers behind him. He extends his leg in front of himself and performs a rond de jambe en l'air until his leg is caught by the other dancers. They rotate and lift him as he brings his standing leg to meet his extended leg. The fluid motion places him on top of the group of dancers, seated upright with his legs and arms extended in front of him. The group effortlessly transport him upstage on a diagonal as he fearlessly reaches for the unknown, trusting the group to determine his next arrival.

As the group actively holds and anticipates the dancer's next move, this is one moment, among many, that the collective is present in *Still/Here.* Yet, the collective is never a static shape or object – it disassembles and reassembles as the dancers and participants move throughout the space. The space is not only a community center or stage, but the space holds the participant's histories as they narrate their moments of diagnoses and imaginations of their futures as they visualize their death.

Although the idea of the collective is implied in both relational aesthetics and AIDS cultural analysis, it is not clearly articulate as such. As the AIDS epidemic and our current pandemic has shown, networks of care are exceptionally critical when neoliberal government routinely fails those without the resources for healthcare. In the era of Covid-19, mutual aid networks, both through grassroots methods and social media, have become increasingly necessary for individuals to sustain their health and wellbeing amidst demands for social distancing. AIDS activists could be credited with bringing healthcare disparities and negligence to light during the height of the AIDS crisis, but it hasn't diminished healthcare gaps considering how in the interim between then and now, GoFundMe is one of the nation's biggest medical insurers. Carol's solo and other moments in the work highlight the work and importance of the collective – the collective as care, the collective as a repository of knowledge, the collective as opposition to the modernist legacy of solo auteurs.

In addition to showcasing modes of embodied care, the work also presents the anger and anguish of living with illness. The screens that transmit the embodied stories from the participants also flash medical images – a pulsing heart, a dental x-ray – the images and references represent the medicalized body, a theme that is present in statements from the participants: "feed me poisons," "doctors are in control," "inoperable," "terminal," and "body can feel like a demon in my mind." Jones acknowledges the disconnect from the body through illness through his reflections on the workshops. He states: "I've heard people say in the workshops that their body betrays them. If the body can betray you, then who is the *you* we're talking about?"[203] The body as separate from the self, the body as betrayal. The sterility present in the medicalization of the body gives way when participants admit desire. In one instance the participant, Tawny, talks about her desire for sex, for touch, which displaces the medicalized body for a desiring body. Illness does not negate desire, nor does it not negate being a living being despite the coldness with which it is treated.

[203] Nicole Cunningham, Thomas Piontek, and Bill T. Jones, "Still/Here: An Interview with Bill T. Jones," *Discourse* 16, no. 3 (1994): 85.

Jones has denied that *Still/Here* is about AIDS, rather emphasizing the pervasiveness of mortality and death. One might understand Jones's desire to address mortality as a whole as a way to adhere to respectability politics, thus creating death and suffering as a universal, rather than as attached to specifically people with AIDS or more pejoratively, homosexual men. Some of the early AIDS theatrical works from the mid-1980s have been criticized for these politics – in trying to universalize homosexuality inside a framework of monogamous heterosexuality in effort to appeal to the pathos of an American public. Of Larry Kramer's, *The Normal Heart,* Román states:

> Kramer has his characters go to great lengths to demonstrate just how conventional they are in terms of how they live their lives. They just "happen" to be gay, "happen" to be dying of AIDS…Kramer's choice to use theatre as the medium for his ideas successfully engaged its mainstream audiences to feel for the play's protagonists by universalizing such issues as love, sexuality, and death. Furthermore, Kramer's choice of realist techniques of engagement and empathy secured such a response.[204]

Concert dance doesn't always map easily on theater genres, so although Jones is not presenting realist theater, he is nonetheless using representational and narrative strategies in the presentation of "sick" individuals on stage. Perhaps less in attempt to "normalize" homosexuality for a mainstream audience, than to universalize the suffering of People with AIDS.

As the dancers speak and employ gestures to embody the participants and bring them to "life," the lighting design and multimedia use of screens, as mentioned above, evoke abstracted body parts and organs. Additionally, the screens and scrim in *Still* bathe the stage and dancers, who are all dressed in white, in a saturated blue reminiscent of Derek Jarman's experimental film *Blue* (1993). *Blue* documented, through monochromatic blue and a narrated voiceover, Jarman's gradual loss of eyesight to cytomegalovirus, an AIDS-related retinal virus. Gretchen Bender's abstract roving on-stage screens also evoke similar aesthetic strategies to Jarman's *Blue.* As mentioned, in Jones's previous work, *D-Man in the Waters*, Jones brought dancer Acquivella's onstage during the height of his illness, thus showcasing the ravaged AIDS body. Yet, in *Still/Here* Jones joins a growing coterie of artists moving away from what was generally seen, and expected, in the decade following the discovery of AIDS. Summarizing Paul Juian Smith, Higginson states: "Branded in such representations as culpable, disfigured, and depraved, PWAs were caught in a Foucauldian "trap of visibility," the dehumanizing inspection of vulnerable groups considered sick, perverse, or criminal."[205] Thus, Jones was joining a growing coterie of artists, such as Jarman and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who were moving away from representations of PWAs.[206] However, both Jarman and Gonzalez-Torres moved away from representation toward forms of abstraction (for Jarman's *Blue* it was the monochromatic color of Yves Klein's blue that accompanies his narration, whereas for Gonzalez-Torres it was the documentation of

---

[204] David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998): 62-63. Yet, heeding his call for "critical generosity," Román cautions us to judge these works inside their historical context and not completely dismiss these early mainstream works for their employment of realism as Crimp does. He states: "Still my point here is neither to contest Kramer's choice of genre nor disclaim the play's activist base. At its historical moment it was politically necessary to stage AIDS in order to educate mainstream audiences as well as to document and initiate discussion about AIDS from a gay male outlook" (63).
[205] Kate Higginson, "Derek Jarman's 'Ghostly Eye': Prophetic Bliss and Sacrificial Blindness in Blue," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41, no. 1 (2008): 78.
[206] Ibid, 79.

present absences in the form of candies or crumpled sheets, for example). Although Jones employs visual abstraction at times through his multimedia presentation – the pulsing heart, the x-rays, the color blue, which is a citation of Jarman's citation of Klein – the presence of other bodies or non-identifiable bodies, not AIDS-bodies, but altogether living, dying, surviving bodies marks a difference.

In an era of activism that was demanding that the responsibility of illness and death shift from the individual to the state, we see how the group or collective absorbs the pain, grief, and care for one another in both the workshops and dance, but in specifically analyzing the transference between the survivor workshop participants to the dancers. Relational choreography foregrounds the group, the collective, unlikely networks; it surfaces blind spots in AIDS activist art and relational aesthetics that continue to situate form as reaching an anonymous mass. Crimp's example of art he deems as part of an end toward ends, he focuses on the form and function, but not the process of making – the collective – and the many networks that were necessarily built out of ACT UP. [207]Additionally, Bourriaud focuses on the form of relational aesthetics, but the new worlds he states are being made are enacted by many individuals brought together to co-create together.[208]

Additionally, *Still/Here* pushes against the disgust of collective art building and networks that Croce lambasts: "And the end of twentieth-century collectivism is the AIDS quilt. The wistful desire to commemorate is converted into a pathetic lumping together, the individual absorbed by the group, the group by the disease." [209] The collectivism that Croce fears is the loss of a decidedly American individualism as represented by "victim art," Jones's use of communities outside the purview of the dance world, and the AIDS quilt. The AIDS quilt not only upholds the collective – in grief, mourning, and anger – but also positions anyone as an artist, displacing the modernist solo artist by an anonymous collective. Likewise, Jones gives choreographic ownership and creation over to communities impacted by terminal illness, offering us a new vision of collective care through choreography in our continued era of illness, death, and pandemic.

[207] Douglas Crimp, "AIDS : Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism," *October* vol. 43 (1987).
[208] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du Reels, 2002).
[209] Arlene Croce, "Discussing the Undiscussable," *The New Yorker Magazine* (1994), 60.

Epilogue
Dancing Alone Together: Social Distance Dance

A central tenet of social practice dance, or social practice generally, is the proximity of bodies in space. Or, put another way, bringing disparate bodies together to form a community, a collective, something that wasn't there before. I began the introduction with a list of terms that have been used to describe my case studies. Here, in reflection on the collective recent past and present, I end with a phrase that is yet another pivot on the word "social": social distance. At the heart of *Social Dance after Social Practice* is a commitment to the power of the group, the collective, the community. As I continued to flesh out this dissertation that hinges so much on bringing bodies together while concurrently teaching a course on collective dance practices, I found my research interests an affront to the social isolation the pandemic produced. In a zoom workshop on New Orleans second-line dance for my students, I became emotional watching the students and myself learn footwork meant to be done with one another, in the same space. There we were, separate, in tiny boxes, kicking and bumping furniture instead of one another. I wondered, still two years out: When, if ever, I might be dancing and sweating with friends and strangers again? How do we maintain a relationality to other bodies that are either far away or physically absent altogether?

Over the past two years, many of us have become de-socialized as we have navigated pandemic life in isolation or only in close proximity with chosen family and friends. In public, we have kept our distance from one another, navigating an invisible boundary of 6-feet – making room, stepping out of the way, fearful of making a crowd. One dance critic likened the intentional movement as "everyday choreography" and queried if this enforced "score" (if you will) could perhaps bring us, as a society, back into our bodies.[210] Additionally, many have identified already socially distanced dances such as Trisha Brown's *Roof Piece* (1971) as choreographic exemplars for these pandemic times. *Roof Piece* features a collection of dancers dressed in red spread out over a landscape of Manhattan rooftops dancing in concert with one another while viewers are likewise scattered.[211]

Other works sprang to my mind in thinking about the inverse, how the soloist can index the collective (akin to Piper's work). In *Véronique Doisneau* (2004) Jérôme Bel extracts the individual from the collective as French ballerina Doisneau holds the excruciatingly long poses of Swan Lake without the comfort of the corps and the spotlight of the soloist. In Felix Gonzalez Torres's *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)* (1991) a male dancer performs atop a platform in a gallery in silver lamé shorts to the music only heard through his headphones. In both *Doisneau* and *Untitled*, the dancing body is abstracted from the communal and distilled for presentation, like an object on a pedestal, the solo dancer is presented as something to behold. For Doisneau, as she stands undisturbed without the spectacle of multiple tutu-clad bodies, her breath the only movement visible, the incredible and unseen labor of the corps is revealed through her still body. For Gonzalez-Torres, there is a deep sadness in recognizing the present absence of other dancing bodies, presumably the gay men who should be in the club with the go-go dancer at the time who precipitously succumbed to AIDS. One wonders of the dancer: Is this the last dance and he the last dancer? Is he a relic of a disappeared community? Or is he an example of endurance, that life

[210] Gia Kourlas, "How We Use Our Bodies to Navigate a Pandemic," *New York Times* (March 31, 2020).
[211] *Roof Piece* was revived and reimagined by the Trisha Brown Dance Company as a digital zoom dance entitled *Room/Roof Piece* in 2020.

does indeed go on? In these examples, relationality is not only about the physical proximity of bodies, but also about how the individual can summon and distill the collective while in solo.

In the past two years, we have all struggled with how to enact collective action despite mandates to keep physical distance. We watched as individuals defied the rules of the pandemic to gather in the streets and protest the continued murder of Black people by the hands of law enforcement. The neglect of vulnerable communities during the pandemic has also produced collective action in the form of mutual aid. What has been learned, or perhaps re-learned, is that the future is not guaranteed, and the most radical act might be in considering the collective before the individual. I position this dissertation as part of a historical turn that can aid curators, scholars, and artists in looking to the past to reflect critically upon what it means to be engaged with the "social" as a form of relationality, care, and politics.

Bibliography

Albright, Ann Cooper. *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance.* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997.

Archias, Elise. *The Concrete Body: Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneemann, Vito Acconci*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Auther, Elissa and Adam Lerner, eds., *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Banes, Sally. *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962-1964.* Durham, Duke University Press: 1993.

Banes, Sally. *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987.

Bishop, Claire. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." *October* 110, (2004): 51-79.

Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.* London: Verso, 2012.

Bishop, Claire. "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA, and Whitney." *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (2014): 63-76.

Bishop, Claire. "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents." *Artforum* 44, vol. 6 (2006).

Bolden, Tony. "Theorizing the Funk: An Introduction." In *The Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture,* edited by Tony Boldon, 13-29. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics.* Paris: Les Presses du Reels, 2002.

Burt, Ramsay. *Alien Bodies: Representations of Modernity, 'Race' and Nation in Early Modern Dance*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Burt, Ramsay. *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces*. United Kingdom: Taylor and France, 2006.

Burt, Ramsay and Michael Huxley. *Dance, Modernism, and Modernity*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Bryan-Wilson, Julia. "Simone Forti Goes to the Zoo." *October* 152, Spring (2015): 26-52.

Bryan-Wilson, Julia and Benjamin Piekut, "Amateurism," *Third Text* 34, no. 1 (2020): 1-21.

Carter, Curtis L. “Watts: Hub of the Universe Art and Social Change.” In *Watts: Art and Social Change in Los Angeles, 1965-2002.* 9-20. Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2003.

Chaleff, Rebecca. “Activating Whiteness: Racializing the Ordinary in US American Postmodern Dance.” *Dance Research Journal* 50, no. 3 (2018): 71-84.

Chave, Anna C. “Minimalism and Biography.” *Art Bulletin* 82, no. 1 (2000): 149-163.

Christian, Barbara. “The Race for Theory.” *Cultural Critique*, no. 6 (1987): 51-63.

Coleman, Wanda. *A War of Eyes and Other Stories.* Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1996.

Costello, Diarmuid. “Xenophobia, Stereotypes, and Empirical Acculturation: Neo-Kantianism in Adrian Piper’s Performance-Based Conceptual Art.” In *Adrian Piper: A Reader*, edited by Cornelia Butler and David Platzker, 166-215. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018.

Crimp, Douglas. “AIDS : Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism.” *October* vol. 43 (1987): 3-16.

Croce, Arlene. “Discussing the Undiscussable.” *The New Yorker Magazine* (1994): 54-60.

Croft, Clare. *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Cunningham, Nicole, Thomas Piontek, and Bill T. Jones. “Still/Here: An Interview with Bill T. Jones.” *Discourse* 16, no. 3 (1994): 78-85.

DeFrantz, Thomas. “The Black Beat Made Visible: Hip Hop Dance and Body Power.” In *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*. Edited by André Lepecki, 64-81. Middletown: Wesleyan University, 2004.

Dixon-Gottschild, Brenda. *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1996.

Dodds, Sherrill. *Dancing on the Canon: Embodiments of Value in Popular Dance.* London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014.

Dungan, Eloise. “The Ghetto Renaissance.” *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), June 2, 1968.

Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

Foster, Susan. “Choreographies of Protest.” *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 396-397.

Franko, Mark. *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s*. Middletown, Wesleyan University Press: 2002.

Franko, Mark and André Lepecki. "Editor's Note: Dance in the Museum." *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (2015): 1-4.

Fried, Michael. "Art and Objecthood" in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

"Funk Lessons." Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. Accessed May 11, 2022, http://www.adrianpiper.com/vs/video_fl.shtml.

Gere, David. *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.

Goldman, Danielle. *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom*. Ann Arbor: Michigan, 2010.

Gorman, Sarah. "Performing Failure? Anomalous Amateurs in Jérôme Bel's *Disabled Theater* and *The Show Must Go On 2015*." *Contemporary Theatre Review* 27, no. 1 (2017): 92-103.

Graff, Ellen. *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942*. Durham, Duke University Press: 1997.

Gutierrez, Miguel. "Does Abstraction Belong to White People?" *Bomb Magazine* (2018).

Halprin, Anna. Anna Halprin Archives, Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, CA.

Halprin, Anna. "Community Art as Life Process: The Story of the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop." *The Drama Review: TDR* 17, no. 3 (1973): 64-80.

Halprin, Anna. "Discovering Dance." *Lomi School Bulletin*, Summer (1981): 14-18.

Halprin, Ann and James Burns. "Ceremony of Us." *The Drama Review: TDR* 13, no. 4 (1969): 131-143.

Halprin, Anna and Seth Hill, dir. *Right On/Ceremony of Us*. 1969; San Francisco, CA: Dilexi Foundation for KQED-TV.

Harrell, Trajal. "Revisions in Time: Curating Across Time." Panel Discussion, Berkeley, CA, November 16, 2015.

Herbst, Robby. "Ceremony of Us." *East of Borneo* (2014).

Hewitt, Andrew. *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

Higginson, Kate. "Derek Jarman's 'Ghostly Eye': Prophetic Bliss and Sacrificial Blindness in Blue." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41, no. 1 (2008): 77-94.

Holdsworth, Nadine, Jane Milling and Helen Nicholson. "Theatre, Performance, and the Amateur Turn." *Contemporary Theatre Review* 27, no. 1 (2017): 4-17.

Jackson, Jonathan David. "Improvising in African-American Vernacular Dancing." *Dance Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (2001): 40-53.

Jackson, Shannon. *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2011.

Johnson, Jasmine. "Solange and Her Dance." *Aster(ix)* (2016).

Jones, Bill T., "A Meditation on Still/Here Lecture." November 14, 2011, University of Virginia Medical Center Hour, Charlottesville, VA. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Onh3udBsDrU.

Jones, Bill T., *Last Night on Earth: Bill T. Jones with Peggy Gillespie.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1995.

Jones, Kellie. *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

Jowitt, Deborah. *Expression and Expressionism in American Modern Dance*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Kester, Grant. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

Kirby, Michael. "The New Theatre." *TDR/The Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (1965): 23-43.

Kourlas, Gia. "How We Use Our Bodies to Navigate a Pandemic." *New York Times* (New York, NY) March 31, 2020.

Kwan, SanSan. "Even as We Keep Trying: An Ethics of Interculturalism in Jérôme Bel's Pichet Klunchun and Myself." *Theatre Survey* 55, no. 2 (2014): 185-201.

Kwon, Miwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2004.

Lambert-Beatty, Carrie. *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2011.

Lasch, Quinn Elisabeth. “How to Behave Sensitively: Prescriptions for Interracial Conduct from the 1960s to the 1990s.” *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 2 (1999): 409-427.

Lepecki, André. “Choreopolice and Choreopolitics: or, the task of the dancer.” *TDR: The Drama Review* 57, no. 4 (2013): 13-27.

Lepecki, André. “The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances.” *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (2010): 28-48.

Lepecki, André. “Zones of Resonance: Mutual Formations in Dance and the Visual Arts Since the 1960s.” In *Move. Choreographing You: Art and Dance Since the 1960s*. Edited by Susan Rosenthal, 152-163. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011.

Malnig, Julie. *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 2008.

Malnig, Julie. “Introduction.” *Dance Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (2001): 7-10.

Manning, Susan. *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press: 2004.

Martin, Randy. *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.

Mckeon, Olive. “Rethinking Anna Halprin’s *Parades and Changes*: Postmodern Dance, Racialized Urban Restructuring, and Mid-1960s San Francisco.” *TDR: The Drama Review* 64, vol. 2 (2020): 87.

McMillan, Uri. *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance*. New York: NYU Press, 2015.

Miller, Tim and David Román. “Preaching to the Converted.” *Theatre Journal* 47, no. 2 (1995): 169–88.

Moyers, Bill, dir. *Bill T. Jones: Still/Here with Bill Moyers*. 1997; Public Broadcasting Service.

“Move: Choreographing You.” e-flux online. October 19, 2010. https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/36332/move-choreographing-you/.

“Movement Research 30th Anniversary Timeline.” Movement Research online. Accessed October 10, 2021. https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/movementresearch/about/Movement-Research-30th-Anniversary-Timeline-History.pdf?mtime=20180108164753.

Morse, Meredith. *Soft is Fast: Simone Forti in the 1960s and After*. Cambridge: Massachusetts of Technology Press, 2016.

Neal, Mark Anthony. "Prelude from the Funkmaster." In *The Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture.* Edited by Tony Boldon, 3-12. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Novack, Cynthia. *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press: 1990.

Piper, Adrian. *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Volume I, Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992*. Cambridge, MIT Press: 1999.

Prickett, Stacey. "Dance and the Workers' Struggle." *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 8, no. 1 (1990): 47-61.

Rainer, Yvonne. "Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Calles *Parts of Some Sextets,* Performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson memorial Church, New York, in March, 1965." *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (1965): 168-178.

Robinson, Danielle. "Modern Moves: Dancing Race During the Ragtime and Jazz Eras." Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Román, David. *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.

Rosenberg, Susan. *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2016.

Ross, Janice. *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Rushing, Janice Hocker. "The Rhetoric of The American Western Myth." *Communications Monographs* 50, no. 1 (1983): 14-32.

Stallings, L.H. *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures*. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015.

Solomon, Alissa. "AIDS Crusaders ACT UP a Storm." In *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology*. Edited by Jan Cohen-Cruz, 42-51. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Sommella, Laraine. "This is about people dying: the tactics of early ACT UP and Lesbian Avengers in New York City: an interview with Maxine Wolfe." In *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*. Edited by Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillete, and Yolanda Retter. Seattle: Bay Press: 1997.

Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York: Picador, 1990).

Spivey, Virginia. "The Minimal Presence of Simone Forti." *Woman's Art Journal* 30, no. 1 (2009): 11-18.

"The Dance in Two Museums," *The American Magazine of Art* 26, no. 1 (1933): 49.

Widener, Daniel. *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Wood, Catherine. *The Mind is a Muscle.* London, Afterall: 2007.

Wookey, Sara. "Open Letter to Artists from Sara Wookey." Another Righteous Transfer! November 26, 2011. https://anotherrighteoustransfer.wordpress.com/2011/11/23/open-letter-to-artists-from-sara-wookey/.

"Yvonne Rainer Blasts Marina Abramović and MOCA LA." The Performance Club. July 21, 2019. https://theperformanceclub.org/yvonne-rainer-blasts-marina-abramovic-and-moca-la/

Velasco, David. "Reveries of a Solitary Dancer." *Artforum* 57, no. 1 (2018).