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2016

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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Gaga as Politics: A Case Study of Contemporary Dance Training

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Critical Dance Studies

by

Meghan Ruth Quinlan

June 2016

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Anthea Kraut, Chairperson

Dr. Jens Richard Giersdorf

Dr. Linda Tomko

Dr. Jeff Sacks

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The Dissertation of Meghan Ruth Quinlan is approved:

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Acknowledgements

The process of writing a dissertation is at times solitary, but always dependent on the support of a community. I am extremely lucky to be surrounded by an amazing group of faculty, friends, and family who have made the completion of this project possible.

First and foremost, I want to thank my committee chair, Anthea Kraut, for all of her help and critical insight. In addition to pushing me to consider new critical lenses and embrace the contradictions in my work, I cannot thank her enough for her cheerleading and organizational wizardry as she helped me negotiate everything from grant applications, chapter outlines, university forms, and seemingly endless revisions. I am also deeply indebted to Jens Giersdorf, who not only significantly influenced the thinking and structure of the project but is also the reason that I applied to and ultimately attended graduate school. He has been a trusted mentor since I was an undergraduate student, and I am so thankful for his forthright and forward-looking feedback from pre- to post-UCR. Linda Tomko has been a key actor in not only my dissertation project, but also my growth as a scholar. Her generosity and support as she consistently pushes me to be more specific, articulate, and cognizant of the importance of contextualization inspires me to be a better scholar and person. Jeff Sacks has also been a driving force in this project, leading me deep into discourses on Israel/Palestine and encouraging me to engage with and learn Hebrew to deepen my understanding of regional politics while embracing my dance studies approach.

I am also grateful to the professors I have had the privilege of working with throughout my time at the Dance Department at UC Riverside: Priya Srinivasan, Jacqueline Shea Murphy, Imani Kai Johnson, Wendy Rogers, Susan Rose, and Kelli King. In studios and seminar rooms, these strong, brilliant women have encouraged me to move beyond my familiar limits in every sense of the term. Without their guidance I would never have had the courage to explore an improvisatory dance form as my research project, or engage with ethnographic methods.

My work has also benefitted from the feedback of countless scholars through conferences, seminars, and publication opportunities. Sherril Dodds has been influential in the development of my third chapter as I adapt an argument from this chapter for an upcoming publication, and Judith Brin Ingber has been a supportive figure who has graciously shared her own experiences writing about dance in Israel and personal experiences and interviews with Ohad Naharin. Feedback from senior scholars and peers at the Mellon Dance Studies Summer Seminar 2015 held at Northwestern University has also greatly influenced my writing for this project. I am also full of gratitude for the many conversations I've been a part of with participants at the various conferences I've had the opportunity to attend and present at, such as at the annual CORD/SDHS joint conferences, which have challenged me and contributed to this work in innumerable ways.

The research required for this project was supported by several generous grants from UCR: a Department of Dance Dissertation Research Grant, a Graduate Deans' Dissertation Research Grant, and a Humanities Graduate Student Research Grant. The

writing and editing of this work was made possible by the financial support from the Dissertation Year Program Award from UCR. I am also indebted to the Middlebury Language Schools for funding my summer of studying Modern Hebrew in their immersive language program.

These research trips introduced me to a wide network of Gaga dancers, teachers, and scholars, whose participation in interviews and casual conversations were crucial to the success of this project. The openness of the Gaga community, from participants to professionals alike, has made this research not only possible, but a joy to perform. I am grateful for the dancers who were more than willing to share their experiences and space in the studio with me. I owe particular thanks to Deborah Friedes Galili, who has been enormously helpful in her capacity as a Gaga scholar and teacher as well as Gaga Movement Ltd. administrator in facilitating interviews, the circulation of surveys, and other research requests.

To say that my colleagues over the years in the Dance Department need thanks is an understatement. I could not have made it through grad school without the emotional, intellectual, editorial, and enthusiastic support of the many friends I've made here. Special shout-outs to the entire Unicorn Cohort for keeping the magic alive, the honey bunches Natalie Zervou and Jen Aubrecht for reading (and editing) virtually everything I've ever written and generally keeping me sane, and Katie Stahl-Kovell for her constant support, brainstorming, and infectious positivity.

I also want to thank all my family and friends for their support of my academic pursuits. Your immense pride in my accomplishments and funny notes, phone calls, and

texts make up for the frequent laughs about becoming a doctor of dance, of all things.

Jokes aside, I am so appreciative of the support to pursue any career I wanted as long as I was passionate about it.

Last but not least, special thanks to Andy for helping me to not take this all too seriously, and getting me to laugh and keep going even when it seemed impossible.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Gaga as Politics: A Case Study of Contemporary Dance Training

by

Meghan Ruth Quinlan

Doctor of Philosophy, Critical Dance Studies
University of California, Riverside, June 2016
Dr. Anthea Kraut, Chairperson

This dissertation unpacks the politics embedded in the practice of Gaga, the movement language developed by Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin. In doing so, I disrupt the dominant mass-media discourse and few academic articles that describe Gaga in terms of personal freedom and other universalizing, depoliticizing rhetorics. I challenge this common understanding of Gaga by acknowledging several political layers of Gaga. First I explore the Gaga organization's rejection of the term "technique" to describe the practice, unpacking the Euro-American racial politics that are embedded in this term and arguing that Gaga/dancers classes do not completely elide these politics because the practice is structured as a meta-technique that depends on awareness of Europeanist form-based techniques. I then turn to the Israeli origins of the practice to argue that Gaga upholds several specifically Israeli ideals that are significant to acknowledge as the practice continues to circulate outside of Israel's borders. Finally, I turn to a global scope to explore the relationship between Gaga and neoliberalism,

suggesting that Gaga predominantly upholds neoliberal values, but also subverts them by emphasizing the importance of pleasure and bodily affects.

These arguments about the political nature of Gaga are rooted in my ethnographic experiences. My Critical Dance Studies ethnographic approach recognizes a diversity of perspectives, and values the embodied experiences that often rupture the rhetoric used to describe and advertise Gaga. Three years of active participation in Gaga classes and workshops throughout the United States and attendance at two summer intensives held in Tel Aviv, Israel (2013 and 2015) lay the groundwork for my personal analysis of the practice. Interviews and surveys with active participants, teachers, and administrators of Gaga expand the scope of the project to consider international perspectives. I then apply theoretical inquiries from race studies, Israel/Palestine studies, globalization and neoliberal theory, and other academic discourses to unpack the politics that both my ethnographic subjects and I have encountered in the practice of Gaga. This case study furthers the academic discourse of Gaga, and also contributes to the broader scholarly studies of technique, contemporary dance training, neoliberalism, and the cultural politics of Israel/Palestine.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Decolonizing Gaga: Embodying the Politics of Appropriation and (Meta-)Techniques	37
Chapter 2 The Cultural Politics of Practicing Israeli-ness in Gaga	98
Chapter 3 Work Instructions and Gaga Intensives: Gaga and Neoliberal Economies	143
Conclusion	201
Works Cited	217

List of Images

Image 1 Screenshot of Gaga Work Instructions	144
Image 2 Exterior of Suzanne Dellal Center	183
Image 3 Studio Suzy	184
Image 4 Improvisation in Studio Varda	194
Image 5 Screenshot of “Mr. Gaga” Facebook page	202

Introduction

The first time I heard about Gaga was in my undergraduate Senior Seminar class in New York. We were discussing the future of dance – which, in this conservatory-style program, meant concert dance – and someone mentioned the Batsheva Dance Company. I hadn't seen a contemporary performance in over a month, because I had been spending my spare time assisting with the activities surrounding the recreation of a piece choreographed by Alwin Nikolais in 1985. Luckily, a few of my peers were more in touch with the contemporary dance world. A few of the more hip students – almost all sporting the partly-shaved head trend that was popular with artists at the time – began raving about a performance by Batsheva they had recently seen at the Joyce Theater downtown. They used adjectives like “explosive” and “dynamic”, and declared themselves infatuated. “They’re Israeli,” I remember someone saying, as if it were exotic and added to the company’s hype. One girl described the dancers as “organic” and almost “effortless,” and stated her interest in learning to embody that style. Several heads nodded in agreement. No one had a bad word to say about the group – a rarity in that class. Someone mentioned that they trained in a style called Gaga, which not everyone had heard of. It was 2010, and Gaga was just starting to be offered in New York studios on a regular basis. I admired the dancing of my peers who had heard of Gaga and made a mental note to try a class when I was less busy.

Wait. That might not be true. This moment in seminar did happen, but maybe the first time I heard about Gaga was online, when I started researching the dance companies

boycotted by the Palestinian civil society's ongoing Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel. I had been talking with a friend of mine, an aspiring political journalist, who knew that I was interested in both politics and dance. He mentioned that he had attended a protest the previous weekend, and surprised me by saying that the subject of the protest was the Israel Ballet. Though I knew that ballet served a political function during the Cold War through American cultural diplomacy, I could not at that time fathom how a ballet company could be so controversial in a contemporary context. My friend informed me that it was part of a broader boycott movement against Israel and Israel's cultural exportation in particular: the Brand Israel campaign, which is not entirely dissimilar from American cultural diplomacy during the Cold War era.¹ Though I knew little of the boycott movement or the nuance of the political situation in Israel and Palestine, I was perturbed by the concept that dance could be the subject of a boycott. I sympathized with my friend's political stance but couldn't shake the idea that boycotting dance was problematic even in the pursuit of social justice. Soon after that conversation I began investigating the phenomenon of boycotting Israeli dance and saw that the Batsheva Dance Company was one of the boycotted companies.

I did not see the Batsheva Dance Company perform while I lived in New York City. Their performances were always sold out, and on top of that excuse I was also actively contemplating the issue of whether or not I could support a boycott of dance, even though I supported the political cause the boycott stood for. I did, however, start taking Gaga classes. The combination of contemporary concert dance and political

¹ The Brand Israel campaign and the BDS movement are described in depth in Chapter 2.

controversy made it impossible for me to abstain from Israeli dance completely, so I put aside my insecurities about having to do improvisation² and my questions about the boycott and trekked down to the Mark Morris dance studios in Brooklyn to see what the fuss was all about. My initial reaction was conflicted, a response that continues to this day. At a physical level, I found joy. The movement *felt* good because it was so open compared to the highly structured techniques I normally forced my hyper-extended joints in to. At the same time, my emotional response was one of disregard. It felt too silly to be taken seriously, or to have any significant impact on my semi-professional dance training. The next day, however, my extremely sore muscles challenged this initial emotional response to describe a fun dance class as “easy” or not serious. It also felt so far removed from the political controversy that had partly prompted my attendance: how could rolling around the floor and shaking my body be related to the forceful military ventures of the State of Israel? Although I continued attending classes for fun when I visited New York, particularly as I began graduate school and let go of my rigid dance training regimen, I resisted studying Gaga at an academic level because of my confused reaction to the practice. How could a white American female with no ties to the Middle East, and no clear response to the practice of Gaga, write responsibly about this movement language?

In spite of my resistance I kept returning to Gaga in both studios and academic papers, which has resulted in this in-depth study of the practice. I recount this journey to writing about Gaga here to contextualize my perspective: my personal and political opinions about Gaga and the State of Israel continue to influence my analysis of the

² As a dancer trained primarily in ballet, I had little experience or comfort with improvisation of any kind at that time.

practice. I still have yet to make up my mind about the ethical dilemma of boycotting Israeli dance (though Gaga is not part of the official BDS call – a topic I take up in Chapter 2).³ So, as an American with no familial or personal ties to Israel or Palestine, I do not attempt to argue one way or another for any particular strategy to establish social justice in the region; I believe it is up to the residents to make their own choices. At the same time, I think it is imperative to consider the ethical dilemmas of how to achieve social justice, and what social justice might look like in Israel/Palestine. As Judith Butler so eloquently argued in her 2012 text on Zionism (*Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*), debate on Israel cannot be confined to Jewish and Arab populations in the Middle East. Rather, it is the responsibility of all (especially Americans, who are complicit in these issues by virtue of our economic ties) to educate themselves and get involved, which is a primary aim of my project. In particular, I am critical of disproportionate military responses the Israeli government enacts against their Palestinian neighbors and the establishment of illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank that infringe upon Palestinian land rights. The government of Israel is in clear violation of international law with the settlements and must be questioned about human rights violations in its military attacks that disproportionately kill and injure civilians (such as

³ Although I personally support the BDS movement against Israel in most regards, in line with many other academics interested in promoting a more politically and socially just society in Israel/Palestine, as a dancer and dance scholar I recognize the many ways in which engaging with a politically controversial company can be beneficial to creating dialogue and debate. I struggle in my efforts to be an ally to social justice movements for the Palestinian people because of my interest in the aesthetics and politics of Israeli contemporary dance, which does in many ways support the Israeli government (and is sometimes supported financially by this government) even as the performances frequently critique the contemporary political and military actions of the State.

the Gaza assault in Summer 2014), though these issues are rarely addressed in international forums. My personal instinct to question the actions of the government currently guiding the State of Israel – and the divisive ethno-nationalist rhetoric so frequently used by current Prime Minister Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu – as I consider these questions of human rights and social justice for both Palestinians and Israelis will also become apparent, though I do attempt to consider multiple perspectives throughout my analysis.

In addition to my political and personal positioning in relation to writing about a dance practice emerging from the State of Israel, this narrative of my journey to writing about Gaga touches on my personal dance training history and aesthetic preferences. I grew up training in form-based techniques such as ballet, and as an undergraduate dance major I took daily classes in ballet and a variety of modern dance techniques such as Graham technique, Horton technique, and Nikolais. I was also exposed to post-modern dance practices through choreography classes, as well as brief dalliances in genres such as jazz, tap, and hip-hop. As a viewer of dance, I gravitate towards the companies that perform technically challenging choreography. This movement background is important not only to contextualize my personal history with and preferences in dance, which factor in to my narratives recounting fieldwork experiences in Gaga classes, but also to indicate a common background for Gaga students. As I interviewed other Gaga students, I noticed that our histories often overlapped in terms of training backgrounds and aesthetic preferences. This specificity is important to keep in mind, because it frames the practice of Gaga within the Western concert dance history tradition even as it presents itself as a

universally appealing practice that engages with healing, freedom, and pleasure (see Gaga Movement Ltd. 2016 for examples of this Gaga advertising rhetoric).

Ultimately, because and in spite of personal political and aesthetic preferences that led me to this topic, this study of Gaga is rooted in an academic curiosity about how Gaga functions in contemporary dance, political, and economic contexts. I unpack the nuances of Gaga practice to understand the ways in which the practice has developed and circulated over the past two decades while Gaga has become an internationally renowned phenomenon. Although my initial questions were about why Gaga was becoming so popular in international contexts, this led to a critical inquiry of the racial politics of its abstraction of other dance techniques, the national politics embedded in the practice, and its role in contemporary neoliberal economies. I explore each of these issues in separate chapters, considering throughout the ways in which a close analysis of the actual practice of Gaga challenges the rhetoric often used to describe it in both advertising materials and journalistic articles published in mainstream news publications. I attempt to reconcile my simultaneous enjoyment and wariness of the practice by unpacking the many layers that comprise Gaga aesthetically, physically, economically, and politically.

0.1 Methods and Theories

This study of Gaga employs a hybridized methodology. The observations and analyses within depend heavily on the ethnographic method of participant observation, which I employed from 2012-2015 as an active Gaga student in various locations. I attended open classes in New York City during frequent visits between graduate

coursework in California from 2012-2014. I participated in two separate weeklong Gaga workshops in the summer of 2012, held in Seattle and Los Angeles respectively. In the summers of 2013 and 2015 I attended the two-week Gaga intensives held in Tel Aviv, and in the summer of 2015 I also attended open Gaga classes throughout Germany (Freiburg, Potsdam, and Berlin).⁴ During each visit in Tel Aviv, I attended open Gaga/people classes held at the Suzanne Dellal Center in addition to the Gaga/dancers program in the intensive. My own experiences are supplemented by interviews and surveys of Gaga dancers, teachers, and administrators, performed both online and in person. This ethnographic work is supplemented by theoretical investigations of technique, appropriation, nationalism, Israeli/Palestinian history, and neoliberalism, as well as historical research on Israeli dance leading up to Gaga's emergence as an international phenomenon in the early 2000s. This variety of methods and theories allows me to re-contextualize and (re)politicize the subject from a variety of different viewpoints, thus challenging commonly held opinions, arguments, and political agendas that may be associated with Gaga.

Participant observation as an ethnographic method holds particular significance in the study of Gaga. Observers are not allowed in the studio; thus to gain access to Gaga classes one must be an active participant. This logistical factor demanded a participatory

⁴ My research in Germany comprised of only one week taking classes in the country, and thus the specificity of this location is not explored in depth in this project. I do reference many contacts I met and interviewed while attending classes in this country, however, to add range to the perspectives of Gaga participants included in this project.

ethnographic method, though it is also a pivotal approach to most dance ethnographies.⁵ The act of practicing the dance often shifts perspectives and understandings of the dance. For example, dance ethnographer Sally Ness wrote of her initial experience of Balinese dance: “The complexity of the technique was made much more accessible to me as a student. I gained enormous respect in that hour, and some concrete awareness of my own specific limitations” (Ness 1996, 132). As a result of this learning experience, she was able to break down the embodied knowledge in this type of dance, and note the specific skills required of its performers. As an outsider to the type of dance, Ness also noted that:

Learning how to embody new forms of movement in cross-cultural encounters exposes in a highly specific way some of one’s most personal judgments to others, and in this respect can accelerate a certain kind of body-based intimacy in the production of ethnographic relationships. (Ness 1996, 139)

In addition to gaining bodily knowledge of the dance practice, Ness argues that participating in the embodied act of dancing can help the ethnographer form closer connections to their ethnographic subjects. I experienced this frequently in my study of Gaga; being able to relate to the experience or refer to a shared moment within a class helped me to push my informants to add more specificity to their comments, and encourage them to share open opinions with me. That act of participating in the dancing rather than just viewing also gives insight into the bodily experience of Gaga, deepening my ability to describe the prompts and movements viscerally. Participating also offers a

⁵ Some examples of dance ethnography where participation adds a critical layer to the author’s analysis include Priya Srinivasan’s *Sweating Saris* (2011), Susan A. Reed’s *Dance and the Nation* (2010), and Marta Savigliano’s *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (1995). In each study, the experience of participating and embodying the dance complicated and added more depth to the analysis of the dance and its significance both to the dancers and the broader society of which it is a part.

challenge to many rhetorical or assumptive statements about what Gaga is and what it can do for the dancer. Although it is easy for me to mock some of the imagery used in Gaga classes as simplistic – such as “boiling like spaghetti” – doing this exercise and feeling the reverberations of movement throughout my body after we cease movement forces me to consider the powerful corporeal effects and affects of such imagery.

My experience of Gaga is, of course, specific to my background and perspective as a white female American academic with a training background in Western concert dance techniques. To widen my analysis of Gaga I thus had to reach out to other participants. I both danced and spoke with dancers from all over the world throughout the course of my fieldwork, and disseminated a survey via official Gaga organization emails and social media to reach a wide range of participants I may not have encountered personally or through my personal contacts. In the survey, I gathered data about their identity, previous dance experiences, the role Gaga plays in their current training regimen, their dance aspirations (personal or professional), level of involvement in Gaga, and written reactions to questions about their personal experiences in Gaga classes. My interview subjects were exclusively those that self-identified as dancers; though the Gaga/people phenomenon is addressed in this project, it is focused on the Gaga/dancers track. These dancers ranged in age, gender, and location but were primarily in their late teens or twenties and living in major North American cities (i.e. New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Toronto) or Israel. The geographic scope of participants’ home bases also included major cities in South Africa, Russia, and a range of European countries including England, Germany, and Sweden, though these were not

always their countries of origin. I also held many casual conversations outside of the scope of formal interviews with Gaga dancers from Japan, Brazil, Taiwan, and other countries, generally falling in to the 20s-30s age range and predominantly but not exclusively female. This data, combined with my information gathered via personal interviews, undergirds many of my claims about the general trends in the Gaga-practicing population in terms of dance history and attitudes towards the practice.

The interviews in particular served to challenge many of my personal assumptions about Gaga's importance for the training of dancers as well as affirm my analysis of Gaga's growing standing in the Western concert dance world. Though I interviewed several instructors and administrators, all officially tied to Gaga Movement Ltd. based in Tel Aviv, Israel, I focused my research on the participants. The instructors and administrators offered valuable insight into the institutional goals and pedagogy of Gaga, but ultimately my questions centered on the impact of training in Gaga for the dancers. Additionally, I was interested in challenging the rhetoric used by Gaga teachers and administrators, which was difficult to do in interviews with members of the organization.⁶ In speaking with Gaga participants – ranging from those who have taken only a few classes to those who moved to Israel to train intensively in Gaga – I encountered a range of opinions and perspectives on the practice. The participants often used similar language to describe the bodily experiences and sensations in the body, such as referencing the grounded quality of movement or the seaweed spine. Some were deeply invested in the

⁶ The teachers and administrators of Gaga I interviewed all appeared passionate about their involvement with this practice, and overwhelmingly positive. They earnestly adhered to the company line, and seemed unwilling to question the practice or Naharin's stated objectives or descriptions of Gaga.

practice, and found it invaluable to their success as professional dancers, and others dismissed it as a fad that did not contribute to their training in any significant way. It is important to note that these responses were coming strictly from dancers engaging with Gaga; I did not interview participants *only* engaging with Gaga/people, though this would be a valuable area for further research in another project.

The interviews took the form of story telling. I guided the participant to tell me the story of how they first heard about Gaga or the story of their first class and what they remember from that experience, allowing them to direct the conversation and focus on what they found important. This follows in a lineage of feminist ethnography that gives agency to the subjects being interviewed, and finds value in the inconsistencies and gossip potentially embedded in someone's story. Rather than looking for a single answer or an objective truth, dependent on what my own understanding of Gaga was, I embraced what anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran describes as a "feminist way of knowing [that] sees the process of positioning itself as an epistemological act" (Visweswaran 1994, 48). In acknowledging my own position as a white, American female in academia I was responsible not only for understanding my personal biases, but also how my positionality may influence the answers of my interviewees.⁷ By asking them to tell stories I attempted to put the dancer in the place of power to lead the interview, thus creating the opportunity to be led to a new narrative or experience I could not have prompted via specific

⁷ In many interviews, my subjects initially indicated hesitation about their ability to offer any important information. At times they verbally referenced my status as an academic, telling me that they did not read about or study Gaga to indicate that they were unsure if they would be of any help to a formal study. Through the process of affirming their experiences as valid insights, they often began to let go of this insecure rhetoric throughout the course of the interview.

questions coming from my own experiences or initial research questions. Though I would occasionally ask for clarifications in their stories, the objective was not to find an objective truth, but rather to uncover what was lodged in their memories as important ideas and events. As Visweswaran argues, “a feminist ethnography can consider how identities are multiple, contradictory, partial, and strategic. The underlying assumption is, of course, that the subject herself represents a constellation of conflicting social, linguistic, and political forces” (Visweswaran 1994, 50). In order to allow this multiplicity of perspectives that emerge from a shifting identity and inconsistent experiences, Visweswaran and other feminist ethnographers argue that fiction, silence, and failure to connect or address a pre-determined subject are valuable tools to reach a more accurate representation of an individual’s experience.

At the end of interviews I asked pointed questions related to particular research questions, such as whether or not they associated Gaga with any political agendas (such as the BDS campaign, which boycotts Batsheva but not Gaga because Gaga is not financially supported by the State of Israel and thus does not meet the current cultural boycott criteria). The dancers’ reactions to my pointed questions were useful in pushing them to consider Gaga in a new light: particularly interesting was the dancers’ reaction to the question of whether or not they considered Gaga to be a technique, and the many different definitions they offered of what a technique meant to them. These questions were often greeted with far less enthusiasm than the story telling of their journeys to and with Gaga, but offered valuable ranges of opinions to controversial topics such as the political nature (or, according to many dancers, the lack thereof) of Gaga. The failure I

frequently encountered in trying to engage my interviewees in a discussion of the politics of Gaga – a core understanding of Gaga in my personal experience – spoke to a common experience within the concert dance community to ignore or abstain from the associating national politics to the practice of their art, regardless of their personal politics or opinions outside of the studio. Though Visweswaran and others do not necessarily advocate for reading one’s subjects’ responses subversively, feminist ethnography acknowledges that there are many instances in which reading between the lines is an integral skill to apply to interviews with subjects that are entrenched in controversial politics and situations. Though I value what my subjects say and cite them directly, I also view challenging their statements as integral to considering what is often left out of conversational discourses surrounding this topic: namely, the political nature of Gaga.

I maintain my interviewees’ informal conversational style when quoting them throughout this dissertation, editing lightly for comprehension and to remove excessive pauses or frequent verbal tics such as “um” and “like.” This style is at times at odds with the academic tone of the writing surrounding the quotation. Rather than academicize their comments with heavy editing, I remain true to their speaking style to emphasize who is participating in Gaga and how they talk about it in daily life. This is intended to give agency to the conversations Gaga participants have about their practice, and the actual words and phrases used by these dancers even when they clash with or challenge my scholarly take on the practice. I attribute each quote to the dancer who said it, using their preferred name. In a few cases, dancers wished to remain anonymous so their critiques of the practice would not negatively impact them while seeking future employment.

Although most dancers chose to allow me to reveal their real names, this did not seem to prevent them from being critical about their practice; most interviews were overwhelmingly positive regarding reactions to Gaga while still recognizing some critiques or downfalls of the practice.

The outcome of these interviews and my participant observation was a great deal of ambiguous information. In many interviews, the participants contradicted themselves frequently. In my own experience, I also encountered many contradictions as I struggled with my simultaneous enthusiasm for and criticism of Gaga. Although initially confused by these results, desiring a clear answer to my questions, I eventually embraced the multiple layers and inconsistencies. Much like the structure of Gaga itself, which is predicated on multi-layered tasks and switching dynamics, there are no singular or clear answers to questions about Gaga. The improvisational nature of the class allows for a range of individual interpretations of prompts and experiences of sensations, resulting in a wide array of responses to the practice. A clear example of these contradictory reactions to the same idea were the various reactions to one of Ohad Naharin's classes at the 2015 Gaga intensive in Tel Aviv: some interviewees raved about how this class was transformative and challenged them, while others complained that they were less engaged than compared to their participation in other classes. Similarly contradictory, some dancers have negative reactions to the abstraction of balletic forms in Gaga classes – complaining that they are not being challenged physically – while others embrace this different approach as equally stimulating and even preferable to a classical ballet class. At times, dancers saw both sides of such arguments, suggesting that they – like myself –

wavered between multiple positions on the efficacy and intent of Gaga's pedagogy. For instance, one dancer asserted that Gaga was not political at all, because it was open to everyone regardless of skill level, but continuously described it as emblematic of Israeli dance trends and acknowledged that it is informed by Israeli culture and sensibilities – an association he did not deem political in nature but that I will argue in Chapter 2 is undoubtedly wrapped up in national(ist) politics.

The multiple perspectives and approaches to Gaga exhibited by these dancers underline and support my reading of the practice from a variety of angles. It is reductive to consider Gaga from any one angle alone, or to argue that it does one single thing. The layers and angles of Gaga create the possibility for it to enact multiple political meanings and effects, and require any analysis of Gaga to consider multiple readings. This understanding of Gaga as political in a multi-layered way is deeply rooted in Randy Martin's explanation of the connection between dance and politics in the introduction to his 1998 text *Critical Moves*. In it, he explains:

If one grants that along with dance, politics cannot have a solitary form or unitary object, if neither can be one thing or about one thing, it becomes possible to notice a proliferation of political activity throughout the social fabric and not simply confined to what are formally considered to be political institutions. ... dance is encumbered with political significance beyond a given tactical stance toward a particular issue, commitment, or moment. (Martin 1998, 2)

Martin's acknowledgment that politics is complex and shifting, similar to the complexity and movement of dance and choreography, allows him to theorize the political significance of dance in a multifaceted way. Dance no longer has to enact an obvious, singular political message – such as the overtly political dances performed by the American Workers' Dance League in the early 1900s – to hold political meaning or effect

change. This acknowledgement of the shifting and multiple meanings available in movement and politics alike also indicates dance scholars' ability to read multiple messages in dances and dancing bodies. I apply this multiplicitous understanding of politics in reading Gaga throughout this project. I acknowledge several different perspectives and at times assert interpretations of the practice that other practitioners may disavow, embracing the concept that these many readings and engagements with Gaga can coexist within the practice.

One way in which the multiplicity of the political readings of Gaga occurs is through the global circulation of this movement language. Though my writing focuses primarily on Gaga as it is practiced throughout the United States and in Tel Aviv, Israel – currently the two biggest centers of Gaga practice – this work rests on the knowledge that Gaga is circulating internationally. This informs the population that attends Gaga intensives, their backgrounds, and the growing diversity of Gaga participants (though these participants remain relatively homogenous in terms of their background of training in popular Western concert dance techniques). As Gaga continues to spread outside of Israel, it is important to consider the cultural politics of globalization and the role of nations and their cultural exports in the global marketplace. Many scholars have addressed this issue theoretically. For instance, political theorists such as Hardt and Negri have considered the growth of transnational exchange as leading towards an end of national autonomy, ideally toward an organizing structure known as the 'multitude,' in which power and trade are increasingly collaborative in the form of a global democracy (Hardt and Negri 2001, 2004). This multitude allows for different communities and local

specificities, but focuses on a global network where – ideally – no individual community has more power or individual agency than another group. Other scholars, such as anthropologist Aihwa Ong, look at globalization as a blurring but not a decimation of national boundaries. In her 1999 study of the travel and economic goals of businessmen from the Asia-Pacific, *Flexible Citizenship*, Ong considers ‘transnationality’ rather than globalization as a framework for understanding the travel of bodies, cultures, and capital in recent decades. Specifically, Ong’s analysis of passports and how the rights to travel are granted by different nations considers the reality of transnational mobility and its frequent obstacles and complex social implications. Unlike Hardt and Negri, Ong reinforces the power of nations in global trade and physical movement of citizens, acknowledging the cultural and economic tensions at play alongside the legal right to travel and trade transnationally.

In addressing this question of the importance of nationalism in global circulation of products – a question important to consider in relation to Israeli-based but internationally-circulated Gaga – scholars within dance studies have begun to consider what is unique about the circulation of dance across national boundaries and how dance might contribute to the growing field of globalization studies. Vital to these studies is the presence of physical bodies. Whereas many political and economic scholars focus on globalization in the abstract sense, the study of dance is bound to the realities of bodies moving through space. In analyzing the ruptures in transnational flow attributed to the trouble of attaining passports, obtaining enough funds to travel, or securing international interest that can be found in the study of dance, dance studies offers a rethinking of

globalization that foregrounds the blockages that still occur within the often-idealized concept of global circulation.⁸

The work of dance scholars such as Thomas DeFrantz (2012), Priya Srinivasan (2011), and Janet O’Shea (2007), among others, has begun to decenter nationally and historically specific studies of dance. In today’s era of increased global trade and communication, it is problematic to consider any contemporary dance practice as entirely localized and uninfluenced by global trends or circulation. In thinking through the legal, political, and economic restrictions for transnational flows of dancing bodies, as well as the translation required across cultural borders, dance studies opens up an analysis of how bodies can strategically navigate borders, restrictions, and newfound access. Whether this is done through the process of obtaining passports, refashioning choreography to appeal to broader audiences, or acknowledging contextually specific interpretations of movement, these corporeal analyses offer an important grounding for the abstraction found in many studies of globalization. Thus, I remain attentive throughout my study of

⁸ One of the primary contributions dance has made to globalization studies is a critical study of how bodies are impacted by passports and labor laws, which are crucial legal and economic factors for the circulation of bodies and cultural products. Priya Srinivasan’s 2011 text *Sweating Saris* considers the labor of dancing bodies as they migrate and perform in diasporic contexts, and dissertations by Anusha Kedhar and Maral Yassayan similarly consider the work of dancing bodies as impacted by citizenship, labor, and gender politics coming from the UK and Jordan, respectively. Kedhar in particular considers the strategies of ‘flexible bodies’ as a method for reconsidering the politics of globalization and how it impacts both dancing bodies and the circulation of their work. In navigating political, economic, and social borders, these ‘flexible bodies’ are shown to corporeally negotiate globalization in creative ways. The issue of cultural translation and cultural specificity amidst globalization has also been of interest to dance scholars, such as Hye-Won Hwang and Janet O’Shea. For both O’Shea and Hwang, cultural translation of dance practices and methods requires a rethinking of the values, meanings, and choreographic forms of the dancing body.

Gaga to the national and cultural specificities of the practice, both Israeli and otherwise, as it circulates to new national markets.

0.2 Israeli Concert Dance, a Brief History: Contextualizing Gaga's Emergence

My study of Gaga is rooted firmly in the contemporary moment. Scholars such as Deborah Friedes Galili have begun to contextualize the history of Gaga's development and rise to popularity during the early 2000s (Galili 2015), as well as the emergence of contemporary dance in Israel (Galili 2012), which provides the foundation for my study of Gaga after it had already begun to circulate internationally in the 2010s. In order to contextualize the cultural politics and significance of Gaga to both international and Israeli dance history, however, I offer here a brief overview of Israeli concert dance history and the emergence of Gaga within this nationally specific aesthetic context.

In pre-State Israel during the early 1900s, there were some initial experiments in concert dance styles blending Middle Eastern and Western European influences.⁹ As Nina Spiegel explains in her 2013 text *Embodying Hebrew Culture*, Jewish concert dance in pre-State Israel heavily depended on European modernist principles and the practice of *Ausdruckstanz* (expressionist dance) that was developed in Germany as well as biblical

⁹ These concert dance endeavors were not the only source of dance cultural in pre-State Israel: at this time, Israeli folk dance was being created and performed in festivals as well as community gatherings. For more on folk dance history, see Chapter 2. The blending of Middle Eastern and Western European influences is significant to the political history of the Jewish settlements in the land of Palestine; as Jewish settlers began to move to the land of Palestine from Western and Eastern Europe, they often drew on both familiar European traditions and the local (Middle Eastern) culture to establish cultural authenticity for their political and biblical claims to the land. This was closely tied to the work of the Zionist Congresses meeting in Europe, who set directives and financial support for the creation and development of a uniquely Israeli national culture.

stories and Middle Eastern culture. For instance, the winner of the only pre-state concert dance competition, held in 1936, was Yardena Cohen. Her choreography embraced “Eastern” themes by representing biblical characters set in the Middle East, accompanied by live music performed by Sephardic musicians. This performance exemplifies a cultural representation of Jewishness in line with political Zionist impulses to connect the Jewish settlers to the history of the land of historic Palestine. As Spiegel notes about Cohen and other dancers with ties to the land of Palestine:

Internalizing Orientalist attitudes of the time, they ... looked to the East as representing authenticity, but at the same time they remained conflicted about these sources and often viewed them as low art. ... Their artistic processes and creations embody the aesthetic of fusion because they combined influences from the two perceived cultural milieus in the work. (Spiegel 2013, 107)

Cohen was well suited to embrace the “Eastern” component of early Israeli culture, as she was the only participant in the concert dance competition who had been born and raised in Palestine. Yet the form and structure of the choreography were heavily influenced by her extensive study of expressionist dance in Germany, a practice also familiar to and used by many of the other participants in the competition.

The use of expressionist art as the model for artistic production for the majority of this competition’s participants points to a widespread adoption of the modernist aesthetic values popular in European culture at that time. In her analysis of Wigman’s expressionist style, dance scholar Susan Manning argues that she rejected traditional forms such as ballet in pursuit of an abstract self-expression, similar to other modernist artists at the turn of the century (1991). In Wigman’s dances, as Manning shows, this abstract expressionism enabled a rethinking of her own femininity and relationships of

leaders to groups in universalist representations of these themes. In early Israeli modern dance, Spiegel shows that the modernist principles of universalized abstract self-expression allowed the dancers to explore their fantasies and connections to the Eastern history of their new homeland. Although the dancers appeared to be drawing on traditional Eastern art, in reality these were only themes and ideas adopted within a Western modernist form for creating movement and exploring identity (Spiegel 2013, 110-1).

After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the United States' immediate support of the new nation, concert dance in Israel began to be exposed to and influenced by American modern dance techniques. In both folk dance and concert dance circles, the influence of German culture became increasingly undervalued as a result of the Holocaust, with very little concert dance of note being produced during the wave of immigration to Israel following the end of World War II. A shift occurred in the 1960s, when Martha Graham established a notable link to Israel through her tour of the region as a cultural ambassador sponsored by the US State Department in the 1960s (Franko 2012, Graff 1997). She also visited Israel through the patronage of her friend Betsabee de Rothschild, who eventually founded the Batsheva Dance Company with Graham as Artistic Advisor in 1964. Jewish American modern dancers such as Sophie Maslow, Jane Dudley, and Anna Sokolow also frequently toured and taught their choreography in Israel in addition to performing with Graham's company or setting her work on Israeli dancers. The frequency of dancers' travel between the two nations established strong aesthetic commonalities between Israel and the United States during this post-war period. The

American influence on Israeli dance was so well established that American dance critic Clive Barnes once remarked that Batsheva dancers were the “Israeli children of American dance” after seeing them perform Graham’s works during a tour of the United States.

Since Batsheva’s establishment in 1964, the company has been a leader of the Israeli concert dance scene. In the 1960s and 1970s, the company brought Graham technique and choreography to the newly established nation-state. Notably, Batsheva was the only company other than Graham’s own that was authorized to perform her work at that time. Although independent choreographers began to take hold of the Israeli concert dance scene in the 1980s, rejecting the European and American modern dance techniques that had come before, the return of Naharin in 1990 set a serious tone to the development of an Israeli-specific dance scene and style (Galili 2012, Aldor 2003, Eshel 2003). Ohad Naharin had been a member of Batsheva under Graham’s leadership, but left to train in New York at the request of Graham herself. After studying her technique, as well as ballet at Juilliard and Butoh and Limon technique throughout New York City, touring internationally, choreographing both solos and company works in New York, and experiencing a back injury, Naharin moved back to Israel to serve as Artistic Director for the Batsheva Dance Company. During the 1980s he explored his movement style as an independent choreographer setting works on ballet companies as well as his own short-lived company. When he returned to Israel in 1990 to become Batsheva’s Artistic Director, he brought this movement language with him and offered a new approach to moving and creating movement. He began teaching classes referred to initially as “class of Ohad” or “Ohad’s class” to the company, and soon began offering classes to non-

dancers before naming the practice Gaga in 2003 (Galili 2015). Gaga has greatly influenced the Israeli dance scene since this time through Batsheva's popularity as well as the proliferation of its former company members; many Israeli choreographers working today have danced in Batsheva and worked with Naharin in some capacity before establishing independent careers. The company also resides in a renowned cultural center of Tel Aviv, the Suzanne Dellal Center, which is home to several studios and performance spaces.

Gaga is now an entity technically independent of the Batsheva Dance Company, structured under the business title Gaga Movement Ltd. based in Tel Aviv, Israel. Gaga is often advertised as a personal practice that everyone can partake in, insinuating that the universality of the human experience transcends aesthetics, politics, and cultural specificity. At the same time, Naharin has described Gaga as “the higher education of dance” (Naharin quoted in Galili 2015, 377) for Western concert dance students, acknowledging that Gaga is primarily practiced by dancers trained in Western concert dance techniques with some level of similarity in aesthetic and personal histories in terms of access to this art form. This is in part due to Naharin's own bodily history, which is dominated by training in Western concert dance styles such as ballet and Graham technique (though also including a range of other non-Western practices, such as t'ai chi, Pilates, Butoh, etc.), as well as the bodily histories of his initial Gaga students – the dancers of the Batsheva Dance Company, who trained almost daily in ballet following a long period of training in Graham technique prior to Naharin's appointment as Artistic Director in 1990. As this history clearly illustrates, Gaga has roots in both American and

Israeli dance communities – among others – and the Israeli dance scene itself has deep roots in both American and European modern dance. Gaga, then, must be analyzed within the framework of Euro-American dance history and trends.

It is also important to note the internal Israeli cultural politics of Gaga versus other contemporary Israeli dance training practices associated with famous companies such as the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company (KCDC), Vertigo Dance Theatre, and Inbal Dance Theater. Though all of these groups invite international artists to train with them and join their companies, they all have very different objectives. Rami Be'er, the Artistic Director of KCDC, states that they “deal with violence and its effect through dance” and “initiate activities to unite Jews and Arabs in Israel, ... in order to open the doors of our dance school to students from all races and nationalities” (Be'er quoted in Galili 2012, 59). The work of this company takes place on Kibbutz Ga'aton, a remote location structured on the socialist kibbutzim model of community living. Many of Be'er's choreographies are pointedly political, dealing with issues of violence such as the Holocaust; this is a significant departure from Naharin's claim to universality and human experience as non-political. Many other groups similarly exclude themselves from urban life, such as the Vertigo Dance Theater who practices in an eco-art village outside of Jerusalem and the company led by Liat Dror and Nir Ben Gal who work in Mizpe Ramon, a small desert village with an industrial hangar that houses studios as well as sleeping quarters. Other famous groups, such as the Inbal Dance Theater, integrate ethnic traditions such as Yemenite dance with contemporary dance. Although there is a range of urban, contemporary choreographers and company working in Israel – such as Yasmeen

Godder and the Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollack Dance Company – Batsheva Dance Company and its practice of Gaga must be recognized as consciously existing in this urban setting that contrasts the more community, eco-conscious practices of many contemporary Israeli choreographers as well as those exploring minority ethnic backgrounds within Israel. Batsheva’s appeal to urban populations, residing in the Suzanne Dellal Center in the historic Neve Tzedek neighborhood of Tel Aviv,¹⁰ places Gaga in a privileged position within the contemporary Israeli dance scene that bodes well for international popularity and mainstream acceptance.

0.3 Gaga Class Structure

Throughout the chapters that follow, references to Gaga prompts and specific moments within Gaga classes are made. To contextualize these moments, it is important to understand the overall structure of these improvisatory sessions. Gaga classes usually take place in dance studios,¹¹ and are anywhere between an hour to an hour and a half in length. The certified instructor who leads the session is either a former Batsheva Dance Company member or an independent dancer who attended an extensive training course with Naharin in Tel Aviv from 2011-2012.¹² In the Suzanne Dellal Center studios in Tel

¹⁰ Cities and urban sites are historically more associated with affluent European Jews, a privileged community within Israeli society (see Spiegel 2013 for a more in depth consideration of the urban vs. rural artistic and cultural divides during the pre-State era of Israel, and Chapter 2 for further discussion of Israeli ethnic and racial strata).

¹¹ Rare exceptions include practices in temples in the United States and a yearly event held in a former airplane hangar in Tel Aviv.

¹² The certification process for Gaga teachers is lengthy and in depth; dancers who have attended Gaga intensives must sign a waiver acknowledging that they cannot teach under the name of Gaga. Gaga Movement Ltd. is responsible for contacting any teacher *not*

Aviv, which are home to the Batsheva Dance Company and the largest weekly schedule of Gaga classes in the world, there are no mirrors. When classes are offered in other spaces, the mirrors that are seemingly ubiquitous in dance spaces are covered up: working without mirrors is a key component of Gaga. The lack of reflective surfaces is intended to allow the dancers to be in the moment by removing the self-judgment of what the movement *looks* like and creating an onus on *feeling* and *experiencing* the movement instead. The only other strict requirement is to forbid observers and latecomers, to mitigate outside interruptions or distractions from the groove of the class.

The soundscape of the class depends on the teacher's own music library; many of the instructors seem to enjoy their role as DJ and explore a wide array of music in each class, ranging from ambient noises to techno club beats.¹³ Silence is also often utilized, and occasionally supplemented by instructions to use voice or embodied rhythms such as slapping the body or stomping the feet. The dress code is relaxed, and the atmosphere is generally welcoming. The teachers tend to be encouraging and positive, which permits students to feel comfortable letting go of the decorum that often accompanies formal technique classes and explore their weirdest interpretations of the improvisatory movement prompts. Deborah Friedes Galili, Gaga scholar, teacher, and administrator, notes: "there are certain verbal conventions for offering instructions and feedback, such as the use of language to foster an atmosphere of inclusion ("let's") and the avoidance of

certified but teaching under the label of Gaga and ensuring that they change the language to clarify that they are not teaching Gaga. As of the Summer 2015 summer intensive, the waiver signed included a clause stating that participants would also not teach "gaga-inspired" classes.

¹³ Several Gaga teachers – such as Stefan Ferry and Guy Shomroni – also perform as professional DJs in Tel Aviv, both for dance improvisation jams and in nightclubs.

language that proscribes certain behaviors (“don’t”)” (Galili 2015, 274). At times, teachers will also literally instruct students to “get weird.” This exploration of breaking movement habits and performing silliness is entirely dependent on the student’s willingness to embrace the suggestions given in class: Gaga is based on suggestions rather than strict instructions, so it is easy for students to ignore or not take seriously the teachers and come away from the class with no new skills. Though this personal interpretation is arguably filtered through the aesthetic of Gaga’s creator, Ohad Naharin, which is often the instigation for students to attend Gaga classes, the rules of the class attempt to provide space for individual artistic choices within the constraints of the class instructions.

The structure of the class varies depending on the teacher and the day, except for the seemingly mandatory beginning with an exploration of “floating,” which has been described by instructors as not letting gravity define your movement. It is intended to be a calm moment, with very little movement but high levels of sensory awareness. Floating is the resting state of Gaga; even if all other suggestions are stripped away, the students are never supposed to collapse or stop moving altogether. The class then works through a series of movement prompts offered by the instructor, which range from embodying imaginative, vivid descriptions of the body (i.e.,: your skin is too small for your body, your spine is made out of seaweed, you have no bones) to more direct instructions (i.e.,: be light, play with your weight, make all of your limbs long). Each task layers on top of one another based on the individuals’ interpretations of the prompts, though the movement performed by the instructor who dances alongside the students also informs

the aesthetic that emerges in Gaga classes. Occasionally there are breaks within the class when students are asked to return to floating and reset before exploring a new layering of tasks, or they are instructed to alternate quickly between sets of sensations. In Gaga/dancer classes abstracted versions of balletic exercises are frequently incorporated to a small section of the class, such as explorations of *penchées* and *arabesques*. Classes frequently end with a burst of energy, where students are asked to move as vigorously as possible (often while slapping themselves all over the body to awaken all their flesh) while counting down from ten until they release into the floating sensation. There is no formal thanking of the instructor as in traditional ballet classes, but it is not uncommon for students to go up to the instructor after classes to thank them or speak to them about an experience they had, demonstrating the openness created within the studio atmosphere.

A unique characteristic of Gaga revolves around the language used in the classes. Although the term “movement language” used to describe Gaga refers to the corporeal language explored in classes, there is also a corresponding verbal language with Gaga-specific terminology. These terms, some named after the people who inspired them and others made up on nonsense syllables or influenced by Japanese words, serve as shortcuts for common Gaga ideas. For example, the “lena” – an engine between the navel and groin, similar to what other techniques call one’s “center” – is often referenced in Gaga classes. This term refers not just to the location in the body, but the idea of engaging the lena and moving from this spot in the body, as if it is the main engine propelling all movement. Other ideas, such as “tama” – a system to explore curves, circles, and ways to

describe these shapes in space with different body parts – propel students into investigations around an idea. Some of these terms move in and out of fashion,¹⁴ depending on the research currently being done in Gaga by Naharin and his instructors, though some remain consistently used in classes.¹⁵ As Galili notes, for many concepts “Naharin bypassed invented words and strung English words together to describe a concept or to denote an action, for example, the ‘snake of the spine’ or ‘move your hands from your heart’” (Galili 2015, 371) to more quickly evoke the imagery or idea represented by a term, appealing to more participants and requiring less insider knowledge of the Gaga-specific lexicon.¹⁶ The fact that there are set terms and descriptions to initiate movement indicates a standardization within Gaga instruction; though classes are rooted in improvisation, the guided nature of it and its goals becomes more clear through a close analysis of these commonly used terms and prompts.

¹⁴ In a “Gaga dictionary” dating to February 2015, distributed to Gaga intensive participants following the summer intensive in Tel Aviv in the summer of 2015, there were many terms that I had never heard used in a class before. These terms include “taka” (pulling bones inside thick flesh), “pola” (the license to fake) and “heda” (head with spine). All of these concepts are familiar to me, and have been used in Gaga classes I have taken, but have not been associated with the terminology in classes I have taken. This is especially true in open Gaga classes with new participants; teachers seem to focus on imagery rather than these shortcuts in classes with students unfamiliar with Gaga, whereas in intensives much more Gaga-specific terminology is used by instructors and described to the students either during or after classes.

¹⁵ Some common terms that are consistently used in Gaga classes, even those containing mostly new students outside of intensive/workshop spaces, include “moons” (the fleshy spaces between the joints where the fingers/toes meet the hands/feet), “lava” (explosive power) and “oba” (traveling stuff inside of the body).

¹⁶ Gaga is almost exclusively taught in English, both within the Batsheva Dance Company (because many of the members are international) and open classes. There are Hebrew-language classes held in Israel, and I have witnessed teachers integrating the local language into the class in both Israel and Germany alongside English, but the working language of Gaga is English.

The students coming to a Gaga/dancer class are often trained in many different styles, usually within the Western concert dance realm of ballet and modern dance techniques. A characteristic of dancers who have taken many Gaga classes, especially those who perform in choreography derived out of Gaga practice such as Naharin's work, is their intense quality of movement and ability to quickly switch from being hyper-aggressive to hyper-delicate. For example, out of a calm walk the dancer might erupt into a sharp leg extension without displaying any significant preparation or transition time. Although often characterized as aggressive¹⁷ because of the ability to demonstrate quick punches of movement with extreme vivacity, Gaga dancers are also able to move with an extreme delicacy that counteracts this violence. Their ranges of motion and dynamics are wide, and do not preclude the awkward. For example, a dancer might bob her head like a chicken while rolling her hips to one side and undulating her limbs: all seemingly unconnected sensations. In Gaga, one can take pleasure in the grotesque and the weird; beauty is not singularly defined or directly tied to any particular aesthetic theory. Dancers are encouraged to get in touch with their own humor, sensuality, pleasure, passion, anger, and grooves. Although the ability to quickly shift between ranges and dynamics is a feature of the experienced Gaga dancer, as is the ability to embrace the awkward as beautiful, the individual interpretations of these tasks remain somewhat varied.

Gaga classes occur in several different formats, each introducing slightly different politics and pedagogies. First, there are two tracks for Gaga: Gaga/people (designed for non-dancers of any ability range) and Gaga/dancers (designed for professional dancers

¹⁷ Reviews of the Batsheva Dance Company often use this among other forceful words such as raw, vivacious, militaristic, and explosive to describe the quality of the dancers.

and students, and used in the training of dancers to perform Naharin's choreography in both the Batsheva Dance Company and all companies that perform his work, such as Nederlands Dans Theater, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet). Gaga/people classes are also the model for various Gaga outreach programs, which are used for people with Parkinson's Disease, victims of terror attacks, and violent men for various rehabilitative purposes often centered around the pleasure of movement (Deborah Friedes Galili and Yossi Naharin in conversation with the author, August 2015). There are also large-scale Gaga classes that are open to the non-dance population in Israel led by Ohad Naharin, such as his monthly classes and the now-yearly fundraising event held in an abandoned airplane hangar to benefit the Association for Civil Rights in Israel. Gaga/people, in both studios and these various programs, is intended for widespread participation. Gaga/dancers is much more specific, geared towards preparing dancers for performance careers by teaching valuable tools and tricks to maintain dynamism on stage. This approach to Gaga is heightened in the context of Gaga workshops (short periods of intense Gaga/dancer training) and Gaga intensives (week to two-week long sessions including Gaga/dancer classes, learning Naharin's repertory, and Gaga methodics). Throughout this dissertation, the term Gaga refers to the basic practice of Gaga that is similar to both Gaga/people and Gaga/dancers (principles such as finding the pleasure of movement, and movement tasks given in both classes), and references to the specific qualities found in Gaga/people, Gaga/dancers, or intensives will be marked by a reference to this label for the appropriate subset of Gaga practice.

0.4 Chapter Outline

The overall goal of this project is to challenge popular representations of Gaga by acknowledging the multiple political, aesthetic, and personal layers embedded in this practice. Gaga is often talked about by both practitioners and advertising material as a personal practice, untied to politics. Rhetoric such as “freedom” and “research” ascribed to the practice on the official Gaga website and used by teachers and students alike infer that the improvisatory form of Gaga is open to individual interpretation, and thus not bound to any particular politic or context. I challenge these common misconceptions about Gaga by acknowledging the many layers involved in Gaga, such as its history and aesthetic influences, the national specificity of the practice’s origins, and its role in contemporary neoliberal economic frameworks. Drawing attention to the ways in which Gaga is in fact culturally, politically, and aesthetically tied to specific contexts and values disrupts the utopic vision of the practice that is often evoked in advertising material and descriptions of classes. To this end, the following chapters are broken down into three case studies of Gaga exploring distinct theoretical inquiries. The order of these case studies, like the order of prompts in Gaga, can be seen as building on another but are also able to exist independently. Some ideas central to the practice of Gaga will recur throughout the chapters, much like in Gaga classes where each session is centered around one or two main movement concepts that then become layered with a variety of textures and ideas.

Chapter 1 explores the issue of technique, and the Gaga organization’s rejection of this label for the practice. I agree that Gaga is not a technique – a claim frequently

reinforced by Naharin and the official Gaga organization Gaga Movement Ltd. – but argue that it is a *meta-technique*, which offers students tools for approaching the integration of multiple techniques. Meta-techniques are increasingly common in a contemporary concert dance context where dancers are frequently expected to be trained in multiple styles. Throughout this chapter, I consider the racial legacies at play in the history of dance techniques in both the United States and Israel. I deconstruct the logic of appropriation built into Gaga, which is influenced by many different somatic and dance techniques but often presented as a “new” practice, and compare it to the function of white privilege in the appropriation of Asian and Native American dance practices by white female modern dancers in early twentieth century America. In acknowledging the overwhelming influence of Euro-American traditions within Gaga, I argue that the discourse and practice of Gaga is in need of decolonization through an increased awareness of and challenge to the hegemony of Europeanist aesthetics in this practice.

Chapter 2 explores the national specificity of Israeli-ness in Gaga by considering what political and social values are embedded in the practice. Through a series of comparisons to Israeli folk dance history and its connection to the Zionist project, I argue that Gaga upholds several specifically Israeli – and, thus, Zionist – ideals. I do not argue that Gaga is exclusively Israeli, as illustrated by the previous chapter uncovering the many Euro-American dance techniques embedded in the practice of Gaga, but rather consider the potential politicization of this practice in relation to the State of Israel, where the head of the Gaga Movement Ltd. organization is located. Key to this insight is the unique popularity of Gaga/people within Israel with non-dancers, whereas Gaga/people

outside of Israel is more frequently attended by dancers (or former dancers). I suggest that there is a nationally specific phenomenon to Gaga's popularity within Israel, tied not just to widespread knowledge about the practice and the Batsheva Dance Company but also to national cultural values. These values, such as a familiarity with dancing and physical movement, are rooted in cultural history such as widespread Jewish participation in Israeli folk dance and the requirement of every Jewish citizen to do military service and the physicality embedded in a militarized society among Jews. In arguing for a Jewish Israeli sensibility embedded within Gaga, I suggest that this is not a consciously constructed political project or agenda, but rather derived from the daily reality of living and working within the particular socio-political context of contemporary Israel that has arguably shaped both Naharin and his subsequent endeavors, such as Gaga and his choreography with the Batsheva Dance Company. Throughout, I apply a critique of Zionism to consider the ways in which embodying Israeli values through Gaga may reinforce and normalize Israeli policies that continue to subjugate Palestinians and minorities living within Israel and the Palestinian Territories. This critique is done not to malign Gaga or suggest it is innately aligned with any one political agenda, but rather to consider how Zionism can be perpetuated through cultural projects and the importance of recognizing such potentially harmful cultural politics.

Chapter 3 moves to a more global scope, investigating the relationship between Gaga and neoliberalism. I unpack the ways in which neoliberal values undergird the practice of Gaga through a close analysis of Gaga's formal "Work Instructions" document, while acknowledging the ways in which Gaga subverts traditional neoliberal

values by emphasizing the importance of pleasure and bodily affects. Then, I move beyond the case of a singular Gaga class to consider the broader neoliberal economic framework that shapes participation in Gaga intensives. I suggest that the increased pressure on these students to find professional dance jobs – unlike the average Gaga participant following the work instructions in open classes – evokes a unique context of competition, both aesthetically and economically. In this context, similar to the case of the work instructions, I argue that Gaga both challenges and supports neoliberal values, training dancers to excel in the competitive contemporary concert dance market while simultaneously encouraging acceptance and community within the intensive setting. Such an analysis of the relationship between Gaga and neoliberalism in both the studio and intensive contexts is important because the two practices developed nearly concurrently. The study of Gaga – following in the trajectory of other performance and dance scholars interrogating the importance of studying movement to better understand neoliberalism and its effect on society and workers’ bodies – offers insight into the development of skills beneficial to workers increasingly dependent on temporary, contract, and underpaid work, and the place of dancers within the increasingly unstable working class for both wage laborers and artists.

This project offers an initial critical political contextualization of Gaga, which has not yet been done in scholarship on the practice. It also builds on debates within the humanities and dance studies specifically about neoliberalism and nationalism, and pushes forward recent trends in dance studies that focus on training and technique as opposed to performance alone. The case studies in this dissertation are not intended to be

comprehensive histories or studies of this practice, but rather jumping off points for future investigation into the many layers of Gaga's politics and aesthetics. As Gaga continues to grow in popularity, both through corporeal participation in the practice and the dissemination of media associated with the practice such as the 2015 film *Mr. Gaga* (directed by Tomer Heymann), I anticipate new layers of complexity to arise in scholarship alongside an increasingly utopic representation of the practice in popular media. Continued research on the multifaceted politics of this improvisatory practice is crucial to combat the homogenizing rhetoric of freedom and pleasure so often associated with it, and reclaim the cultural specificity of Gaga and the influences that continue to shape the practice of this movement language.

Chapter 1

Decolonizing Gaga: Embodying the Politics of Appropriation and (Meta-)Techniques

I wore a leotard the first time I tried Gaga. Having just graduated from a conservatory-style college dance program in New York City, I was attempting to keep up a dance schedule similar to the daily regimen I had maintained in school. Still in the habit of following the strict dress code of my college days (black leotards, pink or black tights, hair pulled back, no extra warm-up clothes), I rarely deviated from this uniform as I attended open dance classes across the city. My first Gaga class was no exception. I had found the class listed under the modern dance section of the Mark Morris Dance Center website, and after hearing some of my former classmates rave about this new ‘movement language,’ I decided to try it out for myself. All I had been told was that it was a fun improvisation class, and that it was how the Batsheva Dance Company trained. The idea of improvising in Gaga was outside of my comfort zone because I was used to strict ballet teachers requiring uniform execution of set choreographies, but I was excited to try something new. As I hopped off the subway at the Atlantic Avenue-Barclays Center station in Brooklyn I twisted my ponytail into a neat bun, climbed multiple sets of stairs, and crossed the street.

Entering the studio, I did not see any other leotard-clad bodies. It was common for students in open classes to have more relaxed clothing, but even in more relaxed modern classes I was usually accompanied by quite a few leotard wearers sprinkled among the increasingly popular booty shorts, tank tops, and sweatpants. Most of the students in the

Gaga studio looked like they had just rolled out of bed, with baggy t-shirts and loose shorts: my first sign that I was in unfamiliar territory. Many of them were doing warm-ups that were familiar to me, however: one woman was wiggling back and forth on her back as if lightly re-aligning her spine, and another was relaxing into a wide straddle on the floor. Their movements quickly shifted from these recognizable postures to an eclectic mix of aesthetics as the class began. The virtuosity and range of motion exhibited by the dancers around me were evident in spite of their baggy clothing, and I found myself wondering where they learned to quickly shift between this wide array of movement dynamics. When asked if anyone was new to Gaga, most of the students did not raise their hands. As the class began, these students were able to quickly juxtapose delicate and aggressive movements and deftly punctuate fluid motions with jerky twists and breaks. I, on the other hand, felt most comfortable in the more rigid tasks such as stretching my bones beyond my skin, which reminded me of extending my limbs in ballet postures. My leotard was not the only thing giving away my ballet background.

Nearly five years later, as I sit typing in a baggy t-shirt and shorts reminiscent of my fellow dancers in that first Gaga class, I am able to recognize why only some movements felt comfortable to my body on that humid Friday night in Brooklyn. Through open prompts, Gaga draws on multiple movement histories, influenced by Ohad Naharin's physical experiences – which include ballet, modern dance technique (such as Graham technique), t'ai chi, Pilates, and more (Galili 2015) – as well as those of the individual participants. That particular day in Brooklyn, we all followed the teacher's suggestions to experience disparate sensations (“boil like spaghetti,” “pretend your skin is

too small for your body,” “imagine earthquakes in your body”) and perform them as multi-layered tasks, I often found myself stiffening and straightening slightly where the other dancers were able to relax and undulate, or slackening my muscles as we were instructed to tense. Gaga is fairly eclectic, which made it difficult for me and my strict conservatory-style highly codified ballet and US modern dance training to adapt to the less structured prompts, which were at times rooted in dance concepts and imagery foreign to me. My background is not uncommon in the Gaga setting, however. The majority of Gaga/dancer¹⁸ participants are similarly trained in Western concert dance forms,¹⁹ which mirrors the emphasis of Naharin’s own training history. Yet, Gaga is not structured like conventional dance techniques, which dance scholar Susan Foster describes as “systematic programs of instruction,” each of which “cultivates bodily strength, flexibility, and alignment, the shapes made by the body, the rhythm of its movement, and the quality and amount of tension throughout it” (Foster 1997, 238). Gaga does not have set postures or a singular underlying principle that guides the shapes, rhythm, or quality of movement; rather, Gaga is designed as a meta-technique that helps dancers develop tools to access techniques that already exist within the body. As such, there are remnants of other techniques within Gaga’s practice, which carry with them complicated cultural politics as they are embodied and abstracted in the Gaga class.

¹⁸ There are two types of Gaga classes: Gaga/people and Gaga/dancers. In this chapter, I refer only to Gaga/dancer in my use of the term Gaga because of the emphasis on dance training backgrounds. The issue of Gaga/people classes is discussed further in Chapter 2.

¹⁹ This observation about the background of participants is the result of surveys, interviews, and personal observations from my fieldwork done between 2012-2015 in the United States, Israel, and Germany.

The many layers of politics and techniques brought forth by the meta-technique pedagogical approach of Gaga make it difficult to define a clear set of aesthetic or physical characteristics for Gaga dancers and their practice. There is no singular vision of the ideal Gaga dancing body, as many of its desirable characteristics are mental rather than physical. When asked about who does Gaga in an interview, Gaga-trained dancer Rossi Lamont Walter attested, “demographics, I don’t think that has any relevance” (Interview with author, January 24, 2015). Walter went on to say that creativity was the most defining characteristic of Gaga dancers that he admired. Walter’s opinion seems to be a common one: the Gaga dancer is not defined by their shape, size, or color so much as they are reliant on a conglomeration of physical and mental characteristics. At the same time, these physical characteristics are not entirely ambiguous or neutral, nor is the body solely defined by its mental creativity. As demonstrated by the Batsheva Dance Company – the most visible representation of Gaga dancers who train in the practice regularly – the popular representation of a Gaga-trained body is relatively flexible and thin, with well-defined muscles. Though the company employs a lot of Israelis, most of whom read as white from the stage, there is often a wide range of races represented within the company, likely influenced by the spread of Gaga classes to foreign countries such as Japan, the United States, Germany, and Spain, and the resulting international composition of the company. In Gaga classes, too, the dancers range in demographics and physicality, though they tend to be white and thin with experience in ballet and other Western concert dance techniques.²⁰ With this demographic and aesthetic in mind, I

²⁰ There is also a class barrier in Gaga similar to other concert dance practices, where

question the universalist rhetoric of Gaga's marketing²¹ through an analysis of the pedagogical structure of Gaga and how it draws on various movement influences. I argue that Gaga both embodies and reinforces the whiteness and elitism of other Western techniques and yet does not entirely replicate them, at times offering space and tools to challenge the hegemony of these traditions.

In this chapter, I outline Gaga's relationship to technique, and the racial and class implications embedded in this term. I begin with a brief historical contextualization of technique as a term, how dance techniques have shifted in the twenty-first century, and then how Gaga specifically falls into the contemporary trend of meta-techniques. Understanding Gaga as a meta-technique rather than a technique acknowledges its links to various techniques as well as the ways in which it departs from the form-based structure of most dance technique classes. This paves the way for an analysis of the racial politics of whiteness in dance history in both the United States and Israel, which contextualizes a discussion of the techniques and racial politics embedded in the practice of Gaga and its pedagogical appeals to appropriating elements from other dance forms.

participants must be able to afford the entry fees to take class. The issue of class is not explored in depth in this chapter, though it is a valuable site for further research.

²¹ In descriptions of Gaga, the focus remains on the body and self-exploration rather than the embodiment of specific techniques or requiring certain bodily characteristics. This is exemplified on the Gaga homepage, where Gaga is described as a framework for bodily exploration. The initial Gaga description on this page also states: "The work [of Gaga] improves instinctive movement and connects conscious and unconscious movement, and it allows for an experience of freedom and pleasure in a simple way, in a pleasant space, in comfortable clothes, accompanied by music, each person with himself and others" (Gaga Movement Ltd. 2016). Appealing to instinct, freedom, and pleasure at an individual level (i.e. "each person") is representative of universalist rhetoric that ignores the cultural specificity of what instincts, freedom, or pleasure might entail for different participants.

To clarify the cultural politics of Gaga, I then consider how Gaga specifically continues the colonizing logic of ballet and modern dance by acknowledging its appropriation of other techniques and claims to universality that attempt to diminish the cultural and racial politics of the practice and its dominant Europeanist influences. The project of recognizing the cultural influences that can be seen in Gaga is useful for challenging the assumed dominance of Europeanist aesthetics, and questioning the power dynamics in working with a multiplicity of dance techniques and stylistic influences. Ultimately, I argue that we need to decolonize the discourse of Gaga by recognizing the space left in the practice for the incorporation and recognition of non-Europeanist techniques; this may in turn create potential for the practice itself to serve as a tactic for decolonization or to decolonize the practice itself.

1.1 What is Technique?

The Gaga organization consciously rejects the common label associated with dance practices – technique – in favor of being called a movement language.²² To understand the significance of this rejection, it is imperative to first understand what politics and ideas are tied up in the term technique. The discourse of “technique” is not specific to dance; the term can also refer to any skill required to practice an art, craft, occupation, or daily life. During the twentieth century, the issue of technique has been theorized in multiple ways by sociologists and philosophers alike before dance and

²² Dance scholar and Gaga teacher and administrator Deborah Freides Galili addresses this issue of calling Gaga a technique in depth in a 2015 article, noting particularly that “Naharin has often repudiated this labeling” (Galili 2015, 361).

performance studies began to analyze technique in relation to its specific application within the dance world.

In his seminal 1935 article “Techniques of the Body,” French sociologist Marcel Mauss presents everyday movements as techniques that are culturally specific and constructed. Writing in France during a time when the country was actively colonizing areas in Africa such as Morocco and Algeria, Mauss’ attention to cultural specificity is striking in his analysis of how cultural habits are formed and enforced. He argues that “there is perhaps no ‘natural way’ for the adult” to move (Mauss 1935, 460). As Mauss shows, the body learns – either subconsciously through observation of others or consciously through a strict training regimen – how to move in ways that are specific to a social and cultural context. Mauss’s study of the cultural context for techniques preceded and inspired French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu’s later work on the habitus, which similarly considers the influence of a wide range of power structures and social frameworks on embodiment and personal dispositions (Bourdieu 1984). This consideration of cultural and societal forces’ influence on how movements are performed was also later taken up in the field of dance studies, such as in Jane C. Desmond’s essay “Embodying Difference” (1997). Mauss’s work was groundbreaking in its dismissal of the body as natural; although the concept of techniques for art and craft was well established in philosophical discourse prior to this essay, Mauss’s analysis of daily movements such as walking, eating, and sleeping as techniques expanded the application of the term and allowed for a more nuanced study of how people move their bodies in

both artistic and social contexts that continues to be expanded today in cultural and anthropological studies.

Whereas Mauss in the early twentieth century was focusing on proving a link between cultural influences and bodily comportment, in the second half of the 20th century Michel Foucault analyzed the actual mechanisms and power dynamics that influence the emergence of culturally specific techniques. Foucault theorized techniques and discipline as political tools for domination and coercion, arguing that techniques were ways of forcibly creating ‘docile bodies’ with uniform physical habits and characteristics to be used and transformed by the dominant powers (Foucault 1977). Yet, in a 1982 lecture, Foucault moved away from an analysis of power structures and focused on a new aspect of technique that does account for the individual actors. He introduced the concept of caring for the self as a positive technique that can be embodied as a personal choice rather than a political tool of coercion. He argues that there are:

...technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault 1982, 225)

By focusing on the improvement of the soul, or the internal self, Foucault expanded the understanding of technique beyond theories of overt top-down power and coercion or the physical skills required to move, create art, or work. This assertion also challenged his own claim that techniques must produce docile bodies, indicating that the discourse of technique is not monolithic, even in the work of one author.

These theorizations of technique as culturally specific, enforcing dominance on docile bodies, and potentially transformative for individuals in their own self-care, also inform the conceptualization and development of dance as a technique, in and of itself, and a set of techniques used to create dance. Although not monolithic in style or form, the label of technique in dance connotes a physically demanding practice with standardized movements one is expected to master. In particular, Western concert dance techniques are directly tied to the skills required for the execution of a specific choreographer's creative work. Techniques privilege structure and a particular aesthetic vision similar to the cultural specificity acknowledged by Mauss. The cultural politics of techniques, then, are rooted in the values espoused through each particular dance form, its progenitors, and its socio-political context. Randy Martin argues that American modern dance, for instance, is ideologically tied to a "larger political project where the language of national identity serves and complicates the formation of a (nation) state" (Martin 1998, 152). Specific choreographers' techniques thus embody particular political functions, such as the argument that "Martha Graham is the quintessential modern dance self whose body gave birth to a technique for being American" (Martin 1998, 152). At the same time, these dancing bodies are not necessarily Foucault's docile bodies insofar that the participants are often willing students, because most dance techniques also require some level of self-awareness and self-determination and are not forcibly imposed upon the participant.²³

²³ This evocation of Foucault's docile bodies as applied to dancers in form-based techniques does not discount the possibility of analyzing participants in these techniques as colonized. Dance students often adopt and internalize the values of the teacher/choreographer similar to the Foucault's docile bodies, though I suggest here that

Although it draws upon many specific dance techniques, Gaga is actually a meta-technique that does not directly replicate the functions of those techniques. It does not impose a specific series of postures or movement phrases, and thus cannot be read as embodying only one particular political or national ideology.²⁴ Instead, it teaches students tactics to approach the process of drawing on multiple movement systems and styles, thus imparting a new value system regarding how to negotiate movement creation. The issue of meta-techniques and how this term applies to Gaga will be discussed in the following sections.

While scholars such as Mauss and Foucault were broadening the understanding of technique during the 20th century to include everyday movements and caring for oneself, contemporary dance scholars have only recently begun actively questioning the politics surrounding the practice of various dance techniques. Since the emergence of academic fields such as Cultural, Performance, and Dance Studies during the 1980s, the study of technique as a scholarly endeavor allowed for a dance-specific reconceptualization of the term. As a result, the study of technique moved beyond the studio. No longer was technique conceptualized solely as a set of standardized movements that needed to be mastered by the dancing body, but rather as a multilayered construction that includes the body itself, the subjectivity of the person being trained, and the socio-political and cultural contexts that establish the conditions of possibility for the technique and the

these participants are more willing than the subjects in Foucault's examples, which alters the power dynamics in the learning process.

²⁴ Though I argue in Chapter 2 for a reading of Gaga in relation to Israeli nationalism and politics, I acknowledge that the multiplicities of Gaga's influences and iterations preclude labeling it as entirely complicit in a singular national politic or confined to such borders.

circulation of its practice. As dance scholar Susan Foster notes in a 1997 article titled “Dancing Bodies,”²⁵ critical writing on bodies often looks at the body “only as a product of the various discourses that measure it” (Foster 1997, 235). As part of the emerging field of dance studies, in this text she took “a more meat-and-bones approach to the body based on an analysis of discourses or practices that *instruct* it” (235). By focusing on the mechanics of the body and how it is taught or disciplined through techniques, rather than just the frameworks of power or the cultural context in which the movements are developed, the dancing body itself is able to be seen as an active participant that is not just passively instructed or shaped, but also has the potential to challenge or shape the structures around it. Though dance and performance studies often privilege analysis of performance events over training, these fields also create space for studies of the actual class structures and techniques that enable dancers and performers to enact their artistic visions.

The term technique, within the dance world, is also embroiled in a framework of cultural and racial politics that upholds hierarchies about who should dance what form, where, and for what audience. There is a general unwillingness in the world of concert dance (marked as “high-art”) to recognize any dance form that deviates from the formal structure of ballet and modern dance as a viable technique. This lack of recognition of non-Euro-American forms diminishes their status and value, and asserts a universalist assumption about the superiority of Europeanist aesthetics and forms. In the American

²⁵ This chapter is part of the seminal dance studies anthology *Meaning in Motion* (1997) edited by Jane C. Desmond. It was one of the first critical anthologies in dance studies and includes writing by many of the most influential early scholars in the field.

context, this has often impacted dance forms that have roots in non-Europeanist²⁶ cultures. In a 2011 article, dance scholar Raquel Monroe unravels the racial politics of ‘technique’ as a label within popular dance media. She explains that:

...dancers will often use the word “technique” with the assumption that the term signifies the same movement or set of skills for all. The pervasive assumed meaning of “technique” refers to ballet technique. This idea is perpetuated by shows such as FOX Television’s *So You Think You Can Dance*, where the judges lavishly praise a hip-hop dancer when he performs contemporary or jazz choreography. “It’s amazing a b-boy, and untrained dancer can perform such a technically demanding piece!” a judge might gush after a b-boy extends his legs and points his feet. Of course, their response blatantly discounts the dancer’s training in his form. (Monroe 2011, 41)

As the example of a judge responding incredulously to a b-boy performing contemporary dance well indicates, hip-hop and other non-Europeanist dance forms are not often understood by dancers today as having technique, although these dance forms require a distinct set of skills. In the reverse case – a ballet-trained dancer trying to perform hip-hop – if the dancer does not excel it is often attributed to an issue of style rather than skill or technique, because they have already been deemed a ‘good’ dancer according to Europeanist aesthetic values. The judge’s stunned reaction to the fact that a dancer trained in a non-Europeanist form could also excel in a technique that requires pointed feet and a straight torso, or that a ‘trained’ dancer might not excel in another form just

²⁶ I acknowledge that the terms Europeanist and non-Europeanist are broad, and connote problematic world views that do not acknowledge the influence of non-Europeanist cultures on cultural traditions often labeled as ‘Western’ or ‘Euro-American’. Yet, I retain the use of these terms because I am referring to a breadth of non-Euro-American traditions, and do not want to narrow or confine these examples to a particular cultural context such as Africanist aesthetics which devalues the presence of additional influences from other traditions.

because of ‘style,’ reifies the hierarchy inherent in the label of technique and the inference that Europeanist aesthetics are universally accepted as superior.

The racist legacies of deeming Europeanist practices as techniques and dismissing non-Europeanist dancing as ‘primitive’ or ‘innate,’ and thus requiring less skill, have a long history. The tension between Europeanist modern dance and Africanist dancing is perhaps the most well known example in American dance history.²⁷ Although the assumed abilities of dancers based on visual race markers has become less pronounced since the mid-20th century, the denigration of non-Europeanist dance forms continues in studio spaces. Many dancers see practicing non-Europeanist dance forms as detrimental to their technique in ballet or modern classes. Again, Monroe offers several examples of students trained in Africanist or Latin American dance styles who struggle upon entering a university dance department because of the emphasis on ballet-based techniques. These students often devalue their own dance backgrounds in favor of developing technique in the balletic sense, and do not recognize that “the skills they learn in ballet are not

²⁷ As Susan Manning explains in her study of concert dance in the U.S. from 1930-1970, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance* (2004), modern dance and Negro dance were seen as predominantly discrete forms in the pre-WWII era. Black bodies were unable to appropriate ‘white’ modern dance because of the audience perceptions of non-white bodies at the time as only able to perform inherited cultural traditions. Thus, Africanist dancing was not considered skilled; though the concept of ‘natural’ movement has since been largely rejected by scholars, at the time non-Europeanist dancing was understood only as innate. Nevertheless, African American dance groups were attempting to take control of their self-representation through performance in multiple ways, both rejecting stereotypical racial aesthetics in favor of more modernist choreography and by drawing on ‘folk’ forms. Examples of popular folk-derived work can be seen in the works of Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus as well as in select Broadway musicals such as Asadata Dafora’s famous 1934 hit *Kykunkor* and Zora Neale Hurston’s theatrical concerts that included the Bahamian Fire Dance. For more, see Manning 2004 and Kraut 2008.

necessarily the same skills they need to dance other forms” (Monroe 2011, 42). The students also question their ability to excel in balletic techniques because of cultural assumptions about which bodies are supposed to perform ballet. Monroe cites students as saying ballet is a form for white girls, and that to dance like a black girl infers that “you can move your hips and have rhythm” (Monroe 2011, 44) and dance well in clubs. Effectively, the ‘white girl’ style of ballet is labeled as a technique and the ‘black girl’ styles of social and Africanist dance forms, which include hip gyrations and polyrhythm, are not. It quickly becomes clear that “technique” continues to have a racist connotation of upholding Europeanist values in the contemporary context. These politics of race are not completely elided in Gaga, despite its rejection of the term technique. In fact, elements of these Europeanist techniques are still brought into its practice by virtue of its meta-technique pedagogical structure, which is also a growing trend in contemporary dance training.

1.2 Dance (Meta-)Techniques in the Twenty-First Century

A key characteristic of the contemporary concert dancer in the twenty-first century is the need to excel in multiple techniques. As Susan Foster concludes in her 1997 article on dance training techniques, an emergence of independent choreographers since the post-modern era of the 1960s and 1970s challenged the aesthetic boundaries of modern dance’s choreographer-driven techniques. Because these new choreographers were often untied to academic or institutional funding and thus not tied to a strict technical form, Foster claims their “choreographic experimentation with eclectic

vocabularies and with new interdisciplinary genres of performance has circumvented the distinctiveness of these [technical] bodies” (Foster 1997, 253). In order to meet the demands of these choreographers, dancers now have to excel in multiple styles rather than just one form. Foster explains: “These choreographers have not developed new dance techniques to support their choreographic goals, but instead encourage dancers to train in several existing techniques without adopting the aesthetic vision of any. They require a new kind of body, competent at many styles” (Foster 1997, 253). Foster concludes this analysis by inferring that these new bodies – what she calls “hired bodies” – become bland and homogenized, and laments the loss of specificity shown by artists that train extensively in a single technique.²⁸ She later revisited the concept of the homogenization of dancers’ styles in the “hired body” in a 2010 essay in the journal *Theater*, updating her analysis with four recent trends in bodily training. Most notably, she introduces what she terms the “regrooving body” that draws on a wide variety of international dance techniques, acknowledging that efforts are made within this type of training to maintain cultural and aesthetic specificities rather than devolving into a homogenized style. Still, she maintains that the “regrooving body” is an exception that exists alongside the many homogenized dancers involved in ballet and industry training similar to her earlier conception of the “hired body.”

Several other dance scholars have also explored the recent demand on dancers to train in multiple styles, such as Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettle-Fiol in their 2008

²⁸ Foster writes: this hired body “does not display its skills as a collage of discrete styles but, rather, homogenizes all styles and vocabularies beneath a sleek, impenetrable surface. Uncommitted to any specific aesthetic vision, it is a body for hire: it trains in order to make a living at dancing” (255).

anthology *The Body Eclectic*. These scholars, writing years after Foster's 1997 article was published, seem more optimistic about the rise of eclectic training practices and the abilities of dancers to maintain rigor in the performance of distinct aesthetics while also finding ways to blur the lines between styles. Bales and Nettle-Fiol show that eclectic training has not only enabled dance to continue in spite of the downturn of financial backers for large companies, but also pushed it towards new styles. I, too, argue that what Foster calls the "hired body" has not become as bland or highly commodified as she seems to forecast in her 1997 essay. While I acknowledge that there is a potential for dancers who train in many styles to become homogenized because of the frequent shift of aesthetic influences on their dancing, now practices are emerging to help dancers create their own dynamic choices instead of replicating a set aesthetic. These practices are meta-techniques: systems of training that teach students tools and tactics for creating and performing movements with a wide range of dynamics rather than mimicking set postures as in traditional techniques. Emerging out of this particular context in which most concert dancers train in a myriad of styles, meta-techniques help dancers work with distinctive styles and combat that blandness that can occur out of blurring the lines between many dance forms and homogenizing them into a singular style.²⁹

²⁹ The concept of drawing on multiple techniques within the same body is similar to Randy Martin's description of the "composite body" in *Critical Moves* (1998). His discussion of the ability of the body to perform multiple cultural and national politics lays the groundwork for understanding how the Gaga-dancing body can potentially enact multiple racial and cultural histories. I focus on the politics of meta-technique rather than the composite body, however, because this chapter addresses the structure of the pedagogy more than the structure of the dancing bodies and their unique identity politics.

Several new approaches to dance instruction have popped up within the past few decades that I would characterize as meta-techniques, including Gaga and Countertechnique.³⁰ The focus of these practices is developing skills to negotiate the eclectic training of contemporary dancers, and helping them make engaged and informed decisions about *how* to perform movement in terms of energy, approach, and dynamics. This is not to say that dancers training in traditional techniques are not self-reflexive about their training. Rather, I use this explanation to emphasize that the goal of a meta-technique is to pro-actively teach the process of self-reflexive choice making as opposed to emphasizing set forms or postures. The movement and instructions are not entirely original – they often draw on traditional techniques and their pedagogies as reference points – but are arguably new in their approach to asking dancers explicitly to reflect on and make active choices about their own movement. For example, Anouk Van Dijk, choreographer and current artistic director of the Australia-based Chunky Move dance company, developed Countertechnique for contemporary dancers to find more efficient, safe, and pleasurable ways of moving. As the home page for this practice states, “Countertechnique provides tools for body and mind to deal with the demanding dance practice of the 21st century” (Countertechnique 2016). The tools developed in these methodically structured Countertechnique classes include enjoyment of the movement, efficiency, counter-balance, and moving through space in a bigger and more fluid way,

³⁰ Countertechnique, designed by dancer and choreographer Anouk van Dijk over the past fifteen years, is a contemporary movement system intended to help dancers think about their bodies and how they move them. Series of specific exercises are taught to cultivate power, awareness, and dynamic balance.

all of which are valuable skills for contemporary dancers and the current aesthetic trends that value virtuosity and individualism.

The very label of Van Dijk's practice raises questions about what technique means in the twenty-first century for the dance world. As part of a German dance initiative that studied a wide range of contemporary dance techniques and teaching methods, dance journalist Edith Boxberger interviewed Van Dijk about why she chose to label her practice a technique. Boxberger asked if the term was contradictory to Van Dijk's goals of finding new ways to move that differed from previous technical training regimens, to which she responded:

The word technique seems to imply a dogmatic restriction, but it's actually the opposite. Technique is something that gives you tools, offers you possibilities. I hear a lot of choreographers say that they denounce technique or don't use technique, but what do they mean by that? *The assumption seems to be that technique can only restrict.* But technique is something different than kicking your leg up high or holding a shape, so people need to rethink what technique is. *Technique encompasses different skills one can learn;* these skills will add up to the knowledge of your body, of yourself, and the choices that you make—and will provide you with a range of physical and mental possibilities. So technique is much more than just the aesthetic outcome. (Van Dijk quoted in Diehl and Lampert 2014, 63; emphasis added)

Her reaction to the implication that technique is restrictive indicates an understanding of the term that is not new to theorists of technique such as Mauss, but is perhaps revolutionary in the context of dance history. Although post-modern dancers often rejected technique altogether as a way to combat the strict structures and forms of early modern and ballet techniques, contemporary dancers such as Van Dijk seek to re-envision what technique is and what it can do for dancers. Most contemporary dancers in Euro-American contexts continue to grow up training in ballet and encounter modern

dance techniques in college or high school,³¹ then stray from these strict forms in their performance experiences while working with different choreographers. These older form-based techniques still have to be reckoned with; thus, contemporary training methods teach dancers to negotiate many different movement backgrounds rather than establish a new way of moving that contradicts previous experiences. It is hard to imagine anyone training exclusively in a meta-technique such as Countertechnique, because it is so heavily reliant upon working with existing movement habits and ranges of motion. Meta-techniques include a tension between doing and undoing, while training bodies to make choices rather than rely on habits, which requires some existing experience with dance techniques to produce vibrant and virtuosic results.

Meta-techniques and form-based dance techniques approach existing bodily knowledge and habits in different ways. Form-based techniques work against bodily histories, and attempt to override or force students to unlearn previous techniques. This is done in order to impose a new physical regimen upon the body, in spite of the fact that it is impossible to start from this idealistic clean slate.³² Meta-techniques, on the other hand, draw on existing bodily knowledge in order to supplement techniques or offer new ways

³¹ Modern dance is rarely taught as a structured technique (Graham technique, release technique, Horton technique, Duncan technique, etc.) to young dancers outside of the context of colleges and conservatory programs. Many young dancers in the US train in small studios that attend dance competitions; though there are often classes in modern dance and they may compete in this category, this is often an amalgamation of modern dance styles or a version of choreographed ‘contemporary’ aesthetics.

³² Phenomenology as a field and individual theorists such as Judith Butler (1998), Pierre Bourdieu (1993), and others have discussed at length the impossibility of starting body formations or movements from a clean slate. Rather, each movement is acknowledged as culturally inscribed and unnatural or learned in some way. Conscious efforts to technically train the body, such as through dance classes or military service, provide clear examples of embodied histories that inform individual movement patterns and habits.

of approaching already-known movements. In Gaga, for instance, dancers are free to incorporate and abstract familiar bodily forms – such as *arabesques* or *tendus* – in spite of the overriding task of breaking habits and focusing instead on letting sensations drive movement. This acceptance of incorporating elements of familiar techniques allows students to explore the application of tools learned in Gaga to their other bodily practices, rather than rejecting or working against them. This relationship to other bodily techniques, and the attitude of rejecting or embracing them, is the key distinction between techniques and meta-techniques.

Because the term meta-technique refers to the choice-making process of dancing, it has largely been used in reference to choreography. Susan Foster employs this understanding of meta-ness as a way of approaching and working through multiple forms of movement when describing the work of La Meri, an artist trained in Flamenco, Bharata Natyam, Javanese dances, and European folk dances. Foster writes:

La Meri’s approach to dance composition thus installed modernist assumptions at the core of the creative process, embracing all forms of dance while at the same time establishing itself as the *meta-practice* through which all forms could be evaluated. (Foster 2011, 60; emphasis added)

Foster’s analysis acknowledges the multiple influences in La Meri’s practice, but argues that choreography is her organizing structure for processing these disparate cultural traditions. Randy Martin similarly argues: “choreography is a metatechnique. It is a method for generating means of movement and offers a basis for differentiating movement values out of a given cultural context that provides the orienting principles for a body of techniques” (Martin 1998, 214). He then goes on to clarify that technique is simultaneously “metachoreographic,” and is “not neutral with respect to a given culture”

(Martin 1998, 214), opening up the possibility that classes – particularly improvisatory practices such as Gaga – can also be structured to address the meta-concerns of how to navigate multiple styles and influences and create movement. Because meta-techniques rely on many influences, this approach to dance training is particularly well suited to the contemporary moment as dancers are increasingly asked not only to improvise, but also to be experienced in and actively draw from a wide range of dance forms.

1.3 Gaga as Meta-technique

Although Gaga draws on many ideas from techniques, and at times explicitly encourages students to play with balletic forms, the organization firmly resists the label of technique. Classifying Gaga as a movement language rather than a technique consciously dissociates the practice from the concert dance world – which relies heavily on the mastery of specific techniques – and avoids the racial and aesthetic politics of the term ‘technique’ described above. As Ohad Naharin has stated in an open conversation during a Gaga Intensive in Tel Aviv, “I feel that by calling it a movement language, it stays open for changes, whereas a technique feels like something more finished.” (Ohad Naharin in conversation with the author, July 2015).³³ Many other somatic activities similarly resist the term technique – such as yoga practice, Pilates, and parkour – but they fall outside of the realm of performative concert dance. Thus, Gaga’s rejection of the

³³ Naharin’s view of technique as static is notably oppositional to that of van Dijk’s discussed in the previous section; I reference Naharin’s statement here to situate his personal reasoning for the conscious rejection of the label of technique rather than as a fact or endorsement of his analysis of what technique means.

term offers a unique example for considering the cultural politics embedded in the (rejection of the) label for dance practices.

In the case of Gaga, however, teachers and practitioners alike often slip up and refer to it as a technique. For example, Associate Artistic Director of Batsheva Dance Company Adi Salant was interviewed in a video about Gaga for an organization called the Dance Consortium. In the video, she refers to the practice of Batsheva as the “Gaga technique” (Salant 2012) before going on to explain the merits of this dance form. This clip is posted in a “Video” section of the Gaga website in spite of this slip up, yet an explanation of the practice as a technique is not found in any rhetoric elsewhere in official Gaga marketing. Naharin states that Gaga can be used to improve technique, but never refers to it as a technique in its own right.³⁴ In rejecting Gaga’s associations with technique he has even gone so far as to say, during a workshop I attended in 2013, that Gaga does not teach anything one couldn’t experience on their own – a comment that is incredibly similar to his former teacher Martha Graham’s humble assertion that she had “simply rediscovered what the body can do” (Graham quoted in Horosko 2002, ix) in reference to her own widely popular and highly codified technique. As Randy Martin notes, this description of Graham technique suggests, “the artist’s own body is but an instrument for the discovery (with all this term’s colonial connotations) and subsequent adoption of what the universal body can accomplish” (Martin 1998, 170). Gaga similarly appeals to the individual artistry and universalism present in Graham’s self-descriptions.

³⁴ For instance, in an interview with JPostTV (a subset of the *Jerusalem Post*), Naharin explains: “Gaga is a toolbox which dancers use to better their interpretation, body, well-being, technique, ... in which we are listening to our body.” (Naharin 2014)

Yet, it is marketed as a “new” practice,³⁵ indicating that learning to negotiate other techniques is a novel approach to teaching movement. This conscious effort by Naharin and Gaga Movement Ltd. to avoid the term ‘technique’ signals how much is at stake in the term both aesthetically and politically.

Invested more in the process of movement creation rather than the aesthetic of the product, Gaga holds a more complicated relationship to choreography than the practice of techniques that prepare students to reproduce a singular artistic vision. Though Gaga has been used to prepare dancers to perform Ohad Naharin’s choreography, familiarizing them with the language and approach to movement he embraces in his own choreographic process, the improvisational element of a Gaga class allows dancers to become their own choreographers for the time that they are in class. It is this self-directed element of Gaga’s pedagogical structure that further differentiates Gaga as a meta-technique from dance techniques that are named as such. Still, I refer to the practice of Gaga as a meta-technique rather than a metachoreographic practice because the goal of Gaga is in-class improvisation rather than adhering to a unified choreographic style or aesthetic,³⁶ thus making improvisation both the process and the product of Gaga, instead

³⁵ For example, the very first line on the homepage for Gaga states: “Gaga is a *new* way of gaining knowledge and self-awareness through your body” (Gaga Movement Ltd. 2016, emphasis added).

³⁶ I challenge this claim that Gaga has no interest in a unified aesthetic in Chapter 3. However, I do not argue here or elsewhere that it is a guiding principle in Gaga philosophy about how to approach movement. Rather, I argue that the cultivation of a common aesthetic is a process that occurs as a result of social and aesthetic pressures rooted in economic competition and the norm in dance cultures to physically mimic the instructor.

of just a stopping point on the way to choreographic production.³⁷ The importance of this classification lies in the particularities of *how* Gaga's philosophies of meta-technique function. What is a Gaga-specific approach to movement? How does one negotiate multiple styles in the practice of Gaga? What techniques are drawn on in Gaga practice?

In order to understand the construction of Gaga as a meta-technique that teaches students strategies for negotiating multiple techniques, it is imperative to understand the significance of the many techniques that can be found in Gaga and how they are used. Traces of other dance and somatic practices make their way into the classroom through the prompts developed by Naharin from his own movement experiences as well as from the bodily histories of the students who engage with previous training and their traces in the body when responding to Gaga prompts. I focus here particularly on the ways that other dance practices are brought into Gaga by the instructor, and how the very practice of Gaga is structured to draw on and abstract a wide variety of movement backgrounds. In a 2015 article, Deborah Friedes Galili outlines the history of Ohad Naharin and Gaga to demonstrate how Gaga incorporates ideas from many dance forms, and show that Naharin is aware of these traces. For instance, she spoke with Naharin about his dance training in New York, and explained:

... he acknowledged that the elegance ever-present in ballet, the sense of weight that characterizes Limon, and the emphasis on moving from the pelvis along with the texture, stretch, and passion prevalent in Graham technique are "all things that I incorporate or listen to" to this day. (Galili 2015, 363)

³⁷ Gaga can be used in the process of artistic creation, especially seen in the choreographed works of Ohad Naharin, but the practice of Gaga is not directly tied to choreographic production in a teleological sense. The development of Gaga/people classes for non-dancers emphasizes the detachment of Gaga from a choreographic end goal.

The incorporations of such ideas in Gaga are largely done through abstraction during improvisation rather than an evocation of the physical forms practiced in these techniques; even when specific physical forms such as *pencheés* are introduced it is through an exploration of how to abstract the form. Abstracting the movement principles found in these sources is then used to develop highly individualized improvisations often rooted in imagery, some of which “are especially conducive to personal choice” though “most provide for individual exploration of more circumscribed terms (e.g., ‘body builder with a soft spine,’ ‘collapse into water’)” (Galili 2015, 372).

This process of abstraction of movement inspiration provides an interesting case study for the study of the transmission of cultural politics in meta-techniques. For example, one source of inspiration in Gaga is Graham technique. Embodiments of Gaga prompts, such as tensing and releasing muscle groups, do not directly resemble any postures or exercises done in a Graham class, but the concept of tensing and releasing is remarkably similar to Graham technique’s guiding principle of contraction and release.³⁸ The objective of this movement prompt in Gaga is to explore the different qualities of movement that accompany varying levels of muscular engagement. As students grip their muscles, the gesture being performed often slows down, narrows in terms of range, and becomes heavy. When instructed to release this tension – moving towards a floating sensation – the movement often becomes lighter, calmer, and more expansive. Though

³⁸When Graham began to choreograph and teach classes in the early 1900s she developed a codified technique based on the principles of contraction and release, often utilizing exercises with spirals, knee work, and breath to achieve a highly expressive and dramatic aesthetic. This technique is incredibly challenging and physically demanding, requiring dancers to train consistently and develop specific corporeal skills.

the only instruction is to play with tension, the qualities of weight, range, and expression shift in conjunction to these muscular changes. The drastic shifts also highlight that there needs to be a range of muscular tensions while dancing: gripping or slackening muscles are both valid options and can alter the performance of movements in strategic ways.

Unlike these isolated exercises in Gaga, in a Graham class, “The contraction and release principle is used throughout the class work and in almost all exercises” (Horosko 2002, 231). In Graham technique, this principle is used to create dramatic movements, whereas in Gaga it is used not to create an identifiable emotional drama but rather visual interest through a wider range of dynamics.

Graham technique has been the subject of several critical investigations, such as Mark Franko’s 2002 text that argues Graham technique upholds bourgeois values, both politically and aesthetically opposing the socialist values that many of her early company members held.³⁹ Randy Martin, in his 1998 text *Critical Moves*, argues that Graham

³⁹ This conscious emphasis on technique with Graham and her contemporaries existed in opposition to the growing movement of socialist dance groups practicing in New York during the 1920s and 1930s. As dance scholar Mark Franko outlines in his 2002 text *The Work of Dance*, Graham’s technique represented bourgeois ideals that were out of line with the politics of many of her early company members, such as Sophie Maslow, Jane Dudley, and Anna Sokolow. Franko labels Graham’s technique bourgeois because of the amount of time required to train, which presupposes the ability to take time off of work and have the funds to be able to pay for classes. There is also a level of innate physical talent and ability involved in the production of a Graham dancer, such as flexibility in the hip joints that enables prolonged floorwork in the distinctive seated fourth position, which creates another barrier to entry. Socialist dance groups, such as the Workers Dance League, instead invited everyone to join and created movement that any person familiar with pedestrian techniques could perform without having to learn an intricate dance technique. Scholarship on dance from this period highlights the politics of dance as residing not only in the overtly displayed content of leftist dances, but also in the class politics of practice and production of dancing techniques (Franko 2002, Graff 1997). Although the class and race barriers to performing as a technically trained modernist

technique is itself a political practice that taught its dancers “a technique for being American” (Martin 1998, 152). This American identity, Martin argues, is tied to the appropriation of African and Native American dances, which Graham claimed as “our [America’s] two forms of indigenous dances” (Graham quoted in Martin 1998, 152) as well as the structure of class that coerces and regulates the body to achieve a uniform ideal similar to the role of the government in American democracy that creates structures for its citizens to work towards the American dream of success and independence. The abstraction of Graham technique in Gaga challenges the national and political specificity of Martin and Franko’s arguments, though traces of these histories are present within the abstraction. Before analyzing Gaga through a lens of US racial politics, however, it is crucial to contextualize and reconcile Gaga’s relationship to whiteness in both US and Israeli dance history.

1.4 Whiteness and U.S. Modern Dance

Gaga’s abstraction of other dance techniques follows in a long history of modern dance, particularly in the United States, because it is influenced by a wide array of foreign cultures and dance practices. Gaga draws on many of these American modern dance techniques, such as Graham technique, Limon technique, and others, and thus a critical understanding of the cultural politics of these practices is necessary to understand

body were not widely recognized until the rise of critical dance scholarship in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it is now clear that the technical body developed and popularized by Graham is also embroiled in American racial, class, and national politics that heralded the emergence of the ‘new woman’ – an independent white female.

Gaga's cultural politics in an international context.⁴⁰ Specifically, it is important to acknowledge the white privilege at play in American modern dance history and how these racial logics largely informed who danced and how they were viewed in relation to the many dance practices they drew inspiration from and at times directly appropriated. This is relevant for Gaga, even though the company organizing Gaga classes is currently based out of Israel, because of the dominant presence of American dance roots in contemporary Gaga practice and Naharin's own participation in and with American dance throughout his career. Many of the participants are also trained in these US-based techniques and bring these aesthetic and cultural legacies with them into the studio. Additionally, the logic of white privilege as employed by the early American modernists can still be seen within the logic of Gaga's use of other practice's ideas with infrequent recognition of these sources. In the cases of both Gaga and early American modern dance, appeals to individualism and the assumed right of distinct modernist artistic geniuses to appropriate any source material in pursuit of their art follows in the history of white privilege as dominant people and groups draw on the resources of a less dominant people or community without giving proper recognition or remuneration.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Though Gaga has several non-Euro-American influences, as will be discussed later in the chapter and Chapter 2, these Euro-American techniques are arguably the most dominant influences on Gaga.

⁴¹ A particularly vivid example of cultural appropriation can be seen in Anthea Kraut's tracking of the gendered and raced complications in American dance copyright cases. In reaction to the claim that black female dancer Alberta Hunter copyrighted the Black Bottom, an African American social dance form from the 1920s, Kraut argues that it functioned as "a powerful refusal of the entrenched racialized logic that generally assigns authorship and ownership of discrete acts of creative expression to individual white artists while 'invisibilizing' the creative labor of individual and collective artists of color" (Kraut 2015, ix-x). Her claim to copyright, as Kraut argues, challenges the common

Perhaps the most well known example of cultural appropriation in American modern dance is Ruth St. Denis and her series of Orientalist solos. Scholars such as Jane Desmond and Priya Srinivasan have deconstructed the politics of her choice to represent Asian dances with her visibly white, female body (Desmond 1991, Srinivasan 2011), thus questioning St. Denis's claim to individual inspiration and reclaiming agency for the sources of her inspiration. This work is an important step to considering the racial politics that enabled St. Denis's brand of cultural colonialism to thrive during the early 20th century. Her whiteness, and the cultural and class status then associated with that label, allowed her work to be interpreted as expressing a universally applicable exploration of spirituality, sensuality, and tradition stemming from an individual exploration. As multicultural and social justice scholar Robin DiAngelo states, "Individualism erases history," and specifically in the American racial dynamic, "allows whites to view themselves as unique and original, outside of socialization and unaffected by the relentless racial messages in the culture" (DiAngelo 2011, 59). Whiteness scholar Richard Dyer affirms that the idea of whiteness as the human norm is upheld when people refuse to acknowledge "white" as a racial category. He states, "There is no more powerful position than that of being 'just' human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can't do that – they can only speak for their race" (Dyer 1997, 2). St. Denis created her own version of Orientalist dance rather than acknowledging or staging the bodies of Asian dancers that have extensive training in these dance traditions, and because of her whiteness this was read as an artistic

practice of white appropriation and subsequent "ownership" of non-white cultural practices.

exploration of universalist themes rather than a replication of a specific cultural tradition in a way that would be impossible for a non-white body to do during this time in the early twentieth century.

The early modernist logic of appropriation wherein white artists were able to draw inspiration from non-European cultures but appeal to universal themes is deeply tied to the racial logic of white privilege. The predominantly white artists of American modern dance - as scholars such as Susan Manning (2004) and Thomas DeFrantz (2002, 2004) have documented, African Americans and other non-white artists were often excluded from the label of “modern” – adhered to modernist aesthetic values of appealing to universal themes and ideas, although often through the aesthetic influence of many other cultures including from Native American and Asian dance traditions. Though many non-white artists were also exploring similar aesthetics and ideas, they were read by audiences and critics as racially and culturally specific endeavors and thus could not be labeled as modernist investigations of universal experiences. Though I am speaking here particularly about the American context, it is important to recognize that white privilege functions similarly in many societies around the world, many of which are structured on racial logics that privilege light skin tones even within so-called “non-white” ethnicities. In the case of Gaga, I argue that a similar structure of white privilege is at play that allows Gaga dancers – as individual artists – to draw on multiple sources in pursuit of individualistic improvisation and movement exploration without needing to account for their sources or inspirations.

1.5 Whiteness and Israeli Dance

Although set in a different national and racial context, Israeli dance history mirrors many of the developments seen in the United States. Pre-State Israeli concert dance was largely derived from European dance trends such as German *Ausdruckstanz*, but after World War II and the establishment of the State of Israel the scene shifted towards American movements because of increased travel between Israel and the United States. Most notably, the Batsheva Dance Company was developed in 1964 with Martha Graham as its artistic advisor, and members of her New York based company frequently traveled to Tel Aviv to teach local dancers her technique and choreography. Due to the frequent cultural exchanges between the two nations, many of the aesthetics and cultural politics of American modern dance made its way to the Israeli dance scene and continue to be seen in the practice and development of Gaga. In addition to the similarities in trends, Israel upholds a similarly problematic racial hierarchy.

In the case of Israel, there are similar social strata that privilege a dominant group (Ashkenazim, or European Jews) over others (Mizrahim - Jews of Middle Eastern descent - and other non-white Jewish immigrants from countries such as Ethiopia). Ella Shohat clearly describes the cultural privilege of Ashkenazi heritage in her article “Sephardim⁴² in Israel: Zionist from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims” (Shohat 1988), which outlines the social discrimination against Jews not of European descent in Israel, an issue that has been taken up in both historical and contemporary studies by many other

⁴² The term “Sephardi” (singular) / “Sephardim” (plural) refers specifically to the Jews expelled from Spain and Southern Europe; it is often used in English language media to refer to all Jews of non-European descent although it only represents a fraction of the Mizrahi population in Israel.

scholars (for instance, see Lavie 2014, Raz Krakotzkin 2004). Mizrahim, Israeli anthropologist Smadar Lavie notes, “constitute the majority of Israel’s disenfranchised” (Lavie 2014, 1) while Ashkenazim “control the division of power and privilege in the state” (Lavie 2014, 2). In addition to the cultural and race-based tensions between Jewish citizens of Israel, there are significant differences between the Jewish citizens and the Palestinians living both inside and outside of the borders of the contemporary State of Israel. This difference in political and social status is perhaps most apparent in the privilege of Israeli citizens over the citizens of the Palestinian Territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the latter being significantly under-funded with regard to education and other public resources as a result of the ongoing Israeli occupation. These Palestinians are also often denied access to visit the land they had once owned within the borders of the State of Israel, indicating the clear legal privileges afforded to Jewish residents of Israel over their Palestinian neighbors (Azoulay and Ophir 2013, Seikaly 2013, Gordon 2008, Abu-Lughod 2007, Said 1999). The systemic privileging of Ashkenazi Jews over Mizrahim, Palestinians, and smaller communities in the region such as refugees, the Druze, and Bedouins, is also prevalent in the immigration system to Israel. Young Jews from Western countries such as the United States are encouraged to visit Israel on Birthright trips⁴³ and are guaranteed citizenship if they choose to make

⁴³ Birthright trips to Israel are available to all diasporic Jewish young adults between the ages of 18-26 who have never before traveled to Israel. The ten-day trip is offered free of charge and run by not-for-profit organizations for educational purposes, though it has been critiqued as a propaganda tour intended to promote Zionist politics.

aliyah,⁴⁴ whereas refugees and Palestinians are often denied entry to the country or are presented with significant hurdles to establishing citizenship. The nuances of these social hierarchies differ greatly from the racial structure of the United States, but remain similar to Euro-American racial logic, especially with regards to the commonplace practice of privileging people with lighter skin tones and European bloodlines, or in the case of Israel, the Ashkenazim.

The different standings of Ashkenazi and Mizrahi communities in Israel also impacted the development of the dance community. One clear example is the establishment of modern dance companies such as Batsheva and Bat Dor, with Europeanist cultural influences – thus associated with the Ashkenazim – as addressing universalist themes. At the same time, companies that employed non-Europeanist influences such as Inbal Dance Theater were often classified by their distinct cultural referents with additional modifiers such as Yemenite dance theater. Although dancers from all backgrounds now perform in a range of Israeli dance companies, the logic of adding a classification such as “Yemenite” to non-Europeanist traditions without adding such classifications to companies influenced by American or European dance trends falls in line with the invisibilization of white (or Europeanist) as a racial/cultural category, and thus enforces this as the norm. Gaga, as the current training method for the Batsheva Dance Company, continues to employ Europeanist characteristics as dominant aesthetic influences and thus I would argue remains within this privileged status of Europeanist (Ashkenazi) culture.

⁴⁴ Aliyah, which means “ascent” in Hebrew, is the term for the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to the Land of Israel. It is a core tenet of Zionism.

1.6 Gaga and Appropriation

Having introduced the logic of white privilege embedded in US dance history, and the somewhat similar hierarchy of Europeanist culture in the Israeli context, I now want to further analyze the politics of Gaga's appropriation of dance techniques.

Specifically, what cultural politics are embedded or overlooked in Gaga as a result of this particular model of appropriation? How does Gaga's active appropriation of Europeanist techniques (and often invisibilized influence from non-Europeanist techniques) differ from the early modern American context explored above? My interest in unpacking these cultural politics, rather than accepting the homogenization and hybridity of Gaga, as it is presented in studio settings, is reliant upon contemporary critiques of multiculturalism and its effect on discourses of race. As Richard Dyer explains, in the British context:

Postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely opened up a space for the voices of the other, challenging the authority of the white West, but it may also simultaneously function as a side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them. We may be on our way to genuine hybridity, multiplicity without (white) hegemony, and it may be where we want to get to – but we aren't there yet, and we won't get there until we see whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place and end its rule. (Dyer 1997, 4)

Dyer's characterizations of multiculturalism differ from the distinct legal and social hierarchies according to race that existed in the early twentieth century in the United States. Contemporary moves towards multiculturalism have introduced new discursive and cultural pitfalls in the US as well as many other industrialized nations. Perhaps most damaging is the inaccurate claim that we are in a post-racial society, and the resulting homogenization of multiculturalism that can override and ignore the political and cultural particularities in one's identity and history. It is this process of acknowledgement of

privilege (white and otherwise) is often overlooked in discourses of multiculturalism. I will focus in this section on the ways in which Gaga participates in the privileging of whiteness through appropriation, and the specificity of what practices are acknowledged as sources of inspiration in Gaga will be discussed in the following section. I consider here how this nuanced logic of white privilege is enacted in the contemporary dance practice of Gaga. Specifically, I question how cultural appropriation can bring light to the continued struggles with racial hierarchies and the logic of white privilege in a contemporary global context.

The complicated politics embedded in each of the movement practices Gaga draws from are passed down through the practice of Gaga, though they may not be visually identifiable. Naharin abstracts principles in pursuit of a comprehensive training method. Rather than presenting his interpretation of a racially or culturally specific aesthetic, Naharin is interested in drawing on the core movement principles embedded in different practices. Instead of emulating the famous Graham contraction, for instance, he draws on the principle of pelvic initiation and urges students to move from their “lena,” the Gaga term for the strong movement engine located in the pelvic region. There are also direct references to the ballet tradition, asking students to shift their weight and alignment to explore their own takes on well-known postures such as *penchées*, *tendus*, and *pliés*. As mentioned above, through an abstraction of movement concepts, Gaga moves away from the physical cues of cultural appropriation by embodying specific body postures and instead subtly passes down abstractions of culturally specific approaches to movement to establish a toolbox of options for dancers to employ during improvisation. This process

of abstraction complicates the usual route for acknowledging outside influences – visual cues of iconic postures – and thus an analysis of other forms for acknowledging Gaga’s sources of movement inspiration is necessary.

There is a distinct difference between Naharin’s acknowledgement of sources in interviews and the acknowledgment of sources in the space of a Gaga class. Although in interviews Naharin has acknowledged influences as widespread as butoh and ballet, in classrooms the only visibly apparent source is ballet. This is reinforced by the common refrain in interviews and advertising materials that Gaga is intended to supplement rather than replace technique, though the technique inferred here is from the Europeanist aesthetics found in ballet and white American modern dance practices rather than the full range of influences on Gaga or the potentially diverse backgrounds of the students. This visibility of ballet (and the lack of visibility of other influences, from both Europeanist and non-Europeanist sources) further reinforces the logic of white privilege circulating in modern and contemporary dance practices from early American modern dancers to today, in which Europeanist practices are privileged and acknowledged more readily than are non-white practices and aesthetics.

Though Naharin acknowledges that he has been inspired by many different movement practices, the specificity of what these influences are is only available in interviews and rare academic articles on Gaga (such as Galili 2015). This is not necessarily common knowledge for the many Gaga students who are engaged in the

physical practice.⁴⁵ The abstraction of dance concepts, rather than the direct lifting of easily identifiable postures, allows for the dissociation from the movement's source. This dissociation also creates a focus on how the individual artist chooses to embody the idea rather than the roots of the idea itself. This individualism is a guiding principle in the Gaga philosophy, evident in both the way teachers instruct classes and encourage people to make their own choices about interpretations of their prompts as well as in the rhetoric used to describe Gaga, such as the use of the words "freedom" and "self-awareness" on its homepage. This complicated relationship to the sources that inspired many Gaga principles – acknowledged, but only in offhand remarks during interviews – emphasizes the role of the individual artist as the genius figure. It assumes that the artist can interpret the information and resources given to them and produce a unique interpretation that obscures the original practice, much like the goal of early (white) modernist art. In this way, Gaga very clearly replicates the logic of white privilege in the process of appropriation by consuming, abstracting, and overshadowing one's influences and roots.

1.7 Centrality of Europeanist Techniques in Gaga, And What This Overlooks

In addition to the process of appropriation, it is also important to also consider what practices are being appropriated, especially with regards to challenging early US modern dance pioneer's methods of appropriation. Drawing on the American modernist logic of the acceptability of cultural appropriation by individual white artists, Gaga also

⁴⁵ Naharin has referenced his influences in interviews, and it is occasionally referenced in journalistic and academic writing on Gaga, but not all students look up these supplementary materials. There is rarely any mention to a discrete technique within the context of a Gaga class, with the exception of ballet terminology.

upholds a problematic cultural hierarchy in its references to the techniques that have inspired Gaga concepts. Unlike the early US modern dancers who drew heavily on the appropriation of non-Europeanist dance forms, Gaga privileges – although not to the exclusion of other forms – the use of Europeanist practices for inspiration. For instance, teachers call out ballet terminology by name, and Naharin has been quoted as saying that Gaga is a form of “higher education,” which Galili argues “reflects the fact that Gaga/dancers classes are intended for dancers already trained in Western concert dance techniques” (Galili 2015, 377). This is not surprising, given Naharin’s extensive background in these forms of dance training. Naturally, this attracts a similar student base, which has also trained extensively in forms such as ballet and various modern dance techniques that are popular in Western contemporary concert dance aesthetics today. Because Gaga relies on both the teacher’s instructions and the students’ embodied knowledge, the prevalence of these dance styles in both teacher and student creates a strong emphasis on Europeanist aesthetics. Though students are encouraged to break their movement habits, the approach to navigating these habits is not to ignore them entirely but rather to approach familiar postures and movements from new perspectives, introducing different dynamic qualities or ignoring traditional bodily alignment. Thus the artistic agency given to the student to improvise and find their own “groove” – a common Gaga term – is rooted deeply in their existing techniques and aesthetics, abstracting rather than dismissing them.

This unstated emphasis on historically white practices creates an aesthetic and pedagogical hierarchy in Gaga, where dance traditions from non-white contexts are

undervalued and often go unrecognized. This is an embodied example of Dyer's critique of contemporary multiculturalism, where multiple cultures are acknowledged but the privileging of white culture often goes unchecked. Because Gaga's approach to how to synthesize movement is predicated on abstracting Europeanist aesthetics and establishing new strategies for performing familiar tasks rather than introducing alternative aesthetic foci, Gaga is well aligned with the privileging of Europeanist aesthetics throughout the current international contemporary concert dance market.⁴⁶

This obvious focus on Europeanist aesthetics in Gaga serves to override the many other aesthetics that are in fact embedded in this practice. A core example of the physical disruption of this stated Europeanist hegemony is to observe *how* dancers employ balletic terminology to their bodies, and how this approach disrupts the dominance of Europeanist aesthetics. For example, a teacher might instruct a class:

Play with your form. As you work through familiar postures – maybe a *passé*, or an *arabesque*, or just a *tendu* – incorporate some of the sensations we have been playing with today. Imagine that your bones are reaching beyond your skin, and make them as long as possible. Really think about your bones reaching so hard that they rip through the skin.

When asked to play with familiar forms and postures, Gaga classes tend to erupt into off-kilter investigations of balletic positions. The majority of the time after this type of prompt is usually spent with students investigating how to make limbs as long as possible and how to abstract balletic poses by ignoring classical hip alignment or adding a curved torso and constantly moving arms. The directives of exploring straight lines and the

⁴⁶ Though there are significant shifts in contemporary concert dance today that privilege hybridized aesthetics, such as the merging of *bharata natyam* and contemporary dance that is particularly popular in the UK, the common thread in these hybridized practices is a basis in Europeanist aesthetics and techniques.

reference to French terminology prevents a wide interpretation of the prompt to explore form in a radically non-Europeanist aesthetic framework,⁴⁷ and assumes that each student's familiar form falls in the realm of Europeanist aesthetics: namely, ballet technique. In my own Gaga practice, this is a warmly welcomed moment of familiarity. I am able to play with the balletic postures so familiar to my bodily history without feeling confined to executing them properly, as I do in ballet classes. My hyperextended knees and elbows are no longer something to restrain, but rather something that I am welcome to explore within the non-traditional lines of this movement that is *inspired* by the postures I struggled for years to perfect, rather than a *replication* of an ideal form. Around me I usually see similar explorations of leg extensions, students relishing in this opportunity to be virtuosic and showcase their flexibility and expertise. Gone are the attempts to keep hips squared off or even: in the attempt to focus on other sensations amidst this exploration, "proper" technique is often ignored in favor of feel-good gestures

⁴⁷ Ballet is representative of Europeanist aesthetics, which include characteristics such as symmetry, efficiency, and verticality. This embodied form of Europeanist aesthetics also evokes traditionally Europeanist values and interests. Joann Kealiinohomoku, in her seminal 1970 essay "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance", challenges the commonly held assumption that ballet is racially or culturally neutral. She clearly illustrates the ways in which ballet evokes Europeanist cultural values such as the role of chivalry in the romantic narratives of choreography, the representation of women as ethereal or fairy-like creatures, the Western careers represented in ballets, and the costuming and scenery that evoke European style. The structure of ballet, too, supports many of these patriarchal and elitist values. In spite of the number of women in ballet, company directors and ballet masters are predominantly male. In choreography, traditionally, gender roles were clearly defined to fall in line with a male-dominant society. The Europeanist history of ballet also evokes a racial association with whiteness, which in the United States context is commonly linked with a higher class status. Although there have been many shifts in the history of ballet practice, ballet continues to be seen as a 'white' technique because of the lack of non-white dancers on ballet stages throughout history and into the twenty-first century.

of reaching and stretching. This is likely related to the lack of mirrors in the Gaga studio. Unlike ballet, where mirrors are readily available for students to use as tools for correcting postures and alignment, Gaga relies on sensations and what feels right. The goal is not to replicate a posture, which requires verifying accuracy with the aid of mirrors, but rather to move through sensations without the pressure of appearing a certain way or hitting certain poses.

Ballet is often heralded as the backbone of technique and existing in opposition to dance forms that employ different aesthetic values, such as Africanist social dancing. Its strict technical and aesthetic code makes ballet an easy and fixed icon. Although the emergence of contemporary ballet with the choreographies of George Balanchine in the mid twentieth century and more recent choreographers such as William Forsythe and others has challenged some characteristics of ballet, the form as a whole remains intact. Ballet and its relatively static aesthetic have also become easily identifiable and widely understood outside of the often-insular dance community, and is thus a powerful political tool. For example, in the context of Cold War cultural diplomacy an American ballet company – the New York City Ballet, led by George Balanchine – was sent to Russia to showcase American ideals and abilities. As Clare Croft demonstrates in her book *Dancers as Diplomats* (2015), the performances did display differences in the balletic technique of the two nations but were met with enthusiastic support from the audiences, showing that the two nations were not as diametrically opposed as many political leaders were arguing because of shared interests and involvement in this art form. Ballet, in this context, became more than an artistic practice and began to be recognized for its

performance of identity and national politics.⁴⁸ Ultimately, then, the evocation of ballet is tied up in the complicated politics of whiteness, nationalism, and class embedded within this practice.

The aesthetics of ballet are not directly replicated in Gaga, however – even a standard tendu exercise that is often taught in Gaga classrooms after the above exercise is abstracted by over-extending the limbs and intentionally falling off balance – and in Gaga there is space for a virtuosic exploration of the form. In my use of the term virtuosic, I reference Ariel Osterweis’s clarification that “...it is important to differentiate between ability, skill, and virtuosity, such that virtuosity signals not only inherent *ability* and technique (*skill*) honed over time, but also relies upon charisma [and] generates excess” (Osterweis 2013, 57).⁴⁹ The role of virtuosity is readily seen in these abstractions of ballet form. In order to showcase the charisma and excess of the individual, these balletic poses are extended to virtuosic lengths that are impossible when considering traditional ballet lines such as squared hips. Pushing beyond these traditional limits challenges the aesthetic in ways that display Africanist aesthetics⁵⁰ of polycentrism and asymmetry,

⁴⁸ Modern dance was also prevalently used in cultural diplomacy during this time.

⁴⁹ Osterweis’s article on virtuosity explores the racial, gender, and class components of this characteristic in relation to the performances of Desmond Richardson from Complexions Contemporary Ballet, ultimately arguing that virtuosity in dance represents both a queer and an Africanist sensibility.

⁵⁰ My discussion of Africanist Aesthetic here is intended to reference the embodiment of a set of aesthetics rather than the identity of those who practice Africanist aesthetics. As scholars of Africanist aesthetics note, this style is not restricted to people of African descent. Rather, as Thomas DeFrantz succinctly explains:

Africanisms discernible in concert dance, for example, are qualities of design and execution based on insistent rhythmicity, angularity, percussive rupture of underlying flow, individualism within a group dynamic, and access to a dynamic “flash of the spirit” that simultaneously confirms temporal presence and

which references the gendered and racialized elements of virtuosity's discourse. It is fitting that virtuosity, and thus references to Africanist aesthetics, are demonstrated in these moments of abstract balletic aesthetics. Gottschild (1998) deftly illustrated the influence of Africanist aesthetics on contemporary American ballet, such as the over-extended hips in several of Balanchine's choreographies, and its resonances can be seen even here in Gaga's abstractions of the form. By evoking ballet, regardless of the aspect of virtuosity, Gaga students embody the complicated cultural politics at play in that technique. The students both perform whiteness – the dominant racial characterization of

ubiquitous spirituality. These qualities are not particular movements so much as compositional strategies that may inform any given moment in a dance. As such, they are recurrent aesthetic imperatives that may be employed both by African diaspora artists and, significantly, by others following this tradition. While some scholars have resisted this theoretical approach because of its implication of a narrow and singular "African dance" idiom, the identification of these conceptual traditions has created the most consistent approach to documenting Africanist performance across generations and geographies of African American dancers and choreographers, as well as in work by others, including white Americans, Europeans, and Asians. (DeFrantz 2002, 15)

Although, as DeFrantz notes, the term Africanist has the potential to homogenize the diversity found in various African and African diasporic practices, I employ it here to acknowledge the influence of the wide range of Africanist influences on American social and concert dance practices. There is no singular definition of what the characteristics of this aesthetic are, but the most common qualities noted by Africanist scholars include an aesthetic of coolness, polyrhythm, ephibism, balance and control, and intricate relationships between individuals and communities (Gotschild 1998, Thompson 1966, Caponi 1999). These qualities draw on pan-African cultural forms, although Robert Farris Thompson and others often focus primarily on West African influences, which are often also seen in diasporic communities in North America, the Caribbean, and Latin America. As such, my use of Africanist aesthetics also includes an indirect link to Latin and Caribbean aesthetics, primarily seen in the common use of Latin rhythms and understandings of community. These aesthetics can be found not only in traditional African dance practices, but also in many styles that have come out of or come in contact with African diasporic communities, such as hip-hop, American ballet (Gotschild 1998), and tap.

ballet, as noted by Monroe (2011) and other dance scholars – and Africanist aesthetics, through the virtuosic extensions beyond the static form.

The very assumption that students are familiar with ballet, too, represents a complicated class politic of access to arts education and the hegemony of similarly Europeanist aesthetics on concert dance stages. This assumed common knowledge of ballet technique reinforces Gaga's place as part of a Western concert dance trajectory of modern and post-modern dance techniques that are often characterized by their inclusion or conscious rejection of ballet aesthetics. It is also important to note that these balletic prompts are only given in Gaga/dancer classes, which reinforces the technical elements of Gaga as a *meta-technique*; while many of the other prompts in this chapter are found in both Gaga/dancer and Gaga/people classes, the specificity of ballet terms are not used in Gaga/people classes. The direct reference to other techniques is unique to the meta-technique element of Gaga/dancer classes; though similar approaches to teaching the body are used in Gaga/people classes, the intent and context in which it is practiced creates a very different framework for analysis, which is discussed in more depth in Chapter 2. Ultimately, even as Gaga celebrates traces of Europeanist aesthetics in the form of privileging balletic influences, the openness to abstract the form allows room for students to explore counter-hegemonic aesthetics and virtuosity in ways that challenge the structure and dominance of form present in classical ballet practice.

There are also moments in the classes that explore what are often seen as Africanist aesthetics outside of the framework of balletic virtuosity,⁵¹ further disconnecting Gaga from the dominance of Europeanist aesthetics often seen in these classes. For instance, there is a frequently used exercise where dancers are encouraged to imagine multiple balls of energy floating through one's body. Imagining highways of movement for these balls of energy to travel along allows the dancer to rethink the pathways in their body: the arms might be connected through a horizontal line, or perhaps there is a current of energy pulsing through the right leg to the left arm, or just along one side of the body. These full-bodied pathways challenge the concept of all movement emanating from the core, which is so common in the Western concert dance practices already explored in this chapter, such as ballet and Graham technique. When imagining a ball of energy moving along one of these highways, the movement tends to be fluid and methodical. Adding a second or a third ball becomes more challenging, provided you are truly trying to keep track of these imagined sources of energy. Sometimes movement slows down, as dancers try to accurately represent the flow of energy, and sometimes they speed up in an attempt to keep up with quick imaginative and kinesthetic responses. Any more than three balls, however, usually results in polycentric and polyrhythmic movement. Dancers tend to exhibit a style of punctuated fluidity, where the body is continuously tracking these multiple sources of energy but occasionally jerking back to

⁵¹ It is important to clarify that many of the characteristics described below as aligned with Africanist aesthetics are movement principles also popularized in non-Africanist dance traditions. Still, I frame them here in relation to Africanist aesthetics because of the strong ties between Gaga and American dance practices that have arguable been exposed to and influenced by Africanist aesthetics.

either invent a new energy source to replace one that is lost or to redirect the intangible ball.

This polycentric, polyrhythmic movement that is often exhibited in Gaga – particularly evident in this exercise – is supposed to be an exploration of sensations untied to any particular cultural or political context. Yet, when I show clips of Gaga to dance history students who have learned about Africanist Aesthetics, invariably I hear them shout out Africanist interpretations of the movement. They directly refer to Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s characterizations of Africanist dance: “That’s *polycentric!*” “They use *a get-down stance* a lot.” “Their expression is really calm, like that *aesthetic of the cool.*” Their reactions are accurate ways to describe the physicality. Yet is this an inappropriate application of these terms, given that Gaga has developed out of the practice of a white, Israeli choreographer with no clear history of partaking in an Africanist dance practice? Or is this claim to Africanist aesthetics valid, considering Naharin’s experiences dancing and choreographing in New York and Gottschild’s claim that practicing Western concert dance includes exposure to Africanist influence? Beyond the trajectory of the original developer of Gaga, it is also important to consider the range of students who take Gaga classes who have had prior experiences in an Africanist dance form. Regardless of whether or not Africanist aesthetics are intended to be evoked in this exercise, it is reasonable to conclude that many participants use this prompt to draw on their own Africanist movement-influenced backgrounds, much like ballet trained dancers play with

their form in the earlier example of balletic exercises.⁵² Thus, Africanist aesthetics are frequently evoked through Gaga practice, even though they are not referenced in classes through the teacher's verbal prompts as explicitly as Europeanist forms such as ballet.

It is important to acknowledge these examples of arguably Africanist principles at play within Gaga practice in order to visibilize part of the range of cultural influences on this meta-technique and their subsequent politics. I use the term Africanist here, rather than a more specific style of dance, to reflect the range movement principles at play in a variety of dance practices that come out of both African and African diasporic traditions, all of which have the potential to be enacted through Gaga. It is perhaps unsurprising that this element of Gaga is not directly referenced, as ballet terms are, because of the long history of invisibilization of Africanist influences and diminishment of the particular techniques involved in evoking these movement characteristics.⁵³ Yet, understanding

⁵² Though I have argued previously that the dancers that engage with Gaga are primarily trained in Eurocentric traditions, this training does not necessarily override the potential to have multiple bodily histories outside of the Europeanist traditions. In the case of American Gaga dancers particularly, the potential for students to have engaged with some form of Africanist dancing, either formally or socially, is increasingly high because of the popularity of African American social practices in US popular culture (Gottschild 1998).

⁵³ The history of racist practices in staging concert dance is well documented, particularly in the US context (for instance, see Kraut 2008, Manning 2004, Franko 2002). Since the popularity of blackface minstrelsy in the late nineteenth century and the fetishization of African folk styles in early twentieth century Broadway productions, Africanist aesthetics have historically been understood as something “other” to the dominance of Europeanist aesthetics exhibited in ballet and early modern dance. In this pre-war period, “Negro dance” was seen as oppositional to the progressive style of modern dance (Manning 2004), which diminished the skill and agency of the Africanist-style dancers, yet the history of white entrepreneurs exploiting and appropriating the work of African American artists has extended from the early Broadway era through social dance practices that circulate today (Kraut 2010, 2009, 2008 and DeFrantz 2012). White society's fascination with Africanist aesthetics have historically led to the fusion of

these moments of polycentrism as evoking Africanist aesthetics visibilizes the influence of non-Euro-American cultures on this practice. This is particularly important given the marketing of Gaga as universal, despite the readily available associations to ballet through tendu exercises. To infer that Europeanist influenced dancing is neutral or apolitical invisibilizes the struggle that practitioners of non-Western techniques – most often, non-white people – experienced trying to enter the concert stage. Thus, visibilizing and embodying these Africanist aesthetics that are available in Gaga is integral to recognizing the influence of non-Europeanist dance within Gaga, and dismantling the rhetoric that ties it explicitly and exclusively to Western concert dance traditions.

1.8 Gaga and the Impossibility of Universality

In spite of drawing on multiple aesthetics and techniques, as described above, Gaga continues to be promoted in terms of universality and individualism. These appeals are meant to undermine the specificity of Gaga's many outside influences, and give the individual participant agency to draw from any source material they can think of while still presenting their work as exclusively personal or unique to themselves, which follows in the logic of white privilege enacted in early American modern dance's appropriation and lack of recognition for non-Europeanist practices. Yet an analysis of the multiple cultural and aesthetic influences on the practice of Gaga is critical for a reconsideration of

Europeanist and Africanist styles in addition to appropriation, often without recognition of the African American artists that were the source of the movement. Thus, as Gottschild notes, "Although these two massive cultural constellations – European and African – are fused and interwoven in many aspects, they also manifest distinct, discrete, and somewhat opposing characteristics and lend themselves to discussion as binary opposites, if not separate streams" (Gottschild 1998, xiv).

the Gaga-dancing body as politically and culturally imprinted. The influence of outside practices – both through Gaga’s prompts and the participants’ bodily histories – are often overlooked in favor of the rhetoric of “self-awareness” and “an experience of freedom and pleasure” explored through sensory-driven movement tasks. Though students’ improvisation is often described as a very personal experience, and entirely up to the individual, I argue that these experiences are deeply rooted in the traces of other physical experiences brought into the studio by the students and teachers alike. Thus, the rhetoric of universality must be challenged by an attention to the many sources of inspiration within Gaga to acknowledge the impossibility of Gaga existing as a truly universality practice.

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that Gaga draws on movement concepts from other dance practices, but it also draws on structural principles that shape the reception and practice of a particular dance style or technique. For instance, both Gaga and Graham technique use imagery to prompt movement. Whereas Graham often incorporated imagery to deepen the expression of the movement, Gaga teachers use imagery to instigate the creation of movement. Though the actual imagery differs drastically – it is hard to imagine Graham ever instructing students to “boil like they are spaghetti in a big pot of water,” as Gaga students are often asked to do – the use of poetic language is an integral characteristic of both practices, and not uncommon in other modern dance styles. Both practices also often use references to nature – such as bison

jumps in Graham, or floating in Gaga – to tap into a “universal”⁵⁴ set of experiences. This inclusion of descriptive language gestures towards the importance of the non-mechanical elements of dance technique. Even in Graham technique, which involves very strict postures and exercises, unlike the improvisatory style of Gaga, the performative and emotional elements of dancing remain integral to a strong performance of the dancing.

The appeal to universal experiences through imagery in both Graham and Gaga reflect broader interests in both practices about transcending the socio-political and engaging with people on a more personal level. Graham is well known for employing dancers of diverse ethnic backgrounds (one of her most famous dancers, Yumiko, is Japanese-American, and her first company members were almost all Jewish-Americans from the Lower East Side of Manhattan) and has often made claims such as “all human beings are the same” (Graham 1991, 144) in spite of the fact that her work has often been associated with her own white, female, American body.⁵⁵ This desire for universality often made its way into her choreographies as she dealt with abstract expressionist ideas.⁵⁶ This presentation of what Susan Manning terms “mythic abstraction” (2004) is a prime example of how claims to universalism function as part of the apparatus of white privilege. As Manning describes:

Mythic abstraction eschewed references to subjects of color – the “Orientals,” “primitives,” Native Americans, and African-Americans conjured through the 1930s choreography of Ted Shawn, Martha Graham, and Helen Tamiris. Rather, mythic abstraction staged universal subjects without the mediation of bodies

⁵⁴ By universal, I refer to experiences common in everyday life across cultural contexts, such as experiencing a range of emotions (ie: jealousy, love, happiness, pain, sorrow).

⁵⁵ For more on Graham and the politics of her choreography, see Franko 2012.

⁵⁶ Examples include grief (*Lamentation*, 1930) and themes such as betrayal and desire in Greek myths (*Cave of the Heart*, 1946; *Errand into the Maze*, 1947; *Clytemnestra*, 1958).

marked as culturally other. ...nearly all works of mythic abstraction figured a universal subject and in this way redefined modern dancers' staging of whiteness. (Manning 2004, 118)

Naharin, like these early twentieth century choreographers, frequently references his interest in universalism. In interviews he often claims that his work – choreographic or practice – is personal, not political. He appeals to the idea of universal humanity over singular political messages in a way that erases cultural, racial, and political specificity by assuming that the individual can be universalized. This status of universal is often granted only to people in positions of cultural power, evoking the apparatus of white privilege in a similar way to Graham's appeal to the universality of mythic abstraction. In both Gaga and his choreography, Naharin aims to connect to sensations and emotions that any person can tap in to rather than engaging with a particular narrative or political message. As he stated in a video interview with the *Jerusalem Post*, in Gaga "We learn to make sublimation of our demons, anxiety, anger [and put it] into form and content." Ultimately, he adds: "Dancing is something that has to do with the creatures, the animal, the power of imaginations, our passion, and it can all be done by anybody" (Naharin 2014). The appeal to universality, regardless of whether or not this goal is achieved, demonstrates a clear attempt to move away from superficial mimicry of postures and towards a sensation-driven style of working that engages broader audiences through the logic of white privilege that is closely tied to appeals to universalism.

These many similarities between Graham technique and the practice of Gaga are not surprising when one considers the close ties between Martha Graham, the Batsheva Dance Company, and Ohad Naharin. Instated as the Artistic Advisor of Batsheva when

the company opened in 1964 at the request of the financial backer, Batsheva de Rothschild, Graham frequently traveled back to Israel to work with the company as they staged her works. Although the company no longer trains in Graham technique, Naharin was a part of the company when Graham was still working with them. Naharin performed in Graham's choreography, even creating his own solo,⁵⁷ and in the 1970s traveled to New York City to train further with Graham while simultaneously undergoing professional ballet training. Naharin no longer works directly with Graham technique – a severe back injury halted his technical training and became a significant stepping point in developing Gaga – but it is unsurprising given this long institutional history between Naharin and Graham that many of her movement principles have made their way into Gaga. These traces of Graham technique and its associated micro politics are important to consider in the practice of Gaga, which exemplifies the impossibility of universality and how these claims of privileging the personal over the political in both Graham technique and Gaga ignore the privilege necessary to appeal to universal traits or concepts.

1.9 Decolonizing Gaga

After returning from a Gaga workshop in Tel Aviv in the summer of 2013, I participated in a contemporary indigenous dance residency at UC Riverside. Classes were

⁵⁷ Naharin joined the Batsheva Dance Company after completing his military service, and a month later Graham visited Israel to set a new work on the company. The work was based on the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, and Graham asked Naharin to choreograph a two-minute solo. This was atypical for Graham, who usually took complete choreographic control, and is often ascribed to the quick liking she took to him. As Naharin notes in an interview, Graham was infatuated with him because he reminded her of a former dancer, Bob Powers, who had recently committed suicide (Naharin 2013).

taught by indigenous performers from the United States (Rulan Tangen of Dancing Earth) and New Zealand (Jack Gray of Atamira Dance Company) as part of a larger conversation about contemporary indigenous choreography, and a recurring theme of the residency was decolonization and returning to the earth. Although these were not Gaga classes, similar themes of imagery spawning movement and finding pleasure and joy in this movement made me think immediately of Gaga and draw on improvisation strategies I developed in Gaga. The similarities in this workshop and Gaga are perhaps due to the similarly eclectic backgrounds of the artists who led the respective classes: like Naharin, both Tangen and Gray have extensive experience in a wide range of ballet, modern, and contemporary dance techniques in addition to specific indigenous dances. Whereas Gaga is marketed as an individual practice that can strengthen one's technique, however, this workshop was geared towards a decolonization of the body through a focus on the experiences of the body in relation to nature and community. Yet, in spite of their different goals, many of the exercises were strikingly similar. This experience, and later urging by the residency's organizer Jacqueline Shea Murphy, led me to question: can Gaga be a decolonizing practice? Or, does Gaga need to be decolonized? What potential can this meta-technique have for acknowledging or obscuring the many influences it attempts to synthesize? Can Gaga be part of the movement towards a more conscious multiculturalism that works towards a decolonization of contemporary aesthetics and the training of contemporary concert dancers?

In referencing the decolonization of dancing bodies, I draw here on Marta Savigliano's writing about her desire to decolonize her own practice of tango in the

seminal text *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (1995), where she acknowledges that her many different perspectives on tango create a battle between her “colonized and colonizer identities” (Savigliano 1995, 5). These inner battles make the process of decolonization difficult and never complete, as well as dependent on both her actions and the perceptions of her potential audience. Savigliano notes that there is not only one way to be decolonized; it can take many paths and appearances: “.... in the process of decolonization the end itself shifts unexpectedly Decolonization is a purpose in process, a search for self-determination, a process of liberation. Decolonization is endless” (Savigliano 1995, 16).

I argue that Gaga is similarly complicated, although it encounters entirely different pitfalls than the exoticization and patriarchal pressures so often placed on the practice and viewing of tango. Gaga is the product of a widespread highly globalized society where dancers are exposed to – and expected to practice – a variety of dance forms and styles. As such, I view the process of decolonization here as working to recognize and diminish the assumed power of any hegemonic force. For most concert dancers, this refers to the dominance of colonial (read: Europeanist) aesthetics in popular practices such as ballet and American modern dance techniques. I acknowledge that the view of what is a hegemonic dance form may differ for the dancer depending on their background and context, but I am writing from my perspective as a dancer from the United States trained in these Euro-American traditions – a very common background for Gaga dancers – and thus my impulse to decolonize Gaga is deeply rooted in an acknowledgment of these techniques as hegemonic.

Savigliano notes that the process of decolonization “...entails learning/unlearning the preeminence of abstract, totalizing Enlightenment logics over bodies and their often absurd techniques of survival” (Savigliano 1995, 13). In Gaga, the process of decolonization requires recognition of the Euro-American structures that frame the very practice of a sensory-driven improvisation that attempts to strengthen the body and prepare it to perform multiple techniques. The fact that Gaga is predominantly practiced by those engaging in Western-style concert dance practices speaks to the philosophical entanglements with Euro-American values and the pressures of the contemporary neoliberal market in which these dancers are attempting to thrive. At times, the very practice of Gaga urges a decolonization of the body by resisting gravity or habits engrained in bodies through the repetitive practice of specific dance techniques. At other times, Gaga reinforces the values and aesthetics of other practices, often but not always Euro-American in origin. These tensions require further analysis to consider the multiple ways in which Gaga both engages in and challenges the aesthetic and political goals of the traces of dance histories found in Gaga-dancing bodies.

It is important to acknowledge up front that the practice of Gaga is not innately invested in the decolonization of the body; it may not be a tactic for decolonization but it is important for an analysis of Gaga to decolonize the practice itself by recognizing the space for challenging the dominance of Europeanist aesthetics so often seen in Gaga. This is crucial because advertising about Gaga claims that it is supposed to help dancers break their movement habits. A quote from Ohad Naharin on the homepage of the Gaga website states: “We change our movement habits by finding new ones. We go beyond our

familiar limits” (Naharin quoted in Gaga Movement Ltd. 2016). This reads like a call to decolonize one’s body by challenging previously learned techniques. In practice, however, the structure of the practice continues to encourage students to draw on Eurocentric bodily histories in techniques such as ballet. This continued emphasis on Europeanist aesthetics and movement principles, as discussed throughout this chapter, brings into question three major issues in Gaga that require interrogation: (1) the appropriation of other movement practices, often without recognition or reference to the complicated cultural politics of the source material; (2) the claim that Gaga is available to every body, without critical interrogation of the actual populations that engage with the practice and what movement histories they tend to embody; and (3) the differences between the Gaga rhetoric of breaking habits and the actual practice in the studio that allows students to make their own choices about whether or not to challenge their improvisational instincts and bodily histories. While I argue that there is potential to decolonize Gaga by challenging its claims to universality, I acknowledge that the work this practice can do to undermine the repetition of hegemonic form-based dance techniques in its participants remains limited. I question whether Gaga as a practice can serve as a decolonizing tactic through which students can challenge their own colonial bodily histories and consciously explore their own instincts and improvisational choices because Gaga continues to encourage evocations of these forms, and at times imposes its own habits and aesthetics upon its participants.

In spite of the prevalence of Europeanist influence on Gaga, however, there is an opening in Gaga’s pedagogy that allows for a possible disruption to this privileging of

Europeanist aesthetics and the white modernist logic of appropriation. One dancer I interviewed, San Francisco-based Daniel Arizmendi, suggested that Gaga was a Jewish practice that allowed him to connect to his Jewish ancestral memory even as it helped him perform classical ballet. This was possible because Gaga taught him “new way to get into things, from point A to point B... Gaga’s definitely helped with figuring out how [his] body works” (Arizmendi in conversation with the author, September 2014). In the improvisatory space of Gaga, Arizmendi believed he was able to discover his own range and style of movement, which was also enabled through his blood memory. Another student, Lauren Mark, described how “when [Gaga teachers] say feel the energy, that’s very much from Qigong. Because then you’re not only aware of the connection of your own breath as it brings energy through your body, but also the sensation of you being more alive to everything around you” (Lauren Mark in conversation with the author, August 2015). Many other students I interviewed expressed similar opinions of recognizing either non-Europeanist influences in Gaga or the space to explore these concepts; the general attitude of students is not that Gaga imposes ballet technique but rather that it serves as a release from the pressures of these classes.⁵⁸

In addition to connecting to one’s own body, energy, and, potentially, ancestral memory, Gaga pedagogy also leaves space for students to draw from their own embodied histories, so students with experience in non-Europeanist practices are able to draw on these aesthetics and forms. When interviewing Gaga teachers about their instruction of

⁵⁸ It is important to note, however, that many of these students I interviewed were also actively taking ballet classes and often interested in using Gaga to improve their technique. Thus, their view of the hegemony of ballet and its potentially colonial influence on Gaga practice is slightly skewed because this is their norm.

“explore your form” that is often used in Gaga, for instance, everyone I spoke with suggested that this was open to any bodily form in spite of the fact that this prompt always results in a majority of the class performing leg extensions, *tendus*, or other technical feats common in ballet. Yet many students I interviewed expressly referenced the balletic aesthetic common to Gaga, and one student who wished to remain anonymous explained that she had difficulty bringing her hip hop training in to Gaga in any serious way, even though she managed to connect some Gaga principles such as groove and grounded pelvic movement to hip hop. She continued to explain that the layers of tasks prohibit clear evocations of particular dance forms and styles because “even when [Gaga teachers] say, let go of everything, it's with a shake, or it's with curves, or something like that, so I don't usually bring hip hop into class” (Anonymous dancer in conversation with the author, August 2015).

In addition to the students, Gaga teachers are theoretically able to draw on their own diverse backgrounds. Yet these teachers have extensive training with Naharin and thus are deeply entrenched in the complicated but over-arching Europeanist training embedded in his personal style. Still, they at times have histories of learning, performing, and teaching other practices sometimes out of the realm of Western concert dance. One Gaga teacher I interviewed is also a professional flamenco dancer, who wished to remain anonymous, argued that they frequently brought their flamenco practice and sensibility in to Gaga through both rhythmic grooves and attention to footwork. Their particular background made room for flamenco rhythms and style to be brought in to the Gaga classroom, and as the instructor they hold particular sway over the style that students

mimic and embody during their classes. Although these moments are arguably rare, the structure of Gaga's meta-technique that encourages students to draw on their own embodied histories – or those of their instructors – as source material creates an opportunity to challenge the existing cultural logic privileging whiteness that pervades the practice of Gaga and so many other contemporary concert dance training methods.

Considering these many layers and techniques that are present in Gaga and the politics associated with them, I am reminded of Randy Martin's explanation of politics in dance from his 1998 anthology, *Critical Moves*. In it, he posits that the motion and malleability of dance is a source of possibility for rethinking how politics can function in ways more complex than just as counter-hegemonic or rebellious. Martin recognizes that resistance through subcultures rather than calling for top-down change is a totalizing viewpoint that relies on the forces of society. He then argues: "...mobilization may turn out to provide a more constructive framework than resistance in which to value and evaluate social change" (Martin 1998, 13). Understanding mobility and the ways in which bodies move allows for a more nuanced reading of the political nature of dance, and the ways in which dance can support, participate in, challenge, and resist hegemonic powers simultaneously. This malleability and multi-layered understanding of politics is integral to my approach to analyzing techniques and their place in Gaga. As shown in the layering of several different techniques and politics within Gaga, the politics are frequently shifting. In the case of Gaga, for instance, at times the politics of the techniques being evoked counter hegemonic politics, and at other times fall in line with the arguably elitist ideals of Western concert dance values. By understanding that Gaga –

and many other dance practices – is neither totally subversive nor coercive to the dominant politics at play, we are able to recognize the complexity of the movement enacted by these dancing bodies.

Though I argue that Gaga often perpetuates a privileging of Europeanist aesthetics and white privilege, the possibility for Gaga to challenge this dynamic through an active incorporation and recognition of other techniques – some of which is already happening in Gaga studios, albeit predominantly in reference to ballet at the moment – may someday lead towards a more culturally cognizant process of bodily training that can embrace multiple aesthetic histories. How can the use of colonial (Europeanist) techniques through abstraction allow for a decolonization of the mastery of the techniques so often expected of Western concert dancers? Though Gaga may not be the perfect model for decolonizing dance techniques because of its continued reliance on hegemonic dance techniques, it raises important questions and possibilities for disrupting the hegemony of Europeanist aesthetics in contemporary concert dance. It is vital that we continue to consider the power dynamics inherent in mixing and matching training practices, and how we can decolonize our own bodies to not privilege Europeanist aesthetics by default, and how the agency given to dancers in Gaga to develop their own tactics for negotiating stylistic influences creates an opportunity to challenge aesthetic norms that is not available in form-based dance techniques.

1.10 Conclusion

Ultimately, a study of technique is not limited to understanding the progression of dance history and layers of appropriation, but allows insight to broader socio-political values embedded in any given practice. In understanding what a technique (or meta-technique) teaches, one can better understand both social and artistic contexts that produce the atmosphere in which these practices thrive. Although this chapter predominantly reinforces the colloquial understanding of technique, which infers a race and class barrier to enter these practices and diminishes the perceived level of skill in non-Europeanist dance forms, it does so in order to acknowledge these complicated politics and how they might be shifting within the contemporary context. Analyzing Gaga as an appropriative project following the logic of white modernist appropriation is not meant to critique the practice itself, but rather to consider how the legacies of white privilege and aesthetics continue to play out in the contemporary concert dance world. Similarly, the stakes of labeling Gaga as a meta-technique are not just to place Gaga in line with the complex race and class politics of Western concert dance history; doing so also opens possibilities to decolonize the hegemony of Europeanist influences within discourses and practices of Gaga. As practices circulate and lines between them blur, it is important to continually recognize the roots of the many politics embedded in the practices in order to recognize and value the complicated histories of which they are a part, and how embodying or abstracting these aesthetics can shape the body politic.

Chapter 2

The Cultural Politics of Practicing Israeli-ness in Gaga

If you do a simple Google search for “Gaga” and “Israel,” the first thing that will appear is not the movement language. Rather, there is coverage about the famed pop star Lady Gaga’s visits to Tel Aviv, most notably her September 13, 2014 show that took place just weeks after that summer’s controversial Operation Protective Edge⁵⁹ which ended in late August. Pre-dating Israel’s 2014 attacks on the Gaza Strip, Palestinian civil society issued a call for a boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) campaign in 2005 to urge the State of Israel to comply with international law and address Palestinian rights (Barghouti 2011, 4-5). As part of this broader movement of international solidarity with Palestine, BDS supporters urge musicians not to play shows in Israel until the state ends its military occupation of the Palestinian Territories.⁶⁰ The members of this campaign argue that the State of Israel will use the event of an international artist performing in Israel as a show of support for the State and their political and military actions, thus using

⁵⁹ Operation Protective Edge, also known as the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict, was launched on July 8 by Israel. Rocket attacks from Gaza and military strikes from Israel ensued, killing thousands of people. Though the final death toll remains contested, Gaza suffered the most deaths (over 2,000) and injuries (over 10,000) and Israel suffered less than 100 deaths. Operation Protective Edge is particularly well known for the controversy over the high rate of civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip.

⁶⁰ A notable exception to this boycott is Roger Waters, a former member of Pink Floyd. After scheduling a performance in Tel Aviv in 2006, Waters moved his performance to a small village within Israel named Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam that houses both Jews and Palestinians in coordination with boycott activists to highlight his condemnation of the wall being built between Israel and the West Bank. I use the term Occupied Palestinian Territories in line with current international law, although the State of Israel continues to deny this label.

popular culture to whitewash their military crimes. Indeed, leading up to Lady Gaga's show, there was a slew of articles published a variety of news sources – from the *Jerusalem Post* to the *New York Post* – praising Lady Gaga for showing her support for Israel. By ignoring the call to boycott and performing in Tel Aviv, her only stop in the Middle East on this tour, Lady Gaga – a symbol of American popular culture – legitimized the idea that Israel is a democracy and part of a civilized international society in a way that its Arab neighbors are not.

In contrast to Lady Gaga, Gaga the movement language plays a more ambiguous role in Israeli cultural politics. As an Israeli product that is exported internationally, Gaga holds a different relationship to the BDS movement. Gaga was developed by an individual, Ohad Naharin, and the Gaga Movement Ltd. company that oversees Gaga classes and marketing accepts no money from the government for its operation. The organization is also not formally aligned with a political agenda set by the State, though it does occasionally partake in local community outreach programs such as working with Parkinson's patients, formerly abusive husbands, and victims of terror attacks (Deborah Friedes Galili and Yossi Naharin in conversation with the author, August 2015) As such, it is not subject to complaints from the BDS campaign because it does not fit their criteria of having a direct financial link to the Israeli government.⁶¹ One would be remiss to assume that this infers that Gaga is entirely removed from national politics, however.

⁶¹ The formal BDS call does not address individual Israeli academics, writers, or artists. Rather, "The 2004 PACBI [Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel] Call and all PACBI documents and speeches on record ever since have consistently called for an *institutional* boycott of Israel in the academic and cultural field, not a boycott of individuals" (Barghouti 2011, 118).

Because this practice is rooted in an Israeli cultural context and maintains its organizational base in Tel Aviv, it is important to read Gaga through the lens of state politics.

In this chapter, I analyze three links between the practice of Gaga and ideologies prevalent in Jewish Israeli society to argue that Gaga needs to be considered as an Israeli practice in spite of its international circulation and Naharin's claims that there is nothing Israeli about his dancing, either in Gaga or his choreography.⁶² I contextualize Gaga as part of a history of Israeli folk and modern dance that served an important role in establishing a national identity. Specifically, I highlight resonances between Israel's dance history and Gaga in regard to socialist values of inclusion and equality, the blurring of Middle Eastern and Western European cultures to establish cultural and political legitimacy, and an emphasis on strong muscular bodies that were all pivotal issues for establishing broader Jewish-Israeli values and national identity. The significance of this claim is to complicate Gaga's place in a history of Israeli dance, and analyze its role as a symbol of contemporary Israeli society as it circulates abroad. I argue that Gaga's popularity and accessibility in foreign contexts – such as in the United States – promotes a normalization of Israeli society and cultural products in the context of the state's controversial military and political ventures that frame its cultural sphere. I do not argue that the Gaga organization actively promotes this – or any other – nationalist political

⁶² In an interview with the *Jerusalem Post*, Ohad Naharin stated: “I don't think there is such a thing as typically Israeli dance. Or even typically Israeli anything. So I don't generalize things about this, not about dance and not about Israel” (Naharin 2014).

agenda, but, rather, that we must acknowledge Gaga's place in Israel's complicated socio-political context.

Throughout this chapter, I will offer an interpretation of Gaga in relation to the structure of the Israeli nation-state and how it can be seen as upholding Jewish Israeli values and thus subtly reinforcing state politics and norms. I acknowledge that this is a controversial reading of Gaga, which many participants, teachers, and organizers would reject. As such, I will also address the ways in which I see Gaga undermining any cultural or political affiliation with the state and its policies or proclaimed values. It is vital to understand the potential political associations and ramifications of this practice because BDS activists frequently protest and boycott the company most associated with Gaga, the Batsheva Dance Company. Although Gaga and Batsheva are closely tied and both currently led by Naharin, the political significance of the two entities differ greatly in relationship to the State of Israel. I avoid reductionistic parallels between Gaga and the company through this detailed reading of the practice itself. I suggest that Gaga is not a simple replication of Israeli values, nor is it exclusively Israeli. Yet, I unpack these associations with this nation-state to recognize the cultural and socio-political implications of this practice, and challenge the assumption commonly held by its participants that Gaga is devoid of association with any sort of national or social politic.

Unpacking Gaga's potential political overtones requires a critique of Zionism to reconsider the power inequalities in the ongoing war between Israel and Palestine, and where Gaga may impact the tense relationship between the two nations. Critiques of Zionism, and thus the State of Israel, are often portrayed in popular media as anti-

Semitic. Yet Judith Butler has argued that criticism of Zionism may very well be a Jewish value in and of itself, and that critiques from both Jewish and non-Jewish perspectives are vital (Butler 2012). In this text, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, Butler joins many of her Jewish peers in dissociating Jewishness from a blind support of Israel. Rather, she evokes Hannah Arendt's arguments on binationalism and cohabitation (and the inability to choose who lives on the earth with you) to call for a binational existence in Israel/Palestine that extends equal rights to all citizens regardless of race, nationality, or religion. This, for Butler, does not outline a viable policy for either a one- or two-state solution, but rather acknowledges the need to coexist regardless of the state structures that emerge to house these 'nations' of people. Whereas Butler is focused on arguing for the right and need to critique Zionism, other scholars of Zionism are more forceful in challenging the roots of this ideology and its role in creating what many call a settler colonial state that privileges Ashkenazi⁶³ Jews and their culture over that of the Mizrahi⁶⁴ Jews and Palestinians (Piterberg 2008, Raz-Krakotzkin 2002 and 2004, Massad 2000, Said 1979, Shohat 1988 and 2006). These scholars argue that Zionism upholds a racist ethno-nationalist ideology that subjugates many of its citizens and neighbors, maintaining an unequal power dynamic between those in power (Ashkenazi Jews, the early Zionist immigrants to pre-State Israel) and the populations they suppress (Palestinians, Mizrahi Jews, other ethnic and religious minorities). My critique of Zionism, then, is aimed at bringing attention to the ways in which the State of Israel upholds morally suspect laws and values that privilege parts of the population over

⁶³ Jews of European and Eastern European descent.

⁶⁴ Jews of Middle Eastern descent.

others. Acknowledging the ways in which these values subtly emerge in the practice of Gaga is aimed at challenging the perpetuation of Zionist ideologies through cultural projects rather than describing Gaga as intentionally supporting these political values.

2.1 Constructing Israeli-ness

In order to discuss Gaga's relationship to Israeli values or the Israeli nation state, it is vital to first define my use of these terms and unpack the historical politics tied up in these labels. Israel, in the context of this chapter, refers to the nation state that was declared independent in 1948. Central to this political understanding of Israel as an independent nation state is Zionism, a complex ideology that has both political and cultural projects that are not always clearly aligned. In this chapter, I refer to Zionism as the set of ideas that underpin both the political and cultural forces that support a national homeland for the Jewish people, originally championed by Theodor Herzl in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This brand of Zionism resulted in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and is the motivation for continued militarization in the region in order to create a state with a Jewish majority and strong security to safeguard this newly established homeland. This form of settler-colonial Zionism is predicated on the idea of a Jewish homeland, and requiring a Jewish majority for its population, which needed to be forcibly created. The process of removing non-Jewish inhabitants and encouraging Jewish immigration to the land of Palestine was a necessarily violent one, both ideologically and militarily, as Jewishness was established in the region as a protected and empowered identity over the indigenous Arab

populations that were often forced out of their homes. Zionism is often referred to by historians as a reaction against anti-Semitism (Piterberg 2008, Massad 2000, Gilman 1991, Arendt 1978), and is also often described in scholarship as a European political project that strategically utilizes cultural ties to Middle Eastern peoples and tradition to validate the messianic claim to the land of Palestine while maintaining Western European political and cultural affiliations (see Piterberg 2008, Berkowitz 1993, Azoulay 2011), all of which are commonly used justifications for Zionist politicians. This working definition relies heavily on the perspectives of scholars who study the history and contemporary politics of Zionism, rather than rhetorical understandings offered by politicians, which allows for a more critical understanding of the ideology and its relationship to history and current events.

The term Israeli, then, is deeply entrenched in Zionist politics and thus Jewish history. In this chapter, I use the label Israeli to refer specifically to Jewish Israeli people and culture. Although the label of Israeli in popular understandings at times encompasses the Palestinian, Druze, and other citizens and permanent residents in the Israeli nation-state, these are not dominant connotations of the word. Thus, any reference to non-Jewish Israeli culture or peoples will be specifically designated with a modifier. This connotation of Israeli-ness as Jewish encompasses a broad understanding of the complex label of Jewish: Israel as a Jewish state embraces both secular and religious Jews with a wide variety of interpretations of what it means to be Jewish. I acknowledge that Israeli-ness is not homogenous, and my focus in this chapter on identifying how cultural products

become affiliated with Israeli political systems that tie them to the State and its policies rather than specific communities and identities within Israel.

The stakes of identifying cultural products such as Gaga as tied to political Israeli-ness are to offer a critique of Zionism, the contemporary ethno-nationalist ideology dependent on a Jewish-majority population in a self-designated homeland. This demographic requirement relies on more than Jewish law: there is also a strong cultural component to becoming an Israeli sabra⁶⁵. In pre-State Israel, cultural production was an integral part of establishing a strong national identity for the early Jewish pioneers. This could be seen through the creation of folk dances, an emphasis on enforcing a common language, and engaging in sports. Scholars of pre-state Israel and early eras of Zionism such as Nina Spiegel (2013) and Michael Berkowitz (1993) have demonstrated the power of culture to enforce political change and unify diverse groups of immigrants under common national interests in both policy and society. In post-Independence Israel, cultural politics remain integral to the State's normalization of military conflict and upholding alliances with powerful Western countries such as the United States. For instance, the State is actively engaged in archaeology projects that maintain Biblical Jewish claims to the land (Abu El-Haj 2011), administrating folk and contemporary dance festivals (Kaschl 2003, Friedes Galili 2012), and a program of international cultural exportation often referred to as the Brand Israel campaign that sends Israeli artists abroad to "show Israel's prettier face, so [they] are not thought of purely in the context of war" (Arye Mekel quoted in Barghouti 2011, 123). This politicization of

⁶⁵ Sabra is a term for a native-born Israeli Jew, native referring to the land of Palestine both pre- and post- the establishment of the Israeli nation state.

cultural projects is intended to create a positive vision of contemporary Israel as a nation involved in many of the same artistic and social projects as its Western allies. While the individual artists or participants may not view themselves as political in any way, external viewers – from media to political pundits – may argue otherwise to make a larger point about Israeli society.

These cultural politics are part of a larger issue: the militarization of Israeli society. Ariella Azoulay, an Israeli visual culture scholar, argues that “The military’s war activities create war as a permanent, continuous reality” (Azoulay 2011, 268) in Israel. This constant state of war is enabled by constitutive violence, a term Azoulay borrows from Walter Benjamin’s essay “Critique of Violence” (1921) to describe the foundational presuppositions that predicate law and policy and enact violence. For Israel, this refers to the constitutive mandate to uphold Zionist ideals of a Jewish majority state and thus deny Palestinian rights to the land that Israel now holds, resulting in a constant state of warfare rather than allowing for a rethinking of what best serves contemporary Israeli citizens.

Azoulay clarifies:

The daily presence of military campaigns – contrary to isolated operations – is outside of the reach of public discussion and contestation, and there are no civil procedures or ways to criticize and challenge it to prevent its perpetuation, because this daily situation is part of the political regime and built into the logic of civil life. (Azoulay 2011, 268)

The roots of both legal and militaristic violence, then, are the ideologies that shape and predate contemporary policy. In light of this, I focus now on a critique of Zionist ideologies that perpetuate the importance of a Jewish-majority nation state and not on the individual actions taken by State leaders throughout its history to maintain this mandate. I

view cultural productions as incredibly important in the subtle enforcement of Zionist values and policies that shape society's acceptance of the military and legal battles that are fought on their behalf by the State of Israel. Though not all Israeli cultural products actively uphold Zionist politics, practices such as Gaga that present themselves as politically unaligned with any particular values or political parties through a focus on the individual still support the political regime by virtue of their refusal to engage with or critique the current state of affairs. The very claim to universality and political neutrality is dependent on a status of power, where participants are able to assume basic safety and rights to focus on art rather than survival. Thus, the political implications of producing and participating in a practice such as Gaga that promotes ideas of freedom and personal exploration must be reconsidered in light of the national politics that surround the emergence of this movement language.

2.2 Zionist Socialism and the (Folk) Dancing Jew

In the late 1800s, the Zionist Congress established the land of historic Palestine as the location for the new State of Israel with the support of charitable donations from Europe. Soon after, European Jews began to travel to the land and set up *kibbutzim*, farming communities based on socialist Zionist values intended to develop the land of Israel. The Zionist project, although based on the idea of a Jewish homeland, was more commonly bound through secular socialist politics than religious principles. The *kibbutzim* were prime examples of Zionist socialism, where the communal lifestyle was celebrated with secular agricultural festivals as well as biblical holidays. In addition to

establishing a community based on the ideals of shared labor and equality, these early Jewish settlers were charged with developing a uniquely Israeli identity. Though issues of Hebraic culture were highly contested at Zionist Congresses in Europe (Berkowitz 1993, Spiegel 2013), the practical development of a new Jewish-Israeli culture occurred on the ground at the *kibbutzim* in historic Palestine. In addition to finding a common language, cuisine, and dress for the disparate Jewish settlers, in these early pre-State years they began to develop Israeli folk dance. This practice celebrated unity and equality among its participants: a socialist principle that can also be seen in the contemporary practice of Gaga. However, celebrations of the Zionist socialist principles of equality and community often overshadow the existence of inequalities within Israeli society and prevent careful considerations of how to embody and ensure equality.

Folk dance in Israel is an invented tradition in every sense of the term. Gurit Kadman, a German-born Jewish settler in historic Palestine who is often referred to as the mother of Israeli folk dance, affirms the invented nature of these dances this as she discusses their origins:

For people who fervently wished to have dances of our own and in our lifetime, it was clear that we had no choice: we had to create dances, ... This was against all the laws of the development of folk culture the world over. How can one create purposely, artificially, folk dances which usually grow slowly like trees out of deep roots ... a process of hundreds of years? (Kadman quoted in Ingber 2011, 109)

Kadman, who choreographed many famous Israeli folk dances, is an anomaly in the common understanding of folk dance tradition because it is rare to have known choreographers. Many of her peers, such as Sara Levi-Tanai and Rivka Sturman, were also easily recognized as choreographers. Though some dances' creators were sometimes

listed as anonymous – such as the widely popular circle dance “Mayim Mayim” when it was presented at the 1944 Dalia Festival – the creating, teaching, and performing of folk dances were important community building practices in the early *kibbutzim* and thus it was difficult to dissociate the creator from the product. In fact, many choreographers were commissioned by their *kibbutzim* to create new works (Ingber 2011, 143). As E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger have argued:

“Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which *seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition*, which automatically implies continuity with the past. (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 1; emphasis added)

Though establishing common traditions and histories is integral to establishing a national identity, as Benedict Anderson demonstrates in *Imagined Communities* (1983), the invented quality of Israeli culture points to the strategic political choices that were involved in its creation. Thus, the works of Kadman, Levi-Tanai, Sturman, and others are not intended to be read as works of an individual genius, but rather as representations of a unified community and their political values.

The representation of Hebrew culture present in Israeli folk dances is consciously concentrated on representing unity. Out of the three primary forms for folk dance – circle, line, and couples – the one most commonly used in Israeli folk dance is circles.⁶⁶ While circle dances are common in a wide range of cultures, particularly prevalent in African traditional dances and Eastern European folk dances, the conscious choice to create the

⁶⁶ According to Israeli folk scholar Dina Roginsky, “circular dances make up more than 50 percent of all Israeli folk dances, compared to couple dances (40 percent) and line dances (less than 10 percent)” (Roginsky 2011, 320).

majority of Israeli folk dances in a circular formation indicates a clear intention of showcasing togetherness. As Israeli folk scholar Dina Roginsky notes:

The close circle, created by holding hands (or shoulders or waists), symbolizes collectivity and actually includes every person held together despite a rushing rhythm, so that no one is first or last. Each dancer can see all the others and is connected to the two people beside him or her. In addition to its physical and sensual entity, the circle folk dance is symbolically embedded in the Israeli collective memory portraying the pioneering *hora* and the circle dances that burst onto the streets in 1947, after the UN vote in favor of the Partition Plan, giving the Jews their own physical state in the world after World War II. (Roginsky 2011, 321)

The physical connection between the dancers in these early circle dances – though often performed today with no hand, shoulder, or waist touching, indicating a slight shift in community values in contemporary Israel – demonstrates the Zionist socialist values of unity and equality. These dances were open to everybody regardless of age, gender, or skill, mirroring the *kibbutz* ethos of equal participation and contribution. It is important to note, however, that this openness was often limited to the *kibbutz* community, thus already precluding the participation of those not allowed into the *kibbutz*.⁶⁷ Though line and couple dances were also practiced, particularly as the folk dance movement progressed after the establishment of the State in 1948, circle dances remain common in Israeli folk dance practice and illustrate the emphasis on community togetherness that originated with the early Jewish pioneers.

⁶⁷ The *kibbutzim* were populated predominantly by European Jewish settlers; Mizrahi Jews (Jews of Arab descent) were largely settled in dense enclaves within cities after the establishment of the State of Israel and thus were not a significant presence in the early *kibbutz* culture. Non-Jewish settlers were not permitted to live and work in the *kibbutzim* (Piterberg 2008, Ingber 2011, Shohat 1988).

This vision of unity presented by circle dances plays into early Zionist values, where equality and community were assumed. Yet while Zionist rhetoric promoted the idea of gender parity in pre-state Israel, and the *kibbutzim* were certainly revolutionary in terms of labor, equality remained idealistic. As University of Haifa professor Yossi Ben-Artzi explained in his investigation of how gender studies has challenged the Zionist historiographies of Jewish settlement in Israel, men and women had different roles even in the socialist *kibbutzim*. He writes:

[As] [t]he women of the Second Aliyah ... [depict] in their memoirs – a rather clear picture emerges of feelings of discrimination, inequity, being held off, and of being kept away from realizing aspirations similar to those of their fellow male immigrants... (Ben-Artzi 2008, 28)

Most notably, although women were increasingly granted access to guard duty and political office as Israel neared statehood, men continued to be removed from most domestic duties such as childcare. In spite of the rhetoric of equality, traditionally feminine domestic labor such as laundry and kitchen duties remained largely relegated to women. In addition to their assigned work on the kibbutz, some females were also working as choreographers. This work of choreography was no small feat, although kibbutz leaders did not often recognize it as labor-intensive. Pre-State Israeli folk dance choreographers such as Lea Bergstein and Sara Levi-Tanai have recounted instances of using their own money for costumes or not being given breaks or rehearsal space, even when their works were celebrated within the community or at folk dance festivals.⁶⁸ Their

⁶⁸ These conversations are recorded in Judith Brin Ingber's study on the roots of Israeli folk dance (Ingber 2011). For instance, Lea Bergstein's choreographic work was often requested by kibbutz leaders, yet her choreography did not earn her money, leisure, or status. She writes: "I ... asked to be let off from the laundry to work in something else so

stories highlight the labor expected of these women to produce images of unity and equality through Israeli folk dance even as they experienced a significant inequality of labor distribution in their home communities.

This labor of cultural creation is often ignored in Zionist histories and patriarchal economic models. This may be because in the case of both the domestic and cultural labor done by these early female choreographers, the use value is difficult to assert because the labor does not result in clear-cut commodities. Dance, in particular, is elusive in terms of determining labor attribution due to the ephemerality of performances. Without a tangible commodity to sell, the work done to maintain domestic life or create art is often ignored in terms of labor, although many scholars such as Raymond Williams have critiqued this flaw (Williams 1980, 31-49). Joseph Childers and Stephen Cullenberg also address this issue in terms of use-value, reminding us that the value of domestic labor and cultural agents must not be overlooked simply because they do not fit neatly into traditional conceptions of Marxist labor (Childers and Cullenberg 1999). In the context of the creation of Israeli folk dance, this means that the work of the women in pre-State Israel to produce this strong nationalist identity must not be ignored in favor of

that my hands wouldn't be bleached out and white for the performance. I was told no, that we must first build the land and then we would dance; there was no time to think otherwise" (Bergstein quoted in Ingber 2011, 142). A similar dismissal of the needs of choreographers can be seen in Sara Levi-Tanai's work creating dances on her kibbutz. In an interview, she explains that she was expected to complete a full day of labor in addition to her dance work, as were her dancers. She writes: "I gathered people together for rehearsals by sheer force. But we had no place to rehearse, so we worked in the laundry room. The dancers would have to wait for me while I'd run out of the rehearsal to breastfeed my baby daughter Michal. Someone else would change her diapers and I'd rush back to the dancing" (Levi-Tanai quoted in Ingber 2011, 129-30).

a more simplistic, nationalistic narrative that only acknowledges labor that results in profitable, tangible commodities.

In spite of the complicated roots of Israeli folk dance, from the female labor to the use of Middle Eastern dances such as the Palestinian dabke (which will be addressed in greater length in the next section), this folk dance movement highlights the importance of the ideals of unity and equality in Israeli society and how they were promoted through Zionist cultural projects. Though I do not suggest that unity or equality are ideas to be maligned, nor do I claim that their importance is unique to Israel, I do argue that this staged representation of socialist Zionist values furthers central political goals at the expense of less powerful members of society. While concert dance practices such as ballet and German Ausdruckstanz were also brought to pre-State Israel, and were celebrated with a national competition in 1937, folk dance remained the predominantly politically supported dance form during this time because it promoted Zionist socialist values rather than urban, elitist politics of hierarchies and high art (Spiegel 2013). It was also celebrated through the performances of young, strong Jewish pioneers at folk dance festivals; though people of all ages practiced the dances at celebrations and community events, public performances at festivals and competitions were most often performed by attractive youth. Thus, to promote equality, community, and freedom through dance in an Israeli context is to fall in line with early Zionist values, which presented an idealistic view of all Jewish settlers as equal while overlooking the many inequalities that remained in line with Europeanist ideas, such as the diminished value of women and aging members of society.

In contemporary Israel, the dance practice of Gaga similarly evokes an ethos of equality and community by opening classes up to anyone who wants to try it. Although initially developed as a personal dance practice by Ohad Naharin, when Naharin returned to Israel in 1990 to work with the Batsheva Dance Company he brought the then-unnamed practice of Gaga to both dancers and non-dancers. He initially taught Gaga to non-dancers at the request of a wardrobe assistant who worked for the company and had witnessed his classes for the dancers. They developed a dedicated group of non-dancer participants who worked at the company or were acquainted with its employees, and Naharin taught classes to these non-dancers several times a week. By the early 2000s, Naharin had opened up Gaga classes for the general public in the Suzanne Dellal Center's studios. Today there are two distinct tracks of Gaga: Gaga/people and Gaga/dancers. In Israel, Gaga/dancers classes are available only through Batsheva company classes, the bi-annual workshops offered in Tel Aviv, or programs associated with performance arts schools. The only public Gaga classes available are Gaga/people. The limited availability of Gaga/dancer classes means that both dancers and non-dancers attend the public Gaga/people classes, which are open to all. Naharin, in many interviews, has stated that he is interested in sharing Gaga with a wide audience and encouraging everyone to dance, because he does not view dancing as exclusively geared towards performance. As such, Gaga's open classes geared for non-dancers are aimed at inclusivity and incorporating dancers and non-dancers moving together, much like what is encouraged in the practice of folk dance.

The difference between Gaga/dancer and Gaga/people classes lies largely in the use of balletic terminology. Gaga/dancer classes often include short exercises based on exploring the forms of *tendus*, *plies*, and *penchees*, whereas in Gaga/people classes these terms are never used and the participants are not directed to explore these classic balletic forms. Instead, Gaga/people classes focus solely on the sensations that are also explored in Gaga/dancer classes, such as floating, shaking, quaking, lengthening, sinking, and releasing. Much of the same language is used in both classes, as is the general arc of actions. Gaga almost always begins with bringing awareness to the body through floating, and then introducing several sensations through multi-layered tasks. There is also always at least one high point in the class with a great deal of physical effort to raise the heart rate – though the effort reached is often more extreme in Gaga/dancer classes because of the expanded range of motion available to highly-trained bodies – as well as a moment of calm. Because one of the rules of Gaga is to always work at one’s own level of ability and avoid pain, the vague prompts and sensations offered in these Gaga/people classes devoid of balletic exercises are appropriate for a wide range of bodies. Often, teachers will have a moment of working on a task at a “molecular level,” indicating that Gaga can also be practiced in a very internal way, which makes it available to bodies with limited mobility even though Gaga is also intended to be a vigorous physical workout.

The Israeli iterations of these Gaga/people classes do attract a wide range of non-dancers, suggesting that Gaga truly is available to everyone and can act as a source of unity. In my experience, this range is unique: the Gaga/people classes I have taken throughout the United States are usually dominated by dancers, which automatically

changes the tone of the class because of the intensity that dancers and their movement capabilities bring to the space. When I attended open Gaga/people classes at the Suzanne Dellal Center in the summers of 2013 and 2015 while attending Gaga/dancer intensives, however, I frequently found myself dancing with a mix of elderly women, stiff middle-aged men, and young flexible dancers. This wide range of participants is common in the Israeli Gaga classes, as communications director and Gaga teacher Deborah Friedes Galili affirms:

I don't know what everybody's day job is, but I know that there are people who are coming from day jobs where they are lawyers, researchers... my husband goes and he's a statistician, you know... people who have desk jobs who have other physical jobs who are doctors... And the amount of physical experience in other approaches that they have also runs the gamut. From people who did dance at some point to people who have never stepped foot in a studio, people who have done martial arts... the age range is quite large. (Deborah Friedes Galili in conversation with the author, August 2015)

Although Galili and Yossi Naharin, Ohad Naharin's brother and Executive Director of Gaga Movement Ltd., denied that there was a cultural component specific to Israel that prompted such broad participation when asked in a joint interview, others that I spoke with argued that there was a uniquely Israeli approach to dance that Gaga tapped in to. For instance Tamryn Pelsler, South African dancer and owner of Cape Town based organization SOMA Movement, explained to me that she recognized a convergence in the Gaga approach and how her Israeli husband danced. In response to a question about whether or not the widespread non-dancer interest in Gaga was a uniquely Israeli phenomenon, she explained:

I think it's a cultural thing. The way that they speak as well, it's almost like their movement is very related to how they talk, the metaphors that they use, and stuff like that. My husband's not a dancer, and he has never been exposed to Gaga or

Ohad Naharin or any of his dancers, ... but he speaks like them, he moves like them, like if he's just jamming at home by himself and I'm watching him, it's like he's got that [Gaga] flavor. (Tamryn Pelser in conversation with the author, August 2015)

While there is no clear answer as to whether or not there is a uniquely Israeli interest in or approach to movement, I argue that the openness of non-dancers to participate in a dance activity does have roots in Israeli cultural history.

Looking back to the early developments of a unified national identity in pre-State Israel, folk dancing was a dominant social activity that became widely practiced in folk festivals, independence celebrations after the establishment of the state, and public school programs (Roginsky 2011, Spiegel 2013, Kaschl 2003). In addition to compulsory military service, which imparts another distinct corporeal norm to the Israeli public, folk dancing has been a consistently practiced activity for many Israeli citizens as well as Jews living outside of Israel interested in forming a connection to the Jewish nation-state (Kaschl 2011). Though folk dance is primarily associated with secular Jews, there is also a long history of Jewish dancing at weddings and for other religious purposes. For instance, the Na Nach, a subgroup of the Breslover Hasidic Jews that follow the teaching of the kabbalist mystic Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, believe that ecstatic dancing to religious Hebrew techno music is a way to spread joy and celebrate their religion (Preston 2011). With the prevalence of these many dancing practices in common Israeli society, dancing is not viewed as something only practiced by trained professionals, as it is often deemed in places such as the United States. Thus, it is not surprising that Israeli citizens with no desire to train as professional dancers might choose a dance-based class for exercise or fun, because dance is commonly practiced by non-dancers through folk and

religious traditions and does not have the same stigma of unattainability it has in other countries. Casual observers of Israeli culture have also noted an exceptional interest in dancing, and particularly with Gaga. Rossi Lamont Walter, an American dancer living in Tel Aviv, noted:

...being in Israel is really the only time I've actually engaged in Gaga/people classes where there are really people with presumably no aspiration to be dancers ... [Gaga] could be something that could be really limited to the dance community, and I feel like in Israel it's not. (Rossi Lamont Walter in conversation with the author, January 2015).

As Walter's observations confirm, Gaga's marketing of dance to non-dancers has been incredibly successful in Israel, with classes now available six days a week in Tel Aviv as well as classes held weekly in Jerusalem, Haifa, and other smaller Israeli towns.

In developing a dance practice that encourages equality between dancers and non-dancers, Naharin has cultivated an ethos of egalitarianism and community in the Gaga/people classroom. Similar to early folk dance, however, Gaga's evocation of equality and availability is imperfect albeit arguably well intentioned. Gaga theoretically opens its doors to everyone, regardless of age, sex, previous training, and ability. Yet the locations of the classes implicitly limit participation in ways similar to Israeli folk dance: it is primarily practiced in the majority-Jewish areas of Israel and is not taught in neighboring countries because of the political status of the Gaga teachers as Israeli citizens or prolonged residents in Israel. Though Gaga can be practiced by Arab people and residents of countries surrounding Israel, this is only possible if participants travel to a more politically neutral space, such as workshops and classes in Europe. The national politics of Israel thus preclude easy access for many local populations of non-Jewish

descent to engage with Gaga even within Israel's borders, despite the practice's ethos of availability and open access.

Though the context of Gaga's evocation of equality is different, occurring over 50 years later than the early folk dance trends and their direct relationship to Zionist socialism, the values it upholds are similarly politically fraught. The assumption that every body can do Gaga, which is theoretically true from a corporeal perspective, ignores the socio-political network that frames who has access to the places in which Gaga classes are held and who may object to the practice due to its national affiliation. Though the often unspoken inequalities in Israeli folk dance history and the contemporary practice of Gaga differ in terms of who is less readily included, in both instances the theoretical ideal of equality and availability to everyone remains unattainable. The insistence on these ideals, however, evokes Zionist rhetorics of the positive social politics of Israeli life that promote inclusion and equality even as equality is impossible to obtain and often serves as a rhetorical device to overlook structural imbalances within societies.

2.3 Incorporating Eastern and Western Influences for Political Legitimacy

A key legitimizing claim for the Zionist project is the biblical Jewish claim to the land of historic Palestine, yet initial political support for the project came from the European countries then housing Jews well entrenched in European cultural values. The initiation of the Zionist project, then, is predicated on a blurring of Eastern and Western influences on Jewish societies in an attempt to claim cultural indigeneity and political rights to Middle Eastern land while simultaneously privileging the European culture and

values absorbed by the early Zionists (Berkowitz 1993, Spiegel 2013). My use of the terms Eastern and Western here reflect the work of scholars focusing on pre-State Israel, where East refers to the Middle East (the land of historic Palestine and its neighbors, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, and Syria) and West refers primarily to Western Europe but at times encompasses Eastern Europe and the United States. Consistently enacting this blend was critical to the creation and maintenance of external political alliances in Western Europe, and rhetorical claims to the land on which the State of Israel now stands.

Scholars of pre-State Israel have documented the ways in which Israeli folk dance embodied these cultural tensions, as well as how these tensions were displayed in the creation of early Israeli modern dance (Spiegel 2013, Ingber 2011, Berkowitz 1993), yet this blurring of “East and West” has been less documented in the contemporary era. The widespread blurring of cultures as a result of globalization and the increased circulation of values, practices, and ideas now serves as an important groundwork for contemporary Israeli multiculturalism that moves beyond the Middle Eastern and Western European cultural hybridity of pre-State Israel to include Asian, African, and other cultural influences. In this section, I unpack the blurring of multiple influences on the practice of Gaga to consider the cultural politics of multiculturalism in contemporary Israeli nationalism. I argue that analyzing these tensions in the embodied form of dance is particularly crucial to understanding the flow of both bodies and ideas in the contemporary moment, and that the popularity of Gaga indicates a tendency in Israeli cultural politics towards a stronger emphasis on European traditions. This move is

politically strategic as Israel attempts to uphold its contentious, ideologically loaded and highly political label as the only democracy in the Middle East with strong alliances to the Western European and American nations who initially supported the development of the Jewish nation-state.

To understand the political importance of blurring cultural influences in Israel, a brief study of a pre-State example is required. I will focus here on the appropriation of dabke for the creation of Israeli folk dance, though there are many other instances of these complicated cultural politics in Israeli folk dance, Israeli concert dance, and other cultural histories of visual art, literature, and even language. As was previously discussed, Israeli folk dance was a deliberately created form. Many of the dances were influenced by the settlers' experiences in their previous homes in Europe, such as the circular form of the hora that is also practiced using the same name in Romania and Bulgaria. Under the Zionist imperative to create a uniquely Israeli culture, however, early Israeli folk dance choreographers were encouraged to draw on their "Eastern" roots. Because much of the Middle Eastern Jewish population did not immigrate to Israel en masse until after the establishment of the State in 1948, the early settlers who initiated the practice of Israeli folk dance largely depended on their Palestinian neighbors for an insight into local cultural traditions.⁶⁹ The primary dance form practiced in rural Palestinian communities

⁶⁹ After the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the widespread immigration of Arab Jews from surrounding countries in the wake of the creation of the new nation-state, many more Middle Eastern dance traditions were brought to Israel. Arguably most famous is the establishment of the Inbal Dance Theater in 1949, which was based on Yemenite dance traditions and remains active today with studios and a theater in the Suzanne Dellal Center in Tel Aviv, which also houses the Batsheva Dance Company studios.

at this time was dabke, which Jewish settlers quickly adapted for their own practices and claimed as their own.

Dabke is an Arab folk dance form that consists of rhythmic jumping and stomping. The participants, traditionally only men, hold hands or shoulders and dance in a circle with occasional solos from a lead dancer who is supported by the rest of the group's steady rhythms. As dance anthropologist Nicholas Rowe notes in his cultural history of Palestinian dance, *Raising Dust*, dabke was a common tradition at Palestinian wedding celebrations and other social events throughout history (Rowe 2010). This masculine form was often performed for tourists in the late Ottoman period, but dabke was relegated to a rural, low-class practice in this early twentieth century era of Western influence from the Jewish settlers, although it was simultaneously adapted for Jewish use in folk dances on *kibbutzim*. The form did not experience a real resurgence in Palestinian culture until the late 1960s, when dabke was used as one way to establish a unified Palestinian national identity based on tradition (Rowe 2010, Kaschl 2003). Since that time, dabke has also come to be used as a concert dance practice in Palestine, serving as the basis for contemporary companies such as El-Funoun in the West Bank.

As dance scholar Elke Kaschl explains in her anthropological study of the development of dabke in Israel and Palestine, Gurit Kadman and her Israeli folk dance peers were heavily influenced by Arab folk dance and incorporated the masculine, jumping rhythmic style into much Israeli folk dance choreography, even labeling some of their dances dabke (Kaschl 2003). These dances did not adhere completely to Palestinian values and were occasionally practiced by women as well as men, but maintained the

majority of the Palestinian form and style. Yet, as Judith Brin Ingber's 2011 anthology on Jewish and Israeli dance shows, not all Israeli folk dance was a direct copy of dabke: much of it continued to be structured along the lines of European folk dances, only including brief allusions to Arab culture or adopting the costuming or music of dabke dancing (Ingber 2011). At a time of great confusion as to what a unified Jewish culture should be, Jewish folk dance in the land of historic Palestine blurred the lines between "East" and "West", drawing on the European practices learned by Jewish settlers while in Diaspora and those of their new neighbors, the indigenous Palestinian communities.

These tensions between the Middle East and Western Europe cultures were common in Zionist politics in the early nineteenth century. Michael Berkowitz clearly outlines these issues in his 1993 text *Zionist Culture*, where he explores the early Zionist Congresses in Europe to discuss the rifts between political and cultural Zionism. Cultural Zionism, as Berkowitz explains, was neither unified nor uncontested. It had to appeal to a wide variety of Jewish populations, ranging from the Orthodox to the secular, from disparate nations. Although the details were often debated at the Zionist Congresses, the overall unstated and unquestioned trend in Zionist cultural projects was a hybridity of East and West, old and new, and religious and secular. Berkowitz emphasizes the hybridity of the Middle East and Western Europe in his analysis of Jewish schools for settlers in Palestine and their emphasis on teaching in Hebrew (a revival of the Biblical language emphasizing Jewish history in the Middle East) while relying on modern European pedagogical structures in Western-style buildings. He also shows the hybridity of religious and secular influences on Jewish culture in an analysis of postcards from the

Congresses; the images shown on these mementos juxtaposed figures of angels and traditionally dressed praying Jews at the Western Wall with field workers and secular politicians such as Herzl himself. The blurring of East and West, old and new, and religious and secular was a strategic undertaking by the Zionist politicians, Berkowitz argues, which connected the political project to the land and history of Palestine while also aligning the political movement with European values, modernity, and progress. Jewish dabke dancing, by drawing on Arab folk forms but labeling it as Israeli and performing it on stages alongside European folk dances, echoed a Zionist trend of drawing on both Middle Eastern and Western European practices.

This Zionist claim to a biblically promised homeland relies on messianic conceptions of history. Israeli historian Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has explored this conception of history in depth in a series of articles (Raz-Krakotzkin 2002, 2007), as has historian Gabriel Piterberg (2008), arguing that a primary characteristic of Zionism is the desire for a ‘negation of exile’ based on the acceptance of a Biblical history where Jews were dispelled from their homeland 2,000 years ago. Accepting this logic justifies the Jewish use of Arab dances in the creation of their own folk culture, because of the assumption that the indigenous Palestinians were simply perpetuating local traditions that were once shared by the Jews of the land prior to their exile. At the same time, Raz-Krakotzkin argues that accepting the principle of ‘negation of exile’ is predicated on a Christian understanding of history and time (Raz-Krakotzkin 2002, 2007), which links Zionist rhetoric to European politics of the early nineteenth century that were structured on a Christian history in which Jews were deemed ‘other’. For Raz-Krakotzkin, Zionism

is essentially a Western Christian political ideology, influenced by European thought; thus, the blending of European and Middle Eastern culture fits well into his conception of Zionism as based on a Western appropriation of Jewish messianic beliefs rooted in the Middle East.

The practice of dabke in Israel can be seen not only as a controversial blending of European and Middle Eastern cultures, but also an extension of violent Zionist politics intent on privileging Jewish history and invisibilizing Palestinian ties to the land in order to justify their rights to a Jewish homeland in the land of Palestine. Israeli dabke takes the name and form of an Arab cultural practice, with only vague references to the Arab nature of the practice; dabke's inclusion under the umbrella of Israeli folk dance serves as an invisibilization of the Arab roots of the form by claiming it as uniquely Israeli. Jewish appropriation of Palestinian land and culture, such as dabke, has been a common critique lodged against Zionism. In Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's collection of essays, *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, he continually recounts different encounters with Israeli citizens after the establishment of the State in 1948 and their ignorance or lack of knowledge about the history of the land his family once owned in the village of Al-Birwa (Darwish 2010). Contemporary scholar Sherene Seikaly also addresses this trend of Israeli invisibilization of Palestinian culture and influence on the land in an article recounting her recent experiences living in Haifa. Walking around an Arab part of town in which Israel had invested money to modernize and Westernize, she writes: "The [Arab] origin has not disappeared, indeed Palestine is the always-already absent-present of Israel" (Seikaly 2013, 233), arguing that no matter how hard Zionist politics and

architecture aim to diminish the Palestinian presence on the land it will always be unable to fully do so because of the shared histories of the land and people. Still, the continued attempts to diminish Palestinian culture within Israel such as the decontextualization of Israeli folk dance's roots in Palestinian dabke can be argued as furthering Zionist tactics of establishing Jewish hegemony by privileging Israeli history and invisibilizing Palestinian influence on Israeli culture.

Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Israeli national identity has been well developed as a unique entity. While strong ties to Europe and its Western allies are maintained, Israel has put significant effort into developing specifically Israeli culture and promoting national artists and identity. In the dance community, for instance, concert dancers moved away from the pre-State dependence on German Ausdruckstanz and the post-World War II influence of Graham technique and American modern dancers to develop independent choreographers in the 1970s and 1980s. This turn was supported by the Ministry of Culture's new Dance Department under the direction of Nilly Cohen in the 1980s, which organized various programs to aid independent artists such as the Israeli Choreographers Association (the Amuta) and events at the Suzanne Dellal Centre in Tel Aviv and The Lab (Ha'Maabada) in Jerusalem (Galili 2012, 25). In spite of the appeal to a unique Israeli-ness, however, Israeli artists are often influenced by external trends and styles from traveling abroad. Now an internationally acknowledged nation-state, Israel is no longer crucially dependent on Zionist claims to the land of Palestine through appeals to Middle Eastern cultural traditions because the claim has now been accepted through the international community's acknowledgement of Israel as an independent state.

Though Palestinian culture is still normalized as “Israeli” in the form of dabke, falafel, and many other now-overlapping traditions, contemporary artists are no longer highly dependent on Middle Eastern influences to claim cultural legitimacy as an Israeli artist. Rather, Israeli artists today are able to assert their place in a global society as independent artists, able to draw on a wide range of traditions without fear of losing their status as Israeli.⁷⁰

The case of Gaga demonstrates the wide range of influences now making their way into Israeli culture. As discussed in Chapter 1, Gaga demonstrates clear links to Western concert dance history, such as its evocation of ballet terminology. I have also argued that there are links to Africanist aesthetics through Gaga’s emphasis on the get down stance and ephibism. I want to introduce now examples of distinctly Asian influence on Gaga’s practice, which is evident through the practice’s approach to movement as well as its growing popularity in Asian dance markets. For instance, one dancer I interviewed compared Gaga’s discussions of energy as similar to the Chinese practice of *qigong*, which draws on breath and meditation (Lauren Mark in conversation with the author, August 2015). The therapeutic nature of *qigong* can be felt in Gaga through its emphasis on healing and self-awareness, which Ohad Naharin has openly

⁷⁰ This logic of maintaining Israeli identification while engaging in multicultural practices is similar to the white modernist logic of appropriation discussed in Chapter 1 in that they are able to embody ideas of both universality and cultural specificity because of a privileged status in society, though of course it is complicated by the racial and ethnic politics within Israeli society that differ from the largely color-bound racial politics of the United States. It also functions slightly different in the contemporary Israeli context because the practice of these artists internationally often remains tied to Israeli national politics via boycotts against Israeli cultural exportation and advertising rooted in the exoticization of their national origins.

stated as a primary object of Gaga practice (Gaga Movement Ltd. 2016). The use of physical movement for meditation and self-improvement is common in other Asian and South-Asian cultures as well, such as the emergence of yoga asana practice from India. Rhetoric common in yoga, such as referring to a class as part of an on-going and progressive practice rather than a static sequence to be mastered, is also evoked in Gaga. Though Gaga blends many practices from a variety of cultural backgrounds, the presence of these arguably Asian approaches to movement is significant. It demonstrates the Israeli artists' current ability to draw on traditions beyond those that politically shaped the State of Israel from America, Western Europe, and the Middle East without disrupting their status as Israeli or the cultural claims to legitimacy required for the State of Israel to maintain independence and political support from abroad. This indicates that the strong geo-political position of Israel today has resulted in not just political and military power in the global community, but also an increased cultural power and privilege for Israeli artists to embrace outside influences and differences without sacrificing their uniquely Israeli identity.

While the use of both Middle Eastern distinctiveness and appeals to European universality has historically been of great political importance to the Israeli nationalist project, a greater emphasis has consistently been given to similarities with Western traditions. For instance, although Gaga is not exclusively predicated on Western dance practices, these remain the dominant influences that are most clearly referenced in classes for students to recognize. Rather than framing the practice as a Middle Eastern product, or emphasizing underlying approaches to movement as a healing practice that are

arguably rooted in Asian movement practices, Gaga is most readily adaptable to the training of Euro-American Western concert dancers because it overtly draws on the traditional training regimens of ballet and various modern dance techniques. I argue that this is integral to the widespread popularity and international circulation of the practice, because Gaga is marketed primarily in European and American markets, though it is also growing in Asian countries such as Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, which have strong economic and political ties to Western countries. This has developed out of the globalization of Israeli markets, which Israeli economist Uri Ram explains became readily apparent in the 1990s (Ram 2007, viii). Ram notes that the rise of capitalism in the Israeli economy created a largely bifurcated effect seen in the globalization of Tel Aviv and the renewed Zionist appeals to insular ethno-nationalist ideals in Jerusalem. Although globalization was not embraced by the entire country, Ram argues that as a result of the increased international exchange in secular, capitalist markets – represented in his text as occurring primarily in Tel Aviv – Israeli political rhetoric became more Americanized and a greater Western presence was felt in secular Israeli society (Ram 2007). Gaga, too, seemingly falls into this mode of secular capitalist projects that – perhaps unintentionally – form and strengthen ties with Israeli’s economic, political, and social allies in the West through its dependence on shared Western dance traditions and movement histories.

The cultural products of Israel have long been utilized by the government for political gain, from the Zionist projects of forming a cohesive national identity through language and practices such as Israeli folk dance to the current Brand Israel campaign.

The exportation of these cultural products is used not only to represent Israel abroad, but also to garner sympathy and support for the nation-state's political projects. Though Gaga is not explicitly included in the formal Brand Israel campaign that is financially supported by the Israeli government and widely publicized as an Israeli product, the widespread exportation of this practice and its ability to draw international dancers to Tel Aviv to study implicates Gaga in the broader politics of Israeli cultural production. Specifically, the use of multicultural influences on Gaga and simultaneous emphasis on exporting Gaga to Western countries⁷¹ reinforces the cultural and political alliances Israel holds with these countries. Like most Israeli cultural products, Gaga is shared more widely with the United States and Europe rather than its geographical neighbors. Artists are able to travel easily between these countries, which aids in the spread of Gaga just as much as do its aesthetic and conceptual similarities to other Western concert dance practices.

2.4 The New Jew: Creating Strong Jewish Bodies

Central to the Zionist project during its early stages in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the concept of a strong “new Jew” to counteract the anti-Semitic representations of Jewish bodies and people circulating widely in Europe during that time. The focus of this new vision was on physicality, though there was also an interest in other identifying markers of this body such as language and cultural interests.

⁷¹ Though Gaga is taught in Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea, the majority of ongoing classes and recurring workshops are taught in the United States and countries throughout Western Europe.

This new Jew was the model for the Jewish pioneers that would emigrate to the land of Palestine and create a new society. Portraying a Jewish body as strong during this time period was a bold claim, predicated on an internalization of the Christian understanding of the body and masculinity as ideal (Boyarin 1997, Gilman 1991). Meanwhile, the dominant stereotype presented in the Christian-dominated news, caricatures, and plays portrayed Jews – men in particular – as weak, sickly, and grotesque (Rossen 2014, Gilman 1991, Boyarin 1997). Doctor and politician Max Nordau, a high-ranking official of the Zionist movement during this era, championed the idea of the new Jew. Also referred to as the Muscle-Jew, this conception of the body directly contradicted anti-Semitic stereotypes and embraced Christian understandings of the body and masculinity. Nordau first introduced this idea at an 1898 speech at the Second Zionist Congress in Basel, calling for a warrior-like and healthy Jewish body. As scholar of Hebrew physicality Nina Spiegel writes:

Nordau believed that in order for Jews to fully recreate themselves, they needed to become physically strong. This notion was influenced by both European national movements that aimed to create a “new man” based on ancient Greek ideals and the German Physical Culture Movement that began in the early nineteenth century. (Spiegel 2013, 9)

Following the trends of the European culture that denied Jewish integration, Nordau created a vision of a strong pioneer that could carry out the Zionist project. Physical health was tied to spiritual, mental, and most importantly national health. Thus, urging Jews to desire a strong body was an important strategic move towards establishing a Jewish nation state. In his view, the new homeland would need strong bodies able to do physical labor and defend themselves; once out of the ghettos of Europe, Jewish society

would diversify and the image of the working Jewish man would become the primary representation of Jewishness (Berkowitz 1993, 99-118). The image of the 'New Jew' functioned as a rejection of anti-Semitic representations of feminized Jewish men, and praised as the ideal citizen for the future Jewish homeland.

Historians such as Sander Gilman and Daniel Boyarin have carefully outlined the importance of masculinity to Zionist conceptions of the body, and how this developed as a reaction to the assumed effeminacy of Jewish men in Europe at the time of Zionism's rise to popularity in the early 1900s. Each author notes in particular the relationship between circumcision and the Jewish male 'lack' of foreskin as feminizing, often citing Freud's paranoia about this lack and how this can be argued to have driven his work on psychoanalysis predicated on penis envy and fears of castration. Although Boyarin in his 1997 text *Unheroic Conduct* argues for the value in the 'femminized' Jewish male bodies as continuing in a traditional Talmudic tradition that challenges heteronormative Western gender models, all of these scholars show that nevertheless the masculine 'New Jew' became the ideal Zionist body. Gilman in particular, in his exploration of different elements of the Jewish body that were vilified in anti-Semitic European representations of Jews at the turn of the nineteenth century, shows how club feet, high rates of syphilis, and poor posture all contributed to the feminized Jewish figure incapable of battle with their Aryan warrior counterparts. Strikingly, all of these historical considerations of the Jewish body are assumed to be male, reinforcing Nordau's investment in masculinity as a core concept for the new Jew figure to combat stereotypes of weak, feminized Jewish bodies.

While the pre-State bodies of the new Jew were primarily developed through working on kibbutzim, gymnastics, folk dance, and other forms of civilian physical culture movements, the contemporary new Jew body is more commonly associated with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). In an article on Zionist bodies in Israel and Palestine, Joseph Massad argues that the figure of the new Jew became normalized by Zionist military achievements in Israel that solidified Jewish control over the land (Massad 2000, 331). Images of strong IDF soldiers played a crucial role in garnering support during the war fought against the Palestinians prior to declaring independence (Azoulay 2011, 270-273). In contemporary Israel, the figure of the masculine IDF soldier continues to play a role in the formation of national identity. In an article investigating the importance of masculinity in Israeli culture, Yehuda Sharim unpacks the homecoming of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit⁷² to indicate the strong role the military plays in both the physical and ideological constructions of contemporary strong Jewish bodies (2016). He offers quotes from *The Israel Army Physical Fitness Book* (1967) to illustrate the importance of physical strength for the military: "...continuous physical fitness is an absolute necessity; on dramatically short notice a boy or girl of 18 or a man of 50 might be called to battle. Physical training, therefore, becomes an important part of the life of every potential soldier, male or female, young or old" (quoted in Sharim 2016, 137). Physical strength is tied to military victory, and thus a powerful and safe nation-state. Yet these bodies are not inherently muscular, as the early figures of the new Jew were. Rather, these are alert

⁷² Shalit, an IDF soldier, was captured during his military service and held by Palestinian militants from Gaza from 2006-2011. He was released in trade for the release of twenty Palestinian women from Israeli prisons, and was often referred to in press as Israel's lost son.

and fit bodies that can easily maneuver between civilian life and the call of military duty. The prevalence of military style training in civilian life can be seen in the rise of popularity of Krav Maga, a self-defense technique developed by the IDF in the 1950s and brought to popular culture in the 1980s and 1990s (Sharim 2016).

While the strength required of contemporary Israeli corporeality upholds heteronormative Western gender roles for men, a continuation of the European-influenced construction of the early new Jew figure, it is worth noting that women have a slightly different relationship to this concept. Women serve in the military alongside their male counterparts, and are similarly expected to be physically prepared for active duty. Yet media representations of these young Israeli women – particularly when serving in the military – are often highly sexualized. Dance scholar Hannah Schwadron analyzes the figure of this sexy Israeli female as it is represented in magazines, racy calendars, and even porn as an exotic and patriotic alternative to the unsexy, “funny girl” Jews of America (Schwadron 2013, 255). She goes on to clarify that there are differences in the representations of these Israeli women in Hebrew language and English language media, suggesting that this overly sexualized representation of Israeli femininity is geared towards American consumption while more masculine and strong representations of the women are presented in Israeli media and official IDF materials. The number of scandals of young Israeli soldiers – often, but not always, female – posing in their underwear or naked with their guns on social media, however, suggests that the overt sexuality of these physically fit youth is also present within Israeli society.

The desirability of these Israeli bodies – the sexy female sabras and the heroic masculine soldier – is key to understanding the importance of this image in upholding support for Israeli military action. The violence that the contemporary new Jew figure can do is not just the enactment of military action, but also to garner cultural and social support for the IDF. The normalization of aggression and violence through the fetishization of sexy photos of IDF soldiers has impacted not only Israeli society and their valorization of virile masculinity, but also neighboring Palestinians. In Edward Said's book *After the Last Sky*, he offers reflections on Palestinian life as impacted by the ongoing tensions with Israel, arguing that physical aggression is also seen in Palestinian culture (Said 1999). He writes: "The cult of physical strength, of fascination with body-building, karate, and boxing, which has been a striking face of life among Palestinian youth for quite a while, is obviously the response of the weak to a strong, visibly dominant other" (Said 1999, 54). His evocation of aggression in recent trends of Palestinian culture as a reaction to disempowerment echoes the very rise of the new Jew image in reaction to anti-Semitic violence in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The valorization of aggression in Israeli society has serious negative political and cultural results for Israeli and Palestinian bodies alike in the form of ongoing normalization of violence in the region.

The desirability of a strong body can also be seen outside of the military context in the practice of Gaga. This improvisatory movement language based on multi-layered tasks is an unlikely suspect for upholding Zionist values: marketing presents Gaga as an exploration of freedom, individuality, and pleasure. At first glance, it appears to be the

antithesis of militaristic. Rather than unison and order, personal exploration is encouraged. Participants wear baggy clothes, are encouraged to play with their faces and “get weird,” and embody ambiguous tasks such as boiling like spaghetti or tasting something good. At the same time, it can be an intense workout where participants are pushed to their limits and develop new skills. Though these extremes may seem contradictory, they coexist in Gaga. This practice is intended to help participants challenge their movement habits and develop a range of movements from small delicate gestures to aggressive punches and explosions within the body. As Ohad Naharin, the creator of Gaga, explained in an interview with The Jewish Theatre in Stockholm:

Gaga is many, many things. It’s a lot about multi-layered tasks. But maybe as a title, I can say that it’s about strengthening our engine. It’s a workout. ... It’s kind of a female force, not so much macho force, though it makes you stronger.
(Naharin 2012)

Naharin’s full explanation of Gaga includes a wide range of descriptions, such as its emphasis on feeling pleasure, but he emphasizes that it is a workout that strengthens the body and the senses. While the body should be prepared to do soft, gentle movements, it also has to be strong enough to attack movement when asked. To do so requires a very alert body: not necessarily one dependent on muscle, but rather an intelligently sculpted physical self with a high sense of awareness. This ability to shift between different bodily states resonates with the necessity of corporeal readiness that results from living in Israel’s constant state of militarization, such as Sharim’s characterization of the need for many Israeli citizens to be prepared to quickly shift from civilian life to military service in response to attacks.

Attention to strength and weakness is common in Gaga classes. One common phrase that highlights this is the concept of “engines” which refer to places in the body that can initiate movement. Dancers are often familiar with their core, located near the stomach, as a stabilizing base for movement. Gaga asks dancers to employ multiple cores, at times initiating from a thigh or a shoulder blade. The ability to engage movement from different sources allows for quicker reaction times and compensation for tired, over-worked engines. I first encountered this prompt when I was asked to lay on the floor on my side at a Gaga workshop in Los Angeles in 2012. From there, the class was directed to come to sitting several times: once by engaging the core – a familiar task – and then by engaging a shoulder, the ribs, a hip, and an arm. Eventually the teacher asked us to engage all engines sequentially. Not only did this exercise awaken and strengthen lesser-used muscles, such as those around the ribs, but it also introduced a new strategy for initiating movement when certain muscles are exhausted or overworked. Though each repetition looked similar, I developed a new efficiency to my movement choices through this exercise. The result was not a drastically different physicality but rather a new approach to movement.

Gaga, although focused on strategies and tactics for movement, as the above example illustrates, is also intensely physical. I recall a particularly challenging Gaga class I took at a workshop in Seattle with a well known former member of the Naharin-led Batsheva Dance Company. We were in our second Gaga class of the day, and everyone was exhausted. We were exploring explosions of energy, and how to summon this burst of motion from stillness with no transition. No one looked particularly

explosive, except for the instructor. Although I was attempting to surprise myself with quick movement bursts, it felt sluggish. How could I get my body to react more quickly? The instructor eventually stopped us and sat us down. Half-jokingly, she explained that Americans are too safe. We are rarely startled or forced to react quickly. In Israel, by contrast, people are used to being on high alert. She recalled having to run to a shelter after hearing bomb sirens, and the tense-ness that builds up in the body through uncertainty and fear. Her story added a civilian sense of Israeli corporeal readiness to shift quickly that was evoked in Sharim's example of military service. She used this example of Israeli reactions to sirens to explain that this alert quality was missing from our movement in class: we had to be more in touch with our animalistic instincts of fight or flight. We were then asked to stand up and try punching as a way to get in touch with our explosive energy. As I went from stillness to a quick jab with my right fist I felt more alert than before, but I recognized the remaining hesitation of a small wind-up in my body that the instructor's highly sensitized and alert body did not need. I tried again.

Quick bursts of energy are often practiced in Gaga to train the body to be alert but not visibly tense or unable to instead switch to intensely delicate tasks. This readiness and availability to move is exciting to see on stage, and makes for a dynamic performance. It is a quality that is often praised in Naharin's choreography, which is performed exclusively by people that train extensively in Gaga. This raw energy, alertness, and intensity is often labeled as Israeli by critics and dancers alike. While interviewing dancers about Gaga, I noticed that they would often conflate Gaga and Israeli dance, attributing Gaga's qualities of dynamics and range to all Israeli dancers and vice versa.

The practice is so pervasive in the Israeli contemporary dance scene that they are difficult to separate. This label of “Israeli” when applied to dance thus often refers primarily to the aesthetic trends popularized by Gaga in the contemporary Israeli dance scene, where Naharin is a looming figure with a wider international presence than any of his peers. Gaga is taught in some Israeli performing arts high schools, and many Israeli dancers aspire to join the Batsheva Dance Company or its junior company, the Batsheva Ensemble. Many independent choreographers popular in Israel today, such as Sharon Eyal, Noa Zuk, and Hillel Kogan, are former members of the company and present works that are clearly influenced by their extensive Gaga training. Though there are some famous Israeli choreographers who are not directly tied to Naharin or Gaga – such as Yasmeeen Godder, Rami Be’er, and Barak Marshall – the overwhelming majority of the Tel Aviv dance scene is dominated by Gaga-influenced works.

I argue that Gaga is Israeli not just because of its overwhelming dominance on the aesthetic trends of dancers and choreographers working in Israel. It also upholds the Zionist ideal of a strong Jewish body, imported from contemporaneous European bodily ideals intended to promote European values in the new settler-colony of Israel. It is designed to be a workout that builds strength and flexibility, even as it develops additional skills such as efficiency and greater bodily awareness. The bodies produced by frequent practice of Gaga are not bulky or overly muscular, like the image of the early twentieth century new Jew, but rather toned and flexible like the heroic and sexy images of contemporary Jewish physical ideals demonstrated in representations of young IDF members. There is not one ideal Gaga body as there is in more form-based techniques

such as ballet, but serious practitioners all develop a proficient (if not extreme) level of flexibility, lean strength, and readiness for movement. Prime examples of Gaga-trained bodies can be seen in the Batsheva Dance Company, which trains in Gaga almost daily. Just as the military bodies must be physically fit to handle their job's demands, these dancers too must uphold a certain level of strength and flexibility to perform the company's choreography. Gaga participants who do not perform or are not professional dancers build on their strength and flexibility to excel in their daily lives, and come closer to a physical ideal of a strong and healthy body that is prevalent in Israeli society.

Although Gaga does cultivate a body similar to that of the military ideal of strength and readiness, it does so by very different means. This practice is a dramatic shift from the strict, rigorous training done for active military service. Gaga, as an improvisatory form, is dependent on individual choices, habits, and abilities. Though influenced by external suggestions, and thus not entirely free form, this practice is not as routine or ideologically strict as the military. Whereas the strong military bodies are developed through repetition and following orders, Gaga bodies are developed by self-directed research based on external movement prompts. The social and mental training that these divergent approaches offer is radically different. Gaga, even as it upholds similar physical ideals to Zionist values, challenges its dominant rhetoric by advocating for individualism. In this way, Gaga can be seen as at odds with the conformity required in military culture, or perhaps offering a new translation of militaristic physicality into a more individual form. Rather than serving as a direct political tool for the cultural wing of the Zionist project, Gaga challenges the very ideologies of cohesive nationalism by

encouraging difference and personal independence. It also resists a strict gendering of bodies in favor of androgynous movement exploring physical ranges of motion, thus resisting the important gendering of heroic men and sexy women prevalent in contemporary representations of idealized Israeli bodies.

It is also important to recognize that the skills trained in Gaga are not exclusive to Israeli dancers. Gaga has become popular internationally, indicating that this practice develops skills that many dancers – and non-dancers – desire. Though this is an ideal desired by most dancers, Israeli or not, the political overtones are striking when considering the national context of Gaga’s training centers and the need to export teachers from this country to train others. Even as I acknowledge that Gaga’s emphasis on the individual and improvisation may be at odds with the structure required of military and kibbutz lifestyles that are strong symbols of Israeli national identity, Gaga is still a tool for developing strong, quick-moving bodies – the types of bodies idealized in Israeli culture and by foreign media portraying Israel. By promoting this contemporary version of a strong new Jew body, Gaga normalizes the necessity for a quickly reactive body and, perhaps, the military conflict that keeps the country on edge and trains bodies to require quick reactions. Additionally, it makes this body desirable, eliding political critique of the situation that has contributed to the production of this corporeal ideal by a focus on the physicality. Thus, the cultivation of these dancing bodies in Gaga can be seen as a cultural envoy of Israeli military policy even as the practice itself challenges the Zionist values the IDF fights for.

2.5 Conclusion: Cultural Critiques of/Challenges to Zionism

While analyzing Gaga as one of many cultural products that normalizes violence and Zionist ideology in Israeli society, I acknowledge that this is an ideological reading that draws on a critique of State politics. There are many layers to Gaga, yet while the practice's internal ideology may resist Zionist values, it may still be structurally tied to Israeli nationalist politics. I offer this reading not to definitively label Gaga as either for or against the State and its associated politics, but rather to complicate its role in cultural politics. As hundreds of dancers fly to Israel each year to practice Gaga with Ohad Naharin in Tel Aviv, and many more practice in their home studios as Naharin certifies teachers who choose to live abroad and make Gaga available outside of Israel, it is important that they question the complicated cultural politics of partaking in Gaga and their relationship to the actions of the State of Israel that houses the central Gaga organization.

Chapter 3

Work Instructions and Gaga Intensives: Gaga and Neoliberal Economies

Before boarding a plane to Tel Aviv in the summer of 2013, I received several emails from the staff of the Gaga summer intensive to which I was traveling. The original acceptance email contained a formal invitation letter that could be shown to security to ensure entrance to the country, a detailed daily schedule for the intensive, information about the intensive's policies, and answers to frequently asked questions about where to find healthcare, organic foods, and other similarly pressing information needed by the typical traveling dancer. After a series of emails offering dancers' apartments available to sublet throughout the intensive and reminders to submit my health insurance verification form, I received a welcome note days prior to flying out. In addition to a letter with detailed information about the first day of the intensive and what to expect, a document entitled "Gaga Work Instructions" was attached. While the other paperwork had seemed ordinary for any international dance intensive, I had not anticipated formal work instructions. Though I was aware that these instructions were posted on the official Gaga website, I had always viewed them as guidelines for the non-dancers unfamiliar with movement classes. I was surprised, then, that intensive participants – presumably professional dance students or performers⁷³ with a strong understanding of contemporary

⁷³ This assumption is based on the call for applications to the intensives, which ask for training and performance experience. It also falls in line with the fact that the intensives offer Gaga/dancer classes, which are advertised on the Gaga website as "open to professional dancers or advanced dance students ages 16+" (Gaga Movement Ltd. 2016).

dance class conventions such as arriving on time, being prepared to dance barefoot, and paying attention to one's body – were sent these formal instructions.

At first glance, the work instructions did appear to be aimed at novices because of their appeal to common dance conventions. “Never stop”, “Listening to the body”, and “Awareness” were all phrases I had heard many times in the course of my ballet and modern dance training. Instructions about being silent during class, arriving on time, and dancing barefoot seemed unnecessary reminders to any respectful and professional dance student. I understood the need to set ground rules before embarking on a two-week movement experience with a large group of new students, but had anticipated hearing these rules verbally and informally as I had during my other Gaga classes. As I reviewed the detailed language after the initial instructions, however,

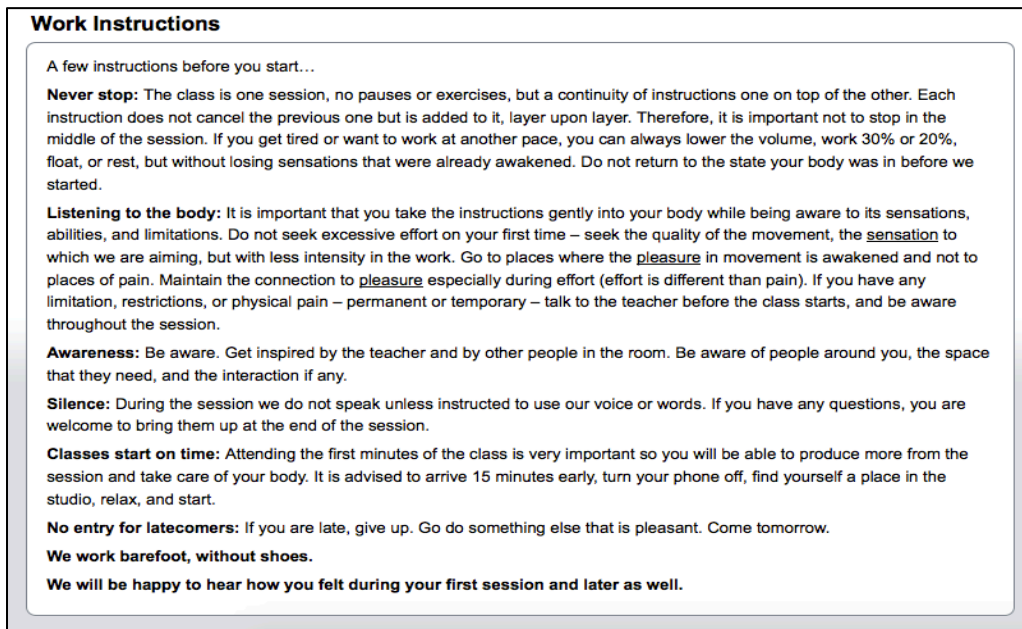


Image 1 - Screenshot of the Gaga Work Instructions from the official Gaga website (Gaga Movement Ltd. 2016).

I began to recognize common Gaga phrases heard in classes, such as working at a particular volume, the awareness of sensations, connecting to pleasure, and avoiding pain. The most unique statement came after one of the most common: “No entry for latecomers: ... Go do something else that is pleasant.” Even in the warning that you will not be granted entry if you are late is a directive to experience pleasure, indicating that these instructions are more about cultivating an approach to Gaga (and, perhaps, life) rather than enforcing strict rules or applying punishments to those that fail to comply with Gaga’s rules. The instructions thus fall in line with the atmosphere of most Gaga classes, where finding pleasure is often a primary directive and students are frequently encouraged to “get weird” and “have fun” with corporeal movement. In this document there are also suggestions to guide participants towards the intended goal of full immersion in this enjoyment of dancing, such as turning phones off and engaging in dialogue with instructors after class has ended to better understand potentially confusing moments in a class. With the frequent emphasis on pleasure and inspiration, the apparent focus of this list of instructions seems to be about offering tools to make the most of one’s Gaga experience rather than imposing restrictions.

Yet this list is still full of restrictions. Participants are instructed to be silent. Movement for movement’s sake, without a clear attention to internal sensations, is discouraged. One should never stop moving, even when exhausted. Though the instructions are presumably tools to lead participants to the “experience of freedom” advertised on Gaga’s homepage, these written instructions consciously restrict the freedom that can be found in Gaga. The reminder to never stop moving in the middle of

an aggressively vigorous jumping exercise certainly does not feel like an invitation to enact your full range of free will, for instance. Dance scholar Danielle Goldman argues that movement improvisation always exists in a “tight space” of constraints, and that understanding “one could escape confinement only to enter into or become aware of another set of strictures is vital to understanding the political power of improvisation” (Goldman 2010, 4). According to this logic, because improvisation exists within a set of constraints and rules, it cannot be inherently free or natural, even though Gaga’s advertising appeals to these ideas.

The label “Work Instructions” also evokes the concept of the participant as laborer, which offers another layer to the existing tension between restrictions and suggestions in this document. I am particularly interested in the relevance of the term “work”⁷⁴ and the way this word shapes the interpretation of the document as a whole. Though a close reading of individual instructions can be interpreted as suggestions or helpful hints, as a whole the document’s title of “Work Instructions” indicates a clear directive for Gaga participants to take these statements seriously. Both the restrictive statements and the encouraging suggestions fall in line with the idea of developing an efficient participant/worker. Though many Gaga participants take classes primarily for personal development and pleasure, at the Gaga intensives – such as the one I attended in Tel Aviv in 2013 – classes are dominated by dancers looking for ways to improve their dancing, potentially get noticed by the program teachers and directors, and eventually

⁷⁴ This phrasing is consistent with the Hebrew version of the same document, using the word for “work” (*ovedah*/עבודה).

find employment as a performer. For these students, the “Work Instructions” are very literally directed to the conventional understanding of the term “work” and its function as the act done while employed and earning an income.

This document of rules for Gaga participants, framed by the literal word “work” and its innate appeal to efficiency, must then be thought about in relation to employment and economics. The case study of Gaga is uniquely suited to an analysis of neoliberal values, the predominant economic theory during the development and current practice of Gaga. The two emerged in close proximity to one another and contain several overlapping values, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter. Ohad Naharin began developing Gaga in a structured way in the 1980s after an injury in New York, in a social context entrenched in neoliberal projects (Harvey 2007, 48). The two projects – neoliberalism and Gaga – both became increasingly popular over the past few decades. Though Gaga and neoliberalism do not directly mirror one another and Gaga does contain divergent values, there are overwhelming similarities in the two practices’ guiding principles. Both are interested in developing efficient workers, and privilege the individual as the primary agent for one’s own destiny. Freedom and flexibility are also key concepts present in both Gaga and neoliberalism, among other similarities. Whereas neoliberal economics are largely disinterested in affective economies, however, Gaga thrives on emphasizing the use of pleasure and internal sensations. Even as Gaga resists some neoliberal values, such as the move away from physical labor to the financialization of economies, this practice succeeds in producing dancers that are prepared to excel in contemporary neoliberal dance economies. In the current moment, the concert dance

market privileges dancers that are independently motivated, excel at improvisation, and able to work in flexible pick-up jobs: all traits of the precariat⁷⁵ class that emerged as a result of neoliberal economic trends.

In this chapter, I argue that the practice of Gaga is growing increasingly popular with dancers internationally not just due to its feel-good mentality and emphasis on fun and pleasure, but also because it is well aligned with contemporary socio-economic values that have emerged alongside the expansion of neoliberalism. In upholding values privileged in the current economic system dominating industrialized nations, such as flexibility and independence, while simultaneously training dancers to excel in the increasingly demanding concert dance market both aesthetically and professionally, Gaga has become a training method not just for dancers but also for successful neoliberal laborers. This is evident at the micro level, in the way the work instructions embody neoliberal values such as freedom and efficiency. Beyond the singular Gaga class, I also present a study of the Gaga intensives intended for professional students and performers, showing how the neoliberal values in the work instructions shape a practice that has

⁷⁵ A popular definition of the precariat “is a distinctive socio-economic group” (Standing 2011, 7) which includes workers in precarious situations such as temporary employment. This growing class is unique to the emergence of globalization and neoliberal economic systems, which resulted in increasingly flexible open labor markets with decreased job security particularly for lower-class wage workers. At the same time, economist Guy Standing points out, “It is not right to equate the precariat with the working poor or with just insecure employment, although these dimensions are correlated with it. The precariousness also implies a lack of a secure work-based identity, whereas workers in some low-income jobs may be building a career” (ibid 10). Rather, Standing defines the precariat as people who lack seven forms of labor-related security, those being: “Labour market security,” “Employment security,” “Job security,” “Work security,” “Skill reproduction security,” “Income security,” and “Representation security” (ibid 10).

become a driving force in a global dance economy. Though Gaga is not the only contemporary dance practice arguably aligned with neoliberal values, and there are aspects of Gaga that challenge neoliberal theory, its international popularity makes it an important case study for understanding dance's place in neoliberal economies.

Throughout the chapter, I connect several values to the practice of Gaga that both align with and diverge from neoliberal theories and practices. In line with neoliberal values, I look at Gaga's appeals to progress, efficiency, competition, and precarious working conditions, and to challenge these neoliberal trends I also consider the importance of affect, pleasure, stillness and contemplation within the Gaga class. I do not view any of these examples as entirely discrete values: they often overlap, and multiple values can often be applied to each dance example I introduce. Yet, I offer these analyses of singular values within the practice of Gaga, prompted by the work instructions, to illustrate the ways in which Gaga can both overlap with and challenge neoliberal values.

Attuned to the contradictions of Gaga as a practice, throughout the chapter I consider how the embodiment of Gaga not only embodies but also challenges neoliberal theories, trains laborers and offers strategies for the precariat beyond the specific example of Gaga dancers. I illustrate how Gaga utilizes several neoliberal values and thus falls in line with the current economic climate, but at the same time emphasizes affect and pleasure in an attempt to regain some of the humanity and personal agency that is often lost in neoliberal markets. This simultaneous engagement with and challenge to neoliberal models indicates that dance can be an active agent in neoliberal economies rather than just a passive recipient of external regulations and ideas, and allows us as

dance scholars to challenge economic theory through the study of embodied realities. Even as the structures of Gaga classes largely align with neoliberal values of efficiency and flexibility, Gaga's insistence on affect suggests important ways in which the practice of dance can intervene in and even resist contemporary economic theories. I suggest that Gaga's emphasis on affect challenges the dehumanization of workers embedded in neoliberalism's emphasis on pure economic profit. Even as it produces effective laborer/dancers within the neoliberal system, Gaga suggests the value of attention to pleasure. I illustrate these neoliberal values through two distinct examples: first, an analysis of the work instructions and how they are seen in the practice of Gaga classes, and second, a study of Gaga intensives and how these events foster competition because of its situation within a global neoliberal economy.

3.1 Theorizing Neoliberalism and Dance

In order to understand the nuances of Gaga's relationship to neoliberal theory, a brief history of this economic system and its relationship to dance history and theory is necessary. Neoliberalism, as both an economic practice and a term, emerged in the second half of the twentieth century as several major economies shifted to free market models led by governments that believed personal and financial freedom comes from a diminishment of government oversight in the market.⁷⁶ Emerging partly out of a reaction

⁷⁶ As David Harvey notes in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2007), politicians such as Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Deng Xiaoping were the leaders of this policy shift that quickly became integrated into smaller economies and nations that were pressured into this neoliberal model by these leaders' powerful nation-states to the point

against Cold War politics and the threat of communism, neoliberal economic policies move away from government intervention to emphasize deregulation, privatization, and individual entrepreneurial freedom. All of these shifts were geared towards personal and political freedom for individuals, which was theoretically attainable if individuals had the ability to enter the market and have free will as both workers and consumers.

Anthropologist Aihwa Ong explains the significance of individualism for this economic model:

In short, the main elements of neoliberalism as a political philosophy are ... a return to a 'primitive form of individualism: an individualism which is 'competitive,' 'possessive,' and construed often in terms of the doctrine of 'consumer sovereignty'. (Ong 2006, 11)

This neoliberal conception of freedom is reliant upon the idea of economic independence, and the ability to make choices and attain power that comes with being financially stable and self-managed. This produces a form of individualism that is also inherently competitive.

Freedom has also been a driving force for other popular economic models, such as Marxism's interest in developing more economic freedom for workers, but the contemporary moment's insistence on freedom obtained through radical individualism and financial success in economic markets is unique. Gaga, too, privileges the idea of individuals making choices by training dancers to develop a wide range of stylistic and dynamic options to choose from. Although neoliberal theory privileges the independent worker and radical free market system as the ideal model for attaining individual

that today "neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse" (Harvey 2007, 3.)

freedom, to uphold the necessary environment for a free market to thrive, governments often have to intervene in some capacity. This need for limited oversight is one illustration of the difficulty in applying this theory to practice. As neoliberalism continues to spread globally and technology advances to enable hyper-mobile and flexible economic practices, both scholars and private individuals are forced to grapple with questions that emerge as the theory is enacted. This has produced tensions between global and local, widespread circulation, and the socio-cultural implications of relying on individualism and economic prosperity as a base model for freedom.⁷⁷

Moving beyond economic definitions of neoliberalism, scholars have recently critiqued the overwhelming dominance of neoliberal values in contemporary life as a threat to democracy (Brown 2015) and a movement that has oppressed and disenfranchised wage workers (Standing 2011), instigating large social movements protesting the results of neoliberalism (Hardt and Negri 2012). Scholars such as Wendy Brown disrupt the focus on economic and state-enforced neoliberal policies by joining “Michel Foucault and others in conceiving neoliberalism as an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life” (Brown 2015, 30). In appealing to Foucault’s understanding of neoliberalism as a perpetuating rationality rather than the neo-Marxist reading of neoliberalism as a

⁷⁷ Freedom, here, refers to both individual freedom (which in neoliberal theory is to be obtained by having economic freedom, which allows one to exist outside of government-initiated social programs) and the freedom of economic markets (which in theory would be completely deregulated and exist as open-market systems devoid of government oversight). For both the individual and market level, the theory is that lack of oversight allows for greatest independence in making choices about how to live life.

contemporary iteration of capitalism as has been forwarded by scholars such as David Harvey, Brown updates Foucault's initial observations to make them applicable to the contemporary moment. I draw on both understandings of neoliberalism – as an economic and governing strategy *and* an ideological rationale – throughout this chapter, acknowledging that the ideas of neoliberalism are pervasive in social, economic, and political spheres alike. This understanding of neoliberalism's influence on contemporary issues has resulted in a widespread interest from humanities scholars.

In response to this interest, performance scholars have begun to emphasize dance as an important site for investigation into neoliberalism's lived realities. Analysis of the corporeality of dancing bodies as laboring subjects in this economic framework enables a complication of theoretical models, and is particularly effective at illuminating ways in which the neoliberal system is ineffective or impossible to adhere to. A prime example of this is the research by dance scholar Anusha Kedhar, who has theorized the “flexible bodies” of contemporary South Asian dancers as both a physical response to, and a tactic for negotiating issues such as “the contradictions between race and citizenship in late capitalism” (Kedhar 2014, 23). Kedhar investigates both the hyperflexibility and unflexibility of physical bodies and political policies demonstrated by South Asian dancers working in the United Kingdom and what they must do to thrive and survive in the increasingly short-term, contract-to-contract market of contemporary art economies where visas and work permits for international travel are increasingly difficult to obtain. Her examples of not being flexible enough, demonstrated by sore and broken bodies struggling to keep up with demands, are particularly poignant in illustrating how the

corporeality of dance points to the contradictions and material effects on bodies of enacting certain neoliberal ideals. Dance, then, is much more than an analogy for understanding neoliberalism and its impacts on individuals. The corporeality of this practice not only complicates understandings and embodiments of freedom, independence, and circulation that are integral to neoliberalism, but also exposes the real-world implications and tolls neoliberal theory takes on actual bodies.

Dance and performance have also been theorized as a way of understanding the role of the precariat in neoliberalism both as an economic inevitability as a result of neoliberalism and a social reality that often perpetuates contemporary economic ideals (Nyong'o 2013, Schneider and Ridout 2012, Martin 2012). Key to the creation and perpetuation of this class of precarious workers is economic risk and instability, as well as the transition from production to financialization as a primary source of economic profit. Randy Martin offers an analysis of how movement – postmodern dance, hip hop, and skateboarding in particular – can be read as corporeal interpretations of the risky economic climate from which they emerged as popular activities during the 1970s and 1980s. In analyzing the very literal corporeal risks these artists took while walking down walls of buildings, performing flips and head spins, and inventing tricks to be performed in abandoned areas, Martin shows how this type of positive innovation and self-organization can be used as evidence to support the efficacy of upholding precarious circumstances as well as a critique of the crises of disenfranchisement that erupt from unstable employment for the working class. Gaga does not embody the risks of the precariat as directly as the movement seen in Martin's examples. Yet its complicated

relationship to both neoliberal successes and the precariat class of artistic laborers implicates the movement language as a way to challenge and understand neoliberalism and its impact on both individual bodies and broader communities over time. This work also challenges the dehumanizing potential of neoliberalism by reinforcing the human impact of enacting neoliberal ideas at both a bodily and social level.

3.2 Work Instructions: Embodying Neoliberal Values in Gaga Classrooms

The work instructions for Gaga participants demonstrate a complicated convergence with many neoliberal values, such as increasing efficiency and taking cues from nearby competitors, while at the same time resisting a full adherence to this economic system through a renewed attention to affect. The overarching outcome of adhering to these instructions, however, is a participant trained to excel in neoliberal economies that require innovation, flexibility, and individual accountability. As Wendy Brown argues, the widespread economization of noneconomic spheres and practices urges people to approach each aspect of their life as markets that serve to optimize their daily activities for some sort of progress of future accumulation of wealth, even if this wealth is not monetary (Brown 2015, 31). Gaga, too, does not directly help students accumulate monetary wealth, but offers tools to become more efficient and marketable. To better understand the way in which Gaga trains participants to embrace neoliberal values while resisting the dehumanizing aspects of this economic system that reduce actors to *homo oeconomicus*, in this section I return to and isolate several of the work instructions cited at this chapter's opening in order to examine them more closely and ask

what repercussions they have for both the participant and Gaga's place in a neoliberal value system. By translating this political economic concept to corporeal examples, I illustrate the unique ways in which dance can both challenge and embrace the current dominant economic system. I argue that Gaga's incorporation of select neoliberal concepts calls for a rethinking of how to develop a practice that thrives in the current economic climate without fully adhering to these values that have negatively impacted individual workers. These work instructions, as the rules for a practice that has seen exponential growth in the international dance community over the past decade, serve as one model for artists looking to work within the radically free-market neoliberal system currently at work in global economy. At the same time, these instructions also leave room to challenge the values of neoliberal systems by attending to the dancers' experience of pleasure.

Never stop: The class is one session, no pauses or exercises, but a continuity of instructions one on top of the other. Each instruction does not cancel the previous one but is added to it, layer upon layer. Therefore, it is important not to stop in the middle of the session. If you get tired or want to work at another pace, you can always lower the volume, work 30% or 20%, float, or rest, but without losing sensations that were already awakened. Do not return to the state your body was in before we started.

Gaga's insistence on movement as a primary directive for participation falls in line with Western concert dance's historical binding of dance with movement. Though movement has not always been the defining characteristic of dance, dance scholar and philosopher André Lepecki argues that movement has become the defining element of dance and its engagement with modernity:

... the development of dance as an autonomous art form in the West, from the Renaissance on, increasingly aligns itself with an ideal of ongoing motility. Dance's drive towards a spectacular display of movement becomes its modernity, ... As the kinetic project of modernity becomes modernity's ontology (its inescapable reality, its foundational truth), so the project of Western dance becomes more and more aligned with the production and display of a body and a subjectivity fit to perform this unstoppable motility. (Lepecki 2006, 3)

By claiming that movement is key to understanding modernity, and that dance enters the modernist project through a renewed emphasis on movement, Lepecki asserts that Western concert dance's ontology is predicated on motion. This philosophical underpinning of how to define and understand dance's place in contemporary society also holds significant aesthetic ramifications. If stillness, or even slowness, can challenge dance's very essence, then constant motion must become the preferred style for the presentation, and preservation, of dance. Gaga's instruction for participants to never stop moving, then, perpetuates this aesthetic and philosophical understanding of dance. The result is forward motion: Gaga participants are expected to leave class in a state different from the one they entered with, presumably more aware and stronger than before.

The perpetual motion required in Gaga seemingly evades the subversive politics of stillness. According to this understanding of Western dance's involvement in a modernist project predicated on the privileging of forward motion, stillness challenges the very ontology of both dance and modernist capitalist values, and Gaga urges participants to never stop or be still. Yet the caveat in the work instruction that participants can "lower the volume, work 30% or 20%" indicates the possibility of experimenting with stillness and slowness in the practice of Gaga. There are also moments in Gaga where participants are asked to move only at a "molecular level" to

focus on minute sensations, which similarly evokes stillness even as participants are urged to keep the forward momentum of moving even if at a very small percentage of their full range. For instance, after performing a vigorous full-bodied movement such as boiling like spaghetti on the ground or slapping one's body with open hands, teachers will often ask students to pause and feel the reverberations of the movement through their bodies as they continue to float at a molecular level. As Lepecki argues:

The undoing of the unquestioned alignment of dance with movement initiated by the still-act refigures the dancer's participation in mobility – it initiates a performative critique of his or her participation in the general economy of mobility that informs, supports, and reproduces the ideological formations of late capitalist modernity. (Lepecki 2006, 16)

Though the practice of Gaga does not allow for complete stillness, its allowance of slowing and lowering effort can be similarly analyzed as a critique of mobility. Lepecki's analysis of still-acts as challenging one's participation in economies of mobility refers to both dance aesthetics and its relationship to the modernist project. A key component of what Lepecki refers to as the ideological formations of late capitalist modernity is the shifting socio-economic landscape of this late twentieth and early twenty-first century era, which privileges efficiency and constant progress for both individual workers and larger businesses. Embracing lower levels of motion, as in the case of the Gaga class, can be seen as subversive to this economic imperative to be efficient and pursue the highest level of possible progress.

Even as I acknowledge the potentially subversive elements of Gaga's acceptance of the need to "lower the volume" of movement, it is important to note that Lepecki's theorization of stillness in dance applies primarily to performance events. Many forms of

dance that arguably adhere to this ontological framework of dance as constant motion, such as ballet, embrace training methods that do not require the same rate of movement as on stage. In ballet classes, students pause and watch attentively as the teacher demonstrates exercises or when the class is broken up into smaller groups taking turns to allow for more space to practice. This is also a common pedagogical format in many modern and contemporary dance classes. Gaga is thus in a strong position to exemplify the importance of constant motion in the contemporary social context because the requirement of not stopping departs from the frequent stopping and starting of other technique classes. Not just relegated to performance aesthetics, this urgency to remain constantly engaged and in movement is connected here to the training process as well. This amplifies the concept of constant motion, moving it beyond an aesthetic preference to an embodied principle for training bodies for both daily activities and performance. By enforcing this rule in a training setting, participants are cultivating higher stamina and increased strength, which are both ideologically and physically aligned with contemporary ideals of efficiency.

The politics of mobility that Lepecki attributes to modernity and late capitalism are also directly aligned with neoliberal ideologies. The two concepts – late capitalism and neoliberalism – refer to the same time period, though the former is used to define economic concerns while the latter is tied to larger ideological concerns of liberalism in addition to economics. The two concepts are not entirely philosophically aligned, though they are both tied to the current era of increased global exchange and ideals of economic individualism. Analyses of neoliberalism in particular emphasize the contemporary

moment's expectation of extreme efficiency for workers and businesses. As Brown notes, the "neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* takes its shape as human capital seeking to strengthen its competitive positions and appreciate its value, rather than as a figure of exchange or interest" (Brown 2015, 33), which is a symptom of the constant pressure on workers to accumulate value in the neoliberal system. The need to increase profits and remain competitive in the contemporary neoliberal markets requires constant motion, which puts an immense strain on the worker. As political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri explain in their 2010 text *Declaration*, contemporary work and social environments urge individuals to remain constantly connected and productive. Work and leisure time become blurred, and the need to repay debts forces workers to adhere to market demands to the detriment of their personal and social lives.

In recent years the conditions have become widely criticized, and protests such as the Occupy movement⁷⁸ have emerged to challenge the contemporary economic model. Describing the format of these protests, Hardt and Negri explain: "A decade ago the alterglobalization movements were nomadic. ... The cycle of struggles that began in 2011, in contrast, is sedentary. Instead of roaming according to the calendar of the summit meetings, these movements stay put and, in fact, refuse to move" (Hardt and Negri 2012, loc. 62 of 1456). In addition to occupying a static physical place, the stillness of these protesters demanded a slowing of time. They urged people to take time away from work to hear their message, at times forcing them to do so by forming physical

⁷⁸ The Occupy movement, beginning in 2011 in Zucotti Park by Wall Street in New York City, has since spread internationally with multiple iterations throughout the US and abroad. The protests had similar goals and tactics to the Arab Spring and the Spanish Indignants movements.

obstacles or highly visible reminders through their occupied areas. These Occupy protests thus challenged the progress of neoliberalism not just by refusing to participate in the existing economic model, but also by bringing to attention to the constant mediatization and work expected of contemporary citizens. Though the Occupy movement engaged with social media and other forms of digital media to disseminate their goals, the fact that the protests took the form of physical encampments demonstrated a relative stillness compared to the hustle of city life surrounding them.

In contrast to the stillness of the Occupy movement, the expectation of constant motion in Gaga aligns it with neoliberal values of efficiency and progress. Even the acceptance of working at a slower pace, which is arguably a challenge to the value of efficiency, maintains forward progress and an attempt to maintain constant motion. The overwhelming attitude of the instruction thus maintains adherence to Western concert dance's ontology of movement and its associated modernist and neoliberal values. As a result, it is clear that the practice of Gaga is invested in producing people prepared to cope with the strain that these values can put on both the body and the mind. Increased stamina and the development of tools to convince the body to keep moving at varying "volumes" are useful not just for dancers preparing to perform on stage, but also for the everyday laborer coping with increasingly strenuous expectations for efficiency and the blurring of work and leisure time.

Awareness: Be aware. Get inspired by the teacher and by other people in the room. Be aware of people around you, the space that they need, and the interaction if any.

“Awareness” in the Gaga/dancer studio produces unified aesthetics through a process of kinesthetic awareness. It is this cue to observe and “get inspired” by others in the room which often results in the mimicry of others’ style. It is usually the teacher who sets the aesthetic tone of the room, though in Gaga/dancer classes there are usually several advanced students with experience in Gaga who also serve as inspiration for the other students. The result of this awareness, which is often interpreted by students as direct external mimicry, is the promotion of a relatively homogenous Gaga aesthetic based on the style emulated by the Gaga teachers, all of whom have trained extensively with Ohad Naharin or performed in the Batsheva Dance Company under his direction. Though this acclimation of style is often incomplete in Gaga/people classes due to bodily limitations and inexperience of the participants, in Gaga/dancer classes it serves as a tool to inspire competition amongst dancers who want to stand out and excel in this practice. I argue that this competitive mindset is brought into the studio by dancers specifically because of their unique position within the wider dance economy, where the scarcity of jobs and economic security places dancers in the class of the precariat. The impulse of dancers to gravitate towards a similar aesthetic even while given verbal cues that can be interpreted in a much wider range of styles and movements plays into the pressures precariat workers face to be competitive with their peers. This type of competition, according to neoliberal theory, is supposed to cultivate innovation, efficiency, and motivation to succeed.

Before continuing, it is important to acknowledge that many Gaga teachers and participants would challenge the very claim that there is a Gaga style. Though many of

my interviewees had clear, resonating descriptions about a common Gaga style, others refused to admit a style existed. I remember asking a very experienced Gaga teacher after a class in Tel Aviv what she thought of the Gaga style and how she either cultivates or attempts to counteract this trend, and she flat out refused to acknowledge any aesthetic similarities between what participants had done during the class. Many of the students I interviewed displayed a vested interest in explaining that the presence of a unified style, if they acknowledged it, did not negate their individual freedom or growth. Lulu Soni explained:

... you can just go where you want to go with it, there's no right or wrong in Gaga. No one's going to tell you like: that move, that shape that you're doing, that's not what it's supposed to look like.... but I definitely think it's a little bit different because it comes from the company, and the company... Gaga came about as a means to help them get more in tune with like how they're moving in the work, so I guess that's where you might say the style comes from. (Lulu Soni in conversation with the author, July 2015)

This emphasis on originality and individual experiences – even as this freedom from previously familiar techniques gravitates towards a new set of habits and impositions on movement from the Gaga aesthetic – falls directly in line with neoliberalism’s focus on the progress of individuals and the importance of establishing oneself as autonomous and productive and, ultimately, employable. The phenomenon of the students in a dance class having a common style is expected in many other forms that develop proficiency in form-based techniques such as ballet, where the style is part of the class instruction. Because Gaga is advertised as something different from form-based techniques, allowing students to experience freedom in their movement, it is unsurprising that students and teachers emphasize the importance of individuality and a freedom to explore their own style. I do

not suggest that the emergence of a relatively unified Gaga style subverts these claims to individualism, even though Gaga students are instructed to be aware of and inspired by others, because the dancers are making choices about what to copy and mimic.

I turn now to a more detailed description of this unified Gaga aesthetic and how it actually becomes embodied. Meredith Clemons, a recent college graduate from New York now dancing in Europe, astutely explained:

I think we'd all love to say the latter [that Gaga is interpreted completely internally and in individualized manners], but I personally believe the former [that Gaga has a particular aesthetic style]. Because you know, this image of floating in water is used. *There are five million ways you could interpret that, and yet, in almost every Gaga class, you look around and everyone's floating in water the same way.* I definitely think there's this aesthetic of fleshiness and a sort of sinewy snake-like quality that most people strive for in class. I mean, that's what the teachers are putting out [in their own physicality]. So I definitely... as much as people say it's a movement language, and that it's completely... I think there's an associated aesthetic. Which personally, I think is amazing and I love it, but... you know, you don't frequently see people deviating from it. (Meredith Clemons in conversation with the author, July 2015; emphasis added)

The impulse to assume that Gaga should not have a unified aesthetic was often tied to the way that Gaga is presented as individual research, and required acknowledging a divide between the rhetoric used in Gaga classes and the physical experience of Gaga. Evan Supple, a contemporary ballet dancer training in New York City explained:

Honestly, that's where I'm very conflicted about it. Because if you're listening to what they [Gaga teachers] are saying, there are no directives that are going towards unifying people and getting a certain quality from people other than freedom, I would say. But you're in that class, and those dancers, whether it's just because they're conditioned in technique or because that's just the way dancers are, I don't know, but they all... end up moving in the same way. I don't know, maybe because that way of moving right now is cool, that way of moving is very popular right now, so whether it's that, or whether it's... maybe that is what's natural, I'm not sure. (Evan Supple in conversation with the author, July 2015)

In spite of the hesitancy of many students to discuss the unified style, most ultimately agreed that it was there, and that it represented a “correct” way of doing Gaga and excelling at the skills that it purports to teach. Valerie Ebuwa, a London-based dancer, affirmed:

...everyone experiences [Gaga] differently and everybody’s body is different, but there’s definitely, I don’t know, an aesthetic or something. Whether or not it’s deliberate, I don’t know, but there’s definitely... *you see someone who does a Gaga class, and you know that they’re doing it right.* You know what I mean? You know that their body is taking on whatever it is they’ve been asked to do. (Valerie Ebuwa in conversation with the author, July 2015; emphasis added)

The responses these dancers gave represent a wider trend in the Gaga community, where the aesthetic often goes unnoticed or unremarked upon even as it emerges physically in the classroom and serves to subtly influence the choices dancers make about their own dancing, style, and form. Though Gaga rhetoric often promotes individualism, the kinesthetic awareness promoted in the work instructions creates an embodied emphasis on mimicry and sharing of styles that emerges in a unified Gaga aesthetic.

Let me offer an example of how this phenomenon emerges. One of the most infamous⁷⁹ Gaga directives is to “boil like spaghetti.” This exercise, which makes its way into many Gaga classes, usually begins with students laying on the floor in stillness. The teacher then directs the students to imagine that they are spaghetti in a pot of boiling water. The goal is to become increasingly soft and available to the movement created by the vigorous bubbles of water pushing the spaghetti-self around, which is explained by the teacher’s own language within the broader prompt. At the end of the exercise – while

⁷⁹ I refer to this prompt as infamous because it is often brought up by interviewees or in news articles on Gaga as an example of how “silly” or “abstract” Gaga can be.

students join the teacher in counting down from 10 to mark the height of the exercise's velocity before relaxing back into stillness to observe the resonances of these actions within the body – everyone is flailing vigorously with their own interpretations of the prompt. Yet, as one senior scholar wisely commented after I presented this exercise at a conference, “every time I’m in the kitchen, my spaghetti all boils the same way!” I laughed at the time, but it is true. In Gaga, too, the dancers look almost identical in their interpretations of how to boil like spaghetti. The image is straightforward, and the way the teacher describes the intended sensations behind the image make it difficult to interpret in a way that looks very different from the others in the class. The students get to make choices, such as what part of the body is hit by an imaginary bubble and when, but it's difficult to make conscious decisions or alter your form from those around you in the middle of this exercise especially when awareness is mandated. The feeling of doing the action includes a sense of release, as the intensity of the flailing takes over and the pleasurable sensation of bouncing your body off the floor with sharp percussive movements overrides any focus on organizing the movement into a particular form. Soon, everyone looks as if they are just one strand in a jumble of cooked spaghetti, each one moving in concert with the strands around them and similarly reacting to a single pot of boiling water. Arms and legs fly and occasionally support the body by landing on the ground as the torso is temporarily catapulted into the air, always attempting to protect the head from moving as vigorously as the rest of the body to avoid painful contact with the floor or nearby limbs.

The style that emerges in the particular prompt to boil like spaghetti does not account for the wider range of the Gaga aesthetic, however. There are a great variety of prompts in Gaga that urge students to find both delicacy and explosive power. Theoretically, the prompts could be embodied in many ways and styles, yet the instruction to remain aware of one's surroundings encourages a relatively homogenous interpretation of movement tasks. I asked each of the dancers I interviewed to describe the resulting Gaga style, and though their words were different, they all attempted to describe an aesthetic rooted not just in the form of the dancers, but the attitude as well. In an attempt to depict the physical form of the style, Evan Supple described the ways in which Gaga differed from his experience in ballet:

I would say that I very much notice people breaking out of the alignment of the torso that you find in ballet, you often find people releasing their core, arching their back, moving side to side and finding *asymmetricality in the torso*... very much *always in plié*, ... Gaga is all in the floor, and I like that that sense of becoming one with the ground definitely brings a little bit more organicism in the body... I would say that *alignment of the legs is also very much disregarded*. You see those dancers, even in the company, that are like in that squat and their knees are... it looks like it hurts. ...the last thing I would say is the way that people hold their face. You often see people with their eyes, very barely open, and their mouth open, and moving their face around, and *they're involving their face as part of the movement* as well, whereas a traditional technique doesn't involve that at all really... (Evan Supple in conversation with the author, July 2015; emphasis added)

Evan's description of the asymmetrical torso, the heavy use of plié, the torquing of the knees and ankles, and the incorporation of facial expressions are all common elements of the Gaga aesthetic. According to Valerie Ebuwa, experienced Gaga dancers appear:

like they've got no bones, or no muscle, no nothing, just got these bodies that are ready to kind of just be as gooey as goo and as hard as nails. That's the only kind of way I can kind of describe it. These bodies are active, constantly active, *constantly receptive, maybe that's a better word to use, to become or take on*

anything that they're asked to do. Sometimes I see ballet dancers and I'm like, you'd suck at a hip hop class, and I see hip hop dancers, and I'm like, you'd suck at a ballet class. And I see Gaga dancers and I'm like, you could probably give me all of that. I could ask you to do anything; you'd be able to do it. (Valerie Ebuwa in conversation with the author, July 2015; emphasis added)

This availability that Ebuwa describes is certainly privileged in Gaga. At intensives, students are given T-shirts with the word 'AVAILABLE' printed on it. Rather than a signal of a relationship status, this word in Gaga refers to the need for dancers to be available to movement, and not resist something because it feels unfamiliar. This allows dancers to transcend previously recognized genre-specific styles, even as they adopt the Gaga style. The evocation of availability goes beyond the physical awareness and ability to shift dynamics rapidly, however. It also suggests availability in a broader sense, such as the preparedness to move required of the flexible labor force of the precariat in neoliberal economies. Adopting the availability and awareness in the context of Gaga, then, can be seen as training for engagement in a broader economic framework of neoliberal values as well as a specific dance aesthetic.

In spite of the common impulse of students to resist the idea that there is a unified Gaga style, mimicry of others is an intended exercise in Gaga. Returning to the work instruction that introduced this section, students are explicitly told to be aware of and inspired by teachers and fellow students. This issue of copying others was raised during a group conversation with Ohad Naharin during the Summer 2015 Gaga Intensive at Tel Aviv. In response to someone who expressed that she felt as if she was "faking it" at times in class, Naharin explained:

I'm glad you say it, that you talk about copying and imitating. Or faking. These are all good words. It's really good to imitate. Just make sure you imitate good

stuff. ... You know, when in China when people learn calligraphy, or in Japan, all they do for years, they just copy. They copy calligraphy from others. And that's how they get the skills, and that's how they connect to the power of the artist that mastered it already. So copying is really... progress is ABOUT copying, ... you copy what's already been discovered. And then you do with it something of your own. Or not. If you want to remain a copier, it's ok too. As long as you know. You cannot think 'oh I'm originating something' while you're copying something. But if you're happy copying, there's nothing wrong with it. The same thing I feel a bit about faking. I mean faking, again, if you do it, it's also like lying. Lying, faking, it's not always... negative. (Naharin in conversation with the author, July 2015; emphasis corresponds to spoken points of emphasis)

Naharin here embraces the idea of mimicry, inferring that copying a teacher's movement or aesthetic is not discouraged in Gaga. This idea also surfaces in a Gaga principle called "kagami," which is the idea of looking at the teacher and copying what they are doing to get the essence of their quality, dynamics, and sensation. From Naharin's perspective, then, it is clear that copying external forms is part of the process of Gaga, because it helps people move in ways that may initially be unfamiliar to their bodies. Ultimately, however, even if mimicking others serves to help a student understand a new pathway or sensation in the body, the act of copying is still necessarily mediated by the form and style of the person they were initially mimicking. Thus, the student may internalize the movement idea and use this to initiate movement rather than mimicry, but their understanding of the idea is filtered through and linked to the style in which it was first approached.

In spite of the lineages and traces from other people in the room exhibited in the bodies of each student, the language of individualism remains privileged in Gaga. This focus on the self follows neoliberal pressures for the individual to privilege the self over a collective, as demonstrated by Brown's claims (Brown 2015, 87-99) that neoliberalism

has developed individuals as *homo oeconomicus* (solely interested in economics at the expense of human or social development) instead of *homo politicus* (an individual intended to live in a polis or community, and is thus invested in political life and collective governance). Though the Gaga dancer practices in a community with other dancers, and awareness of these other moving bodies is encouraged, this awareness is enacted primarily for personal safety by avoiding collisions and personal gain through the mimicry and exposure to new sensations or aesthetics. The rhetoric of self-awareness and self-discovery promoted in both Gaga advertising and teachers' prompts during classes guide students towards privileging personal gains. Unlike the community progress emphasized in form-based dance techniques as dancers attempt to perform movements in unison with their peers (while simultaneously advancing their personal training goals), Gaga encourages students to feed off their peers' energy or inspirations for personal gain.

Silence: During the session we do not speak unless instructed to use our voice or words. If you have any questions, you are welcome to bring them up at the end of the session.

W

While the previous work instruction on awareness encourages students to adjust their own performance at will based on their awareness of what others are doing, the rule of silence reinforces the fact that Gaga participants are adhering to restrictions and rules even as they are told to listen to their bodies, be aware of others, and ostensibly make their own movement choices. At the same time, the silence allows for an intense focus on the self and one's moving body without the pressure of verbally communicating with others, which is a drastic shift from the hyper-mediatized culture of constant production

within neoliberal economies. I thus suggest that the instruction of silence encourages both corporeal efficiency, which is directly aligned with neoliberal values, as well as contemplation, which challenges neoliberal values.

The imposition of silence holds great significance for understanding the role of the Gaga participant. The silence in Gaga is used to both focus more fully on expression through movement and reinforce obedience to the work instructions. This rule, unlike the more ambiguous instructions of maintaining awareness or listening to one's body, is easy to police and enforce. Although scholars of neoliberalism have made claims about speech functioning as capital (Brown 2015, 158), I do not argue here that Gaga's imposition of silence functions as a reduction of political or economic freedom, as may be the case for other forced silences. Rather, it is an exercise in focus on the corporeal action by attempting to limit distractions; discussions before or after Gaga classes are almost always welcome. At the same time, there are resonances with political protest in this normalization of silence during class: by instructing students to remain silent and focus on movement, this instruction reinforces neoliberal ideals of efficiency and progress. Just as protests such as the Occupy movement challenged the progress of neoliberal economies and its negative effects on workers by urging passersby to listen and challenge their involvement in the neoliberal project, using unprompted voice in a Gaga class would disrupt the status quo and bring attention to the often unquestioned adherence to Gaga's rules.

The efficiency and focus that is cultivated in Gaga in part due to the participant's verbal silence supports the efficiency of laborers promoted in neoliberalism. As Brown

notes, the “...neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* takes its shape as human capital seeking to strengthen its competitive position and appreciate its value” (Brown 2015, 33). In Gaga, the dancers strengthen their competitive position and value in the contemporary concert dance market by developing the tools and skills taught in Gaga without the distraction of speaking or socializing during class. The efficiency valued in Gaga promotes more than increased value for the individual participant, however. Efficiency and (economic) flexibility are traits that have been widely praised in the dance world. Randy Martin claims that dancers are often viewed as ideal laborers, both historically and in the neoliberal context:

...dancers are valued for their creativity, flexibility, absence of material needs – they can make work in spare rooms with nothing more than their bodies, often unshod, subsist on few calories, and even among performing artists deliver more for less by garnering the most meager wages. Their love of art subsidizes their pursuit of perfection – making them the ideal laborers in an idealized creative economy. (Martin 2012, 66)

Martin continues on to argue that dancing itself makes value, which is often overlooked in these economic frameworks that continually devalue dancers and dancing as passion projects that can exist without financial or material support. Gaga seems to follow Martin’s claim that the dancing itself holds value, as it promotes silence from its participants to focus on bodily rather than verbal output.

The singular focus on embodiment suggested by this work instruction of remaining silent, while supporting neoliberal values of efficiency, departs from a growing trend in neoliberal societies to value hyper-mediatization. Although oppression and free speech are still challenged in many societies around the world, in most industrialized nations people have become “stifled by a surplus of information, communication, and

expression” (Hardt and Negri 2012, loc 176 of 1456). Hardt and Negri cite Gilles Deleuze as they explore the increased need for silence and solitude for people to form their own opinions in neoliberal hyper-mediatized societies. Gaga, then, serves as one such site of silence and contemplation. Although the participants are inundated with a range of physical information, they are given time and space to explore these ideas corporeally without constant reminders of external pressures. Whereas the balance between work and personal life is continually blurred by increased access to internet connectivity, which encourages constant availability on behalf of workers and increased attention to work during personal time, the work of Gaga demands a removal from these electronic pressures to check in and be accountable to others’ requests. The enforcement of silence and a break from media is intended to increase focus on the work and research done within the Gaga studio, an increasingly rare opportunity that causes many dancers to refer to Gaga in almost reverent tones, as if it is a meditation or religious ritual in addition to a physical and artistic practice.

Classes start on time: Attending the first minutes of the class is very important so you will be able to produce more from the session and take care of your body. It is advised to arrive 15 minutes early, turn your phone off, find yourself a place in the studio, relax, and start.

No entry for latecomers: If you are late, give up. Go do something else that is pleasant. Come tomorrow.

We work barefoot, without shoes.

The last three work instructions for Gaga are straightforward and related to the classroom logistics of timeliness and attire. Although there is no leniency on these rules, as indicated by the clarification that there will be no entry for latecomers, they are presented in a mild manner attentive to the participants' enjoyment and quality of the experience. Starting on time is paired with arriving early to prepare for the experience, emphasizing not only neoliberal values of productivity – “you will be able to produce more” – but also affective states of care and relaxation. This attention to affect is made particularly clear in the instruction of what to do if you are late to class: leave and “do something else that is pleasant.” The importance of affect to the Gaga experience is not in line with traditional neoliberal values, yet remains an integral part throughout this list of work instructions that otherwise promote efficiency, progress, competition, and adherence to this economic doctrine. Pleasure, the primary affect sought after in Gaga, has historically been theorized as counterproductive to orderly societies and economies (Freud 1930). More recently, the rise of affect theory has suggested that emotions (pleasure and otherwise) can serve important roles in the developments of societies, economies, and politics (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, Ahmed 2004). As such, I argue in this section that Gaga has co-opted the affect of pleasure to develop a movement system rooted in internal sensitivity and awareness that is both economically and socially in line with popular contemporary neoliberal values of efficiency. Rather than being framed as subversive, pleasure is utilized in Gaga as integral to a participant's success and efficiency.

Gaga's insistence on participants experiencing pleasure falls in line with contemporary neoliberal "soft power" techniques of enforcing values. Brown documents this shift in neoliberal policy, noting that though it

...was often imposed through fiat and force in the 1970s and 1980s, neoliberalization in the Euro-Atlantic world today is more often enacted through specific techniques of governance, through best practices and legal tweaks, in short, through "soft power" drawing on consensus and buy-in, than through violence, dictatorial command, or even overt political platforms. (Brown 2015, 35)

Thus, neoliberalism circulates in the Euro-Atlantic world today not through force, as was the case throughout the Global South during large-scale economic experiments in the 1970s and 1980s, but through choice. This choice, however, is greatly influenced by subtle motivators from policy makers and economic pressures that incentivize and praise the embrace of neoliberal values. The evocation of pleasure, a positive experience, in Gaga's work instructions serves a similar function as what Brown refers to as neoliberalism's use of "soft power" to incentivize adhering to the instructions. By following these rules, the document infers, the participant will be better prepared to experience pleasure and "produce more from the session." In this way, pleasure becomes just another one of the neoliberal values embraced in the Gaga work instructions because it is deemed as crucial to the development of a dancer's efficiency and productivity, though affective states are not traditionally associated with neoliberalism.

Though Gaga embraces many sensations, its specific emphasis on pleasure is very literally underlined in the work documents as well as referenced verbally in classes and in writing about Gaga on the official website. Pleasure, however, is much more than a physical or emotional sensation. It is also directly tied to histories of sexuality and the

unreliability of human nature. Sigmund Freud has written extensively about pleasure, particularly in relation to the formation of societies in his text *Civilization and Its Discontents*. In it, Freud states that happiness and pleasure as are found in the practice or consumption or art are similar to “a mild narcotic and can provide no more than a temporary refuge for us from the hardships of life” (Freud 1930, 20). He suggests that pleasure – particularly through art – is but a temporary solution to the pain of living in civilized societies that incessantly put pressures on innate desires. This is not dissimilar from Gaga’s appeal to pleasure and effort as ways to counteract pain in one’s body, though Freud goes further to analyze the need to partake in this process as directly tied to the experience of existing in structured communities. He argues that unhappiness derived “from our relations with other men” puts stress on the individual, and as a result “humanity is wont to reduce its demands for happiness, just as even the pleasure-principle itself changes into the more accommodating reality-principle under the influence of external environment” (Freud 1930, 16). Whereas Freud’s analysis of the role of pleasure in civilized societies⁸⁰ is pessimistic and characterized as fleeting, pleasure in the Gaga community has become a foundational principle.

Freud’s analysis of civilization and its dependence on laws that suppress one’s individual freedom to act solely in pursuit of pleasure is not directly tied to the establishment of neoliberal states or policies. Yet, his characterization of the suppression of individual pleasures in favor of a civilization’s norms and values in a modern

⁸⁰ Civilization is characterized by Freud as dependent upon the formation of systems of justice and law, the creation of a culture not bound exclusively to innate desires, and the repression of individual desires to function in a collective that privileges adherence to rules and interactions with neighbors.

European capitalist framework remain pertinent for contemporary neoliberal reconfigurations of personhood. Brown argues that this early citizen figure, termed *homo politicus*, has been replaced with its economic counterpart. She writes: “The replacement of citizenship defined as concern with the public good by citizenship reduced to the citizen as *homo oeconomicus* also eliminates the very idea of a people, a demos asserting its collective political sovereignty” (Brown 2015, 39). Thus, to carry forth Freud’s argument, pleasure is no longer being suppressed for political means but rather for predominantly economic ones, which represses not just individual desires but also community involvement in political life. Affective appeals, such as an individual’s pleasure-principle and desires, are often deemed irrelevant to neoliberal economies because they are not seen as relevant to the primary goals of this system: efficiency and productivity. Gaga, by focusing on pleasure as key to developing an effective and marketable dancer, thus both embraces and challenges neoliberal values.

Gaga’s focus on productivity through paying attention to the mindset and experience of the participant suggests a radical rethinking of productivity, particularly for an artistic product, by re-introducing the importance of affective economies. The concept of an affective economy – where “emotions *do things*” (Ahmed 2004, 119) – recognizes the power that emotions can have not just for individuals, but also for the formation of groups and societies. In this article outlining the presence and function of affective economies, Sara Ahmed relies on Marxist understandings of capital being created through circulation and suggests:

emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation. I am using “the

economic” to suggest that emotions circulate and are distributed across a social as well as psychic field. (Ahmed 2004, 120)

In the case of Gaga, we can thus understand that the circulation of pleasure not is not about an accumulation of value for the individual dancer through the acquisition of personal pleasure and happiness. Rather, the role of this affect in Gaga is crucial to the development of an economy of pleasure that produces a vibrant dance practice. Because the dancers are urged to feel pleasure rather than pain – even recognizing sore muscles and tiredness as a form of pleasure – they become willing and able to push their bodies further. This in turn creates a more virtuosic and daring aesthetic. The psychic difference of appeals of pleasure results in material differences in the dancing. The positive outcome of this affective economy justifies the evocation of pleasure as an alternative way to enact the neoliberal logics of efficiency and productivity, rather than as entirely oppositional to these values.

3.3 Freedom to Compete: Neoliberalism at Play in Gaga Intensives

The neoliberal values embedded in the work instructions as described above set the framework for understanding the politics at play within the Gaga classroom. To understand the larger context in which these classes take place, it is imperative to consider Gaga’s place in the international dance community. In this section, I look at Gaga intensives held in Tel Aviv, Israel, to unpack the broader economic forces at play that shape the entrance to the Gaga class. Who comes to these intensives, and why? What is the value of attending this particular Gaga training format? As I incorporate statements from fellow participants at these intensives, I bring attention to the economic situation of

the participants, and their career goals that are tied to their participation in Gaga. This introduces how Gaga creates a microcosm of neoliberal society in the classroom, as well as how it prepares students to work in the current dance market that is necessarily implicated in neoliberal politics and values because of its root in the Western world that is entrenched in these economics.

A driving force in this analysis is the idea of competition. The importance of competition was introduced obliquely in the above work instructions, and plays an important role in the professional dance economy of which Gaga intensives are a part. This analysis considers what happens within the Gaga studio, but also takes a step outside of the studio to consider Gaga in relation to larger neoliberal practices and economies. Although there are many neoliberal values at play in Gaga's international circulation and appeal, I am interested primary in the idea of competition because it is a value that has long been a part of concert dance economies. It also plays an important role in neoliberal theory. As Wendy Brown writes:

In neoliberalism, competition replaces the liberal economic emphasis on exchange as the fundamental principle and dynamic of the market. ...equivalence is both the premise and the norm of exchange, while *inequality is the premise and outcome of competition*. Consequently, when the political rationality of neoliberalism is fully realized, when market principles are extended to every sphere, inequality becomes legitimate, even normative, in every sphere. (Brown 2015, 64; emphasis added).

The inequality resulting from competition can be seen in the ways that Gaga students size one another up in terms of skill, and the opportunities that may or may not come out of their participation in a Gaga intensive. Skill inequalities are common features in the

concert dance world, which is notoriously competitive.⁸¹ Where Gaga rejects neoliberal values is in its rhetoric of inclusiveness, in both advertising and through teachers encouraging even Gaga/dancers participants to explore their own bodies without imposing interpretations of prompts as “right” or “wrong.” Gaga thus exists within the competitive framework that is the basis of both neoliberal theory and existing dance economies, and encouraging it insofar that it establishes intensives to promote professional growth.

Many of Gaga’s appeals to positive rhetoric have already been introduced throughout this chapter, such as the encouraging phrases used by instructors to guide the class through a variety of movement prompts using words such as “nice” and “yofi⁸²” create a positive atmosphere, devoid of harsh critique about students’ approaches to movement. The positivity embedded in Gaga can also be seen in the wording of the work instructions, encouraging students who miss class to do something “pleasant” to emphasize that the goal of Gaga – whether you attend or not – is to bring pleasure to the body. The positive philosophical imperatives embedded within the Gaga organization and pedagogy can seem at odds with the competition required in the dance economy.

Although pleasure and employment are not inherently contradictory, there is a competitive element inherent in self-improvement pursued for the purpose of obtaining a

⁸¹ The competitiveness of the dance world has been the source for many theatrical interpretations of what life as a dancer is like, such as the 2010 film *Black Swan* directed by Darren Aronofsky which illustrates Natalie Portman (who, coincidentally, trained in Gaga prior to the movie) coping with her own perfectionism and jealousy and she believes that her fellow company members are trying to replace her in a prestigious role. Though these films are not entirely accurate representations of life as a company dancer, the competitive element of dance is certainly based in reality.

⁸² Hebrew (יפה) for “beautiful,” also colloquially used to mean “nice” and “good.”

job that challenges much of the self-indulgent rhetoric about Gaga specifically during the intensive setting. Everyone may be “yofi” as the teachers say, yet only some will be “yofi” enough to eventually get a job as a professional dancer.

As I argue throughout this chapter, the philosophies of self-research and personal pleasure articulated in Gaga’s advertising and pedagogical rhetoric are unable to exist neatly in the competitive socio-economic climate of the contemporary concert dance world. At the same time, I also assert that a simplistic reading of Gaga as resistant to economic pressures and neoliberal values invisibilizes the nuances of what makes Gaga so marketable to contemporary dancers. Rather, Gaga’s focus on the self becomes co-opted by dancers entrenched in neoliberal economies as a professionalization tool to make them more competitive in the concert dance market. Even the focus on non-dancers through the Gaga/people track, which disrupts neoliberal values of efficiency and profit by focusing on a recreational activity not intended to result in a professional performance career, often becomes overrun by dancers when these classes are offered outside of Israel.⁸³ This indicates that regardless of the intentions of the Gaga Movement Ltd. or Gaga’s creator, ultimately the economic and cultural value of Gaga is determined by the way it is utilized by its participants. In the case of the Gaga intensives in particular, I argue that Gaga creates a neoliberal space for both artistic and economic competition.

⁸³ This phenomenon of Gaga/people classes as appealing widely to non-dancers in Israel is discussed in further depth in Chapter 2.

Gaga Intensives vs. Gaga Classes

Gaga intensives, as opposed to single Gaga classes, exist in a framework intended to encourage professional and aspiring dancers to use Gaga for their professional development.⁸⁴ Though I argue above that elements of neoliberal values are at play in all Gaga classes through the enforcement of Gaga's work instructions, in this section I look specifically at the case of Gaga intensives to argue for the uniquely competitive context of these events. Unlike open classes and outreach events, where Gaga is employed specifically for personal growth with no overt connection to professional dance, the intensives are specifically geared towards professional dance training. Though some of the elements of competition discussed below can be found in other open Gaga classes to some degree, especially in Gaga/dancer classes, it is important to clarify that my arguments here refer specifically to the intensives.

The structure of Gaga intensives is rigorous, similar to other contemporary dance intensives held internationally. The length of these intensives varies, though the Tel Aviv intensives are currently the longest Gaga events available (one week in the winter, two weeks in the summer). For the summer intensives, dancers take class six days a week. Each day Sunday through Thursday begins with a Gaga/dancer class, followed by a

⁸⁴ The concept of the "intensive," most often held in the summers during the off-seasons of many ballet, modern, and contemporary dance companies, is widespread in the concert dance world. They are well known sites for professional development, networking, and exposure to popular choreographers' aesthetics and training styles. Unlike many other intensives, however, Gaga is not predicated on the presence of a certain choreographer or dance company (though the presence of Ohad Naharin at the Tel Aviv intensives is a particularly important draw for many dancers). This allows Gaga intensives to circulate more widely and frequently, making them arguably more accessible than those hosted by individual choreographers and companies, most often in the summer off-seasons that exist for many professional dance companies.

repertory class that teaches selections from Naharin's choreography for the Batsheva Dance Company, an hour lunch break, and a Gaga methodics class. On Fridays, the beginning of the Jewish Shabbat, dancers only take one Gaga/dancer class.⁸⁵ The dancers participate in the intensive as part of smaller groups (approximately 50 dancers), though at times the groups are combined depending on the studio they are assigned to for the day. The intensives take place in the Batsheva Dance Company studios in the Suzanne Dellal Center⁸⁶ in Tel Aviv's Neve Tzedek neighborhood, which include access to two



Image 2 - The exterior of the Suzanne Dellal Center's front entrance. This building houses the box office, a café, and the main theater. Studios and additional theaters are housed in buildings in the back of the complex. Photo by author.

⁸⁵ This shorter day is in line with many Israeli businesses, as public transportation and most businesses are closed for the length of Shabbat (from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday) and the hours leading up to and following the hours of religious observation.

⁸⁶ This complex houses the Batsheva Dance Company and the Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollak Dance Company. It is a cultural hub in Israel: it is the site of four popular theaters for dance performance, many studios, restaurant and café, and extensive outdoor space for performance and gatherings.

smaller studios (Studio Suzy and Studio Dalia) as well as the large studio that is occasionally converted to a performance space (Studio Varda). A small studio within this



Image 3 - Dancers relaxing in Studio Suzy during a lunch break in the Summer 2015 Gaga Intensive. Photo by author.

complex is left open for Gaga/people classes to be held during the time of the intensives (Studio A). The dancers attending the intensive become familiar with one another quickly, often sharing hostels or apartments as well as socializing during lunch breaks, after-class trips to the beach,⁸⁷ performances,⁸⁸ and night life.⁸⁹ This closeness fosters both friendships and competition. I interviewed participants about the atmosphere of these events, and there were many conflicting responses. A popular narrative maintained that in the beginning of intensives, the participants are

⁸⁷ The Suzanne Dellal Center is located just minutes from the beach, so students often congregate there in groups after classes.

⁸⁸ Gaga participants are often offered discounts to the performances held at the Suzanne Dellal Center for the duration of their stay, encouraging them to experience the local Israeli dance scene as well as the international companies the center attracts.

⁸⁹ During the course of the intensive, students are often formally invited to see Gaga teachers perform as DJs or to attend pop-up art events featuring performances put on by Gaga teachers. This allows for informal socialization with the teachers and company members not afforded during intensive hours.

...kind of weird and competitive, but intensives are weird by nature. There are some people who want to be in the company, there are some people who have never done this before and are just trying to get better at dancing in any way, so... when you put this many people together who don't know each other – but some do – and there are language barriers, there's going to be interesting formations of cliques. (Anonymous dancer in conversation with the author, August 2015)

Many students agreed that the moments of competition were not always present: either they faded by the end of the event, or were present only in select moments (such as in classes taught by Ohad Naharin). The remarkable nature of this observation is that competition is a word rarely applied to Gaga in other contexts by its participants.

The nature of Gaga classes, to some degree, discourages competition between participants. The lack of mirrors encourages students to focus on sensations rather than external forms, and teachers reinforce a positive atmosphere through encouraging language and the directive to be inspired by other students.⁹⁰ Yet Gaga intensives are attended by advanced dance students and professionals seeking employment and/or professional development, enveloping the events in a competitive economic framework where dancers are training to surpass others in forthcoming auditions. One Gaga dancer explained regarding the uniqueness of competition in the intensive setting:

it's (Gaga) not supposed to be a competitive thing, and it's supposed to serve a purpose for the individual, and it isn't made to be a contest of any sort. Yet at the same time the company gets to know their future dancers through their workshops and all of that, so it's like ... *on one hand, no, they're not fostering competitiveness, but on the other hand, people who want to dance for the company are going to workshops hoping to be noticed.* So maybe you know ... they're not going to outright be like, yeah, be competitive in class, but maybe in a

⁹⁰ As noted earlier in this chapter, being inspired by other students is not inherently non-competitive: it can foster a subtle enforcement of a unified aesthetic. Yet, this approach of inspiration rather than direct competition differs drastically from many form-based dance technique classes that encourage students to aspire to the performances of their peers.

backwards way there's some competition being fostered in that way. (Meredith Clemons in conversation with the author, July 2015; emphasis added)

Clemons infers here that in spite of Gaga's innate trend towards non-competitiveness, the structure of the intensives creates a competitive atmosphere. This refers not only to Gaga, but to the wider network of concert dance economies, where summer intensives play an important role in professional development and potential future employment for aspiring or out of work dancers. By participating in this framework of summer intensives, the Gaga organization joins a highly competitive world dance economy where dancers are expected to travel, train, and audition for companies on their own time and money.

To clarify, my argument about the competitive nature of Gaga intensives is not about the intended goal of the Gaga organization. In line with the non-competitive ethos of Gaga inferred in the above interview quote – Gaga “isn't supposed to be a competitive thing” – the Gaga Movement Ltd. endeavors to employ Gaga in a wide variety of contexts entirely dissociated from the professional dance world. While the Gaga organization continues to engage with neoliberal markets to increase the circulation of Gaga practice internationally through Gaga intensives, workshops, and open classes, Gaga Movement Ltd. simultaneously counters the for-profit model of neoliberal economies through a non-profit branch that remains focused on a humanitarian application of Gaga. The Executive Director of Gaga Movement Ltd., Yossi Naharin, explained:

There's two companies, one, it's a company, not a non-profit. And parallel to this, we have a non-profit company; it's like two different companies. With the name Gaga. ... we have many...not many, but we have projects that are not business wise, but we want to allow Gaga... we want to allow people to be able to use Gaga

in areas that they cannot afford financially. (Yossi Naharin in conversation with the author, August 2015)

He went on to explain the pay scale for classes, such as paying more in Tel Aviv (usually 60 shekels⁹¹ for a class card) and less in the north of Israel which is less financially stable (closer to 30 shekels for the same card). In addition to providing affordable open classes, the Gaga organization also gives classes free of charge for certain events and creates outreach programs to bring Gaga to new communities. Some projects include working with female victims of terrorist attacks⁹², Parkinson's patients, taking part in the annual "Good Deeds Day" that was initiated in Israel, and as part of a rehabilitation center for violent men. Yossi Naharin, in explaining these outreach programs, displayed a strong passion for using Gaga to help people overcome traumatic pasts and diseases. His brother, Ohad Naharin, explained how exactly Gaga helps these people through giving an example of working with Parkinson's patients:

They are defeated by their disease, they lost their happiness, and they're very, I say they, and I'm generalizing, but, you feel the common heaviness going in, no energy, defeated feeling in the group, and it was amazing that in 20 minutes from people that were like, if you tell them: they could wake up, they could feel texture, they could feel energy flow of it, effort, even explosive stuff going on. So their situation wasn't their disease, their situation was their body language, and how they treat their body, it was from lack of listening and knowledge and how they can actually make huge progress within their limitations. *So this is where Gaga can go into.* It cannot heal, we're not going to heal Parkinson's, but we can make their laugh a lot happier and physically - huge, what we can do. (Ohad Naharin in conversation with the author, July 2015; emphasis added)

⁹¹ The New Israeli Shekel (NIS) is the currency of Israel. 60 NIS is worth roughly \$15.50 USD, and 30 NIS is worth roughly \$8.00 USD.

⁹² A documentary was made about Naharin's work with these female victims; the English title of the work is *About the Body* (2006).

It is worth noting that Ohad Naharin's characterization of how Gaga benefits Parkinson's patients exists outside of the framework of dance economies. In a not-for-profit setting, with participants experiencing Gaga without economic imperatives to utilize the practice to become more effective and competitive dancers, this application of Gaga challenges core values of neoliberal economies such as efficiency and profit, and is unfettered by many of the pressures and values embedded in practices involved in the competitive frameworks of for-profit businesses or the contemporary dance economy.

Yossi Naharin explained that the financial security of the for-profit branch of Gaga Movement Ltd. allows them to operate the non-profit branch without needing external funding, which circumvents the common claim that neoliberalism encourages a lack of unity among people and helping each other (Harvey 2007, Brown 2015). At the same time, it upholds the unnerving idea that democratic ideals of helping others is determined completely by economic factors, as argued by Brown in the United States context. Referring to a recent presidential speech in which Obama justified a social welfare program because it would also help grow the economy, she writes:

democratic state commitments to equality, liberty, inclusion, and constitutionalism are now subordinate to the project of economic growth, competitive positioning, and capital enhancement. These political commitments can no longer stand on their own legs and, the speech implies, would be jettisoned if found to abate, rather than abet, economic goals. (Brown 2015, 26-27)

Gaga, circulating primarily in Western neoliberal economies such as the US context described above, must also contend with these issues of financing the humanitarian goals of the non-profit side of Gaga. It is important to acknowledge that the neoliberal values analyzed in the context of Gaga/dancer classes and intensives may not hold entirely true

for these Gaga/people outreach programs, which represent a very small portion of the overall activities overseen by the Gaga organization. Similarly, my analysis of the Gaga intensives apply to a specific subset of the practice, and are not intended as a critique of the practice's intrinsic values or goals.

Competition in Gaga Intensives

Gaga intensives are important sites of professionalization for dancers interested in pursuing performance careers. By developing the toolbox of skills⁹³ practiced in Gaga classes, dancers expand their range and physical capabilities. These events are also important for networking, with both the teachers and fellow students. As Anusha Kedhar (2014) points out in her article on South Asian dancers working in the United Kingdom, international travel is an increasingly common requirement for dance jobs today. This travel is often predicated on pre-existing relationships with choreographers due to the need for dancers to obtain visas and work permits for international work. While students may not be directly asked to perform as a result of partaking in an intensive, it is seen as a way to establish repertoire with the Batsheva company members and make contacts that might assist in a future audition, as well as get an insight into the physical range and style that the company may be looking for. What is most notable about this phenomenon is that the onus rests on the student to make contacts and go to the company in order to have a

⁹³ These skills refer to a range of approaches to moving the body. Gaga dancers learn how to embody drastically different dynamics, speeds, textures, levels, and postures and shift between them almost instantaneously; embodying all of these different ways of moving the body are seen as tools, as well as the skill of being able to shift between them quickly.

better chance of being seen as competitive. This indicates that the companies control the market, and that the individual dancers are the precarious workers who need to try to fit into this economy rather than being the valued workers on whom the company depends.

The status of the dancer seeking a company to join is representative of the growing class of the precariat. Their lack of job security and the need to sell their own labor, rather than having their own means of production to hire other laborers to make a profit, places this class of workers at the mercy of employers. Though this is hardly a new state of affairs in the dance economy (the presence of dance companies able to employ their workers full time has always been limited, and dancers frequently commit to short term gigs for little or no pay), in the neoliberal market contract work rather than full time employment has begun to rise in other markets as well. As Hardt and Negri argue, “[o]nce upon a time there was a mass of wage workers; today there is a multitude of precarious workers” (2012, loc 131 of 1456) that are often indebted and dependent on capitalist control. A career in dance has always been precarious at best, due to both economic conditions and the possibility of injury or physical inability to execute a desired skill, thus a look at how dancers negotiate this condition in the present moment can provide some insight into strategies for other precarious workers emerging in the age of neoliberalism.

At the Gaga intensives, the participants most attuned to the underlying competitive atmosphere at the event are college or conservatory dance students who will soon be graduating and on the job market and unemployed dancers searching for a new company. While dancers of many ages attend the intensives, the predominant age range

of students is in their late teens to early 20s. Flo Pope, a second-year dance conservatory student from London, said of the 2015 Summer Intensive in Tel Aviv:

... the competitive edge is only, in my view, it's only with people that are still training and don't have jobs yet. Or, want to come here and dance. Like, it's not ... *I feel myself do it. It's not that I'm trying to be better than other people, but there is that pressure*, like... there's a huge amount of pressure ... especially because I'm coming from London and there are a lot of us, and ... some of them are the really good ones; Batsheva people know their names, so it's like, that's a lot of pressure on someone that's also a part of that circle. (Florence Pope in conversation with the author, August 2015; emphasis added)

This need to be better than other participants, in spite of the fact that Gaga is not overtly competitive in its rhetoric or instruction style, is driven by extreme pressure and lack of job opportunities, particularly for students coming from vibrant dance communities with a high level of competition. For Pope, who is still studying and not currently on the job market, it was an underlying pressure as she endeavored to be seen as on par with her highly skilled peers both at the intensive and back home in preparation for graduation and the future audition process. For students who are already on the job market, the intensive can be even more explicitly competitive, because it is seen as an opportunity to get a leg up and be noticed by the teachers.

Learning repertory is a particularly important part of the Gaga intensive, both pedagogically and for the students' opportunities to perform for their teachers. The choreography is ostensibly taught as a way to better understand and apply the Gaga principles learned in classes. Deborah Friedes Galili, the international director for the Gaga organization, explained that students aren't always able to physicalize ideas right away, so "the repertory also is used to help you LEARN those tools more, and to understand ... I mean, there are some things that you'll end up understanding, like

explosive power when you're learning *Echad Mi Yodea* and some other repertory” (Deborah Friedes Galili in conversation with the author, August 2015). This reference to *Echad Mi Yodea*'s use of explosive energy signals a recurring moment in the piece where the dancers move abruptly from sitting still to a standing position, which requires a quick burst of energy that is often difficult to summon through abstract improvisation without a particular movement task or form to which to apply the energy. Yet, many students also take repertory classes as a tool for professionalization to give them a step up for future auditions. These students not only attempt to master the choreography, but also grab the attention of the teachers. I witnessed this phenomenon at the intensives in which I participated, with the most competitive students placing themselves closest to the instructors. While I gravitated to the outer edges of the room and the back lines when performing repertory, giving myself a view of the other dancers, most of the other students tried to get in the space early and claim their spots near where they anticipated the teachers to be. Once in clear view, these dancers would exhibit strong bursts of energy, with little regard for the people around them. I remember instances of people getting hit with flying limbs, and dancers taking the space to run through repertory full-out multiple times before others had a chance to perform it once – the Gaga imperative of ‘awareness’ often went out the proverbial window during repertory sessions. These students were not reprimanded, and continued to compete for the instructors’ attention throughout the event as the other students learned to negotiate the space and avoid potential collisions.

Making connections with Gaga teachers, particularly the ones teaching repertory, who are usually active or former members of Batsheva, is seen as advantageous to a future audition process. London-based dancer Valerie Ebuwa explained to me the difference between open classes and intensives as partially rooted in the need to learn repertory:

The energy is just a lot different. ... especially like at Juilliard - a part of their second or third year thing is to learn a piece of rep from a company, so a lot of them are like, ... I'm going to get rep from Batsheva, I'm going to have to do this so good, I have to ask them, they can teach me ... (Valerie Ebuwa in conversation with the author, July 2015)

She explained that this is a common interest from students. At the time of the interview she was also working with Hofesh Shechter (a former Batsheva member) in London, and explained that students at the Shechter intensives often asked her about learning other pieces of Shechter's choreography. Thus, the presence of repertory classes in the Gaga intensives heightens the unwritten rules of competition to the atmosphere as students are reminded of ways to make themselves more marketable for potential future jobs or competitive roles in upcoming school reconstructions. Although students do not have the rights to perform this repertory on a stage as a result of participation in an intensive, the acquisition of this repertory functions similarly to the acquisition of cultural capital. This access to Naharin's repertory serves as more than a way to develop one's own ability to move or understand the sensations taught in Gaga. Knowledge of the choreography can be used in auditions or in school settings as a way to assert one's insider status, and can be used to their advantage if asked to learn and perform similar (or sections of the same)

choreography for an audition or a reconstruction of Naharin's work, as has happened at Juilliard.

Though each Gaga intensive offers access to Naharin's repertory and renowned Gaga instructors, the most competitive space for aspiring dancers is the bi-annual Tel Aviv intensive. These events are bigger than the ones held in Europe and North America⁹⁴ because they have easier access to a range of studios (the intensives are held in Batsheva's studios while the company is on break) and teachers, many of who live in Tel Aviv. These teachers are almost all former or current company members, and Ohad Naharin is also present sporadically throughout the intensive. The presence of Naharin and members of the Batsheva Dance Company in the company's studios throughout the intensive serves as a constant reminder of a lucrative application of Gaga: joining the Batsheva Dance Company. There are also open improvisations after the standard day of classes, where several of the Gaga teachers observe what the students do with the information they



Image 4 - Dancers improvising in Studio Varda at the Summer 2015 Gaga Intensive in Tel Aviv. Photo by author.

⁹⁴ Intensives are held bi-annually in Tel Aviv and New York City; workshops and intensives are also held on a semi-regular basis at European locations such as Torino, Italy; Barcelona, Spain; and Amsterdam, The Netherlands in addition to one-time events held elsewhere in Europe and North America.

have been learning in an open forum. These improvisation sessions mimic a dominant aspect of the auditions for the Batsheva Dance Company, and are often treated as spaces to show off as if it is actually an audition.

I interviewed three students at different stages in their careers together at the 2015 Summer Gaga Intensive at Tel Aviv about their experiences and they explained:

WALDMAN: I think in rep, definitely [people can get competitive] ... [and in] the improv that we're having, I think people are really ... they're very aware that Batsheva company members are watching them. And like, are thinking they're maybe scouting a little bit. Which I think they maybe are.

POPE: Yeah, they definitely are.

MARK: Of course they are. (Alison Waldman, Florence Pope, and Lauren Mark in conversation with the author, August 2015)

At the intensive, there was never an explicit statement from the teachers about scouting.

Yet, the idea is so pervasive within the Gaga community that even dancers at other locations get the impression that attending a Tel Aviv intensive is the best chance to be seen as a potential company member. One student who attended a New York intensive in 2014 told me that the atmosphere of that intensive was much more competitive than the open classes she had taken previously, but that:

... if you want to get in [to the company] you need to go to Tel Aviv. They're not going to, in New York, scout people. Because they have, you know, they have their pick of the lot of Juilliard students, and all these people in Tel Aviv, and ... they [Batsheva] don't need to go to them [the students], I think. (Meredith Clemons in conversation with the author, July 2015)

She then went on to mention a student she had met at the intensive who had bragged about knowing all of the faculty at the intensive in New York, right before saying that he would be traveling to Israel to attend the company's open audition two months later. Clemons' characterization of the need to go to Tel Aviv to gain attention from the

company highlights the precarity of the dancers' position: with no guarantee of employment, non-Israeli dancers are expected to raise enough funds to travel to Tel Aviv to have a competitive shot at being scouted for the world-renowned company, whether it is through performing well at an intensive or attending an actual audition prepared with the skills learned at the intensive.

In spite of the precarity of dancers' positions, and the very slim chance that they will be noticed or scouted at an intensive, hundreds of dancers flock to the intensives annually. Though dancers I have interviewed often note the competition between dancers and the desire to be scouted or otherwise noticed by the instructors (or, ideally, Naharin), they also acknowledge that the purpose of this intensive is predominantly about the acquisition of skills. Gaga is well suited to prepare dancers for the contemporary dance market, because it cultivates many practical and aesthetic traits that are desirable today. Choreographers are increasingly working with smaller casts and utilizing improvisation as part of the creative process, collaborating with dancers and building off their unique capabilities. Some have rightly argued that this personal approach is due in part to economic shifts on the dance market: the lack of funds available for big budget companies with large casts, or the need to accommodate individual capabilities, for instance (Foster 1997, Bales and Nettle-Fiol 2008, Kedhar 2014). I argue that it may also be due in part to the increased focus on individualism and personal freedom as a result of the proliferation of neoliberal values. Dancers today are increasingly expected to possess strong improvisation skills and a unique approach to movement whether it is set choreography or self-developed phrases. Gaga thrives in the contemporary moment

because it works on the qualities that marketable dancers must excel in today: the ability to self-direct, move quickly between styles and movement dynamics, and perform highly textured improvisation.

In order to demonstrate this asset of stylistic flexibility, the dancer must showcase their abilities in terms of their range of movement and dynamics and the ability to contrast them. While the stated intention of Gaga is to be an internal exploration, it nevertheless exists within the framework of a larger neoliberal dance economy in which students are more frequently asked to demonstrate skills than invest in personal movement research. Thus, students often use Gaga classes as a laboratory not only for internal research, but also to play with ways of exhibiting their metacognitive knowledge about employing dynamic and stylistic range. This is particularly true in Gaga intensives, where the stakes of demonstrating this knowledge are higher for dancers on the job market who hope to impress their teachers. This training is explicitly acknowledged by dancers to be beneficial in training for the contemporary dance market. Many of the dancers I interviewed indicated the need to excel at improvisation in auditions, and praised Gaga for developing these skills. A recent college graduate currently training in Europe, Clemons explained that she continues doing Gaga because she finds it personally enjoyable, but also important for professional development:

Particularly because lots of choreographers are looking for collaborative dancers, and dancers that have improvisation experience, and even though we talked about that it's actually a quite structured improvisation class, there are those moments, especially as classes get to the end, where you're just given complete freedom to play with the tools you've been given. I think I've become a much better improvisational dancer since starting Gaga, which in today's dance world is I think pretty invaluable when you're looking for work. And also, hitting back on this idea of maturity as a dancer, I think that's been really beneficial, that I now

am self-motivated to find you know, if a choreographer isn't spelling out for me, like this may be deep and rich environment below the movement, to have the motivation from me to find that for myself, and to make this world that I'm in, I think that's really helpful professionally. (Meredith Clemons in conversation with the author, July 2015)

While Gaga's contribution to the professionalization of dancers is focused on individual growth, this shift towards a neoliberal dance economy based on rampant individualism does not negate the ethos of competition that is the cornerstone of earlier dance economies.⁹⁵ While Gaga does not enforce competition between dancers in terms of excelling at particular movements that are easily judged against one another, it does support the type of individual pressure to maintain constant growth to continuously prove one's ability within a frequently shifting dance economy. This is fitting in a neoliberal context, where the prevalence of contract and short-term work encourages competition for workers to constantly prove their worth and earn further employment. Although Gaga may not be designed as a neoliberal training method, it is well suited to be adopted by its participants to thrive in the demands of contemporary markets through an emphasis on personal research and self-development.

⁹⁵ By earlier dance economies, I am referring to the predominance of form-based techniques in the early American modern dance era, and the need for dancers to outperform others in particular techniques in order to obtain a higher status in a hierarchically-structured company. Though this is still prevalent in many ballet companies today, increasingly modern/contemporary dance companies today have rejected hierarchical models of company structures that encourage competition among dancers in similar ranks that want to move up in the company.

3.4 Conclusion

Gaga, as an increasingly popular training tool for contemporary concert dancers, teaches skills that have been deemed important by many choreographers for dancers in the current moment. Gaga's emphasis on improvisation and dynamic range are crucial for adhering to contemporary aesthetic interests and choreographic methods, and the focus on efficiency and availability allows dancers to utilize this individual work for professional gain. Gaga's focus on these dancerly values often overlap with neoliberal values, such as efficiency, competition, and precarious working conditions, though Gaga also values affect in a way that is often seen as contradictory to neoliberal progress. These skills are taught in open Gaga/dancer classes and explored even deeper in Gaga intensives. In framing the intensive space as a competitive one, I highlight the prevalence of economic pressures on dancers as they partake in Gaga. Although this movement language may not have been designed to further neoliberal agendas of personal freedom and personal development for economic gain, Gaga is easily subsumed in this process because of its applicability to contemporary demands in dance markets. This analysis of Gaga may prove useful for understanding the plights of the precariat and what they must do to remain competitive in today's economic markets, but it also questions the impact that economics can have on artistic practices in particular. Gaga's focus on independent research appears to align with these neoliberal values of freedom, constant progress, and competition, suggesting that artistic goals are not the only values that can be enacted through the practice of Gaga. As neoliberal economics continue to be a dominant model internationally, forcing individuals to remain competitive and economically motivated in

all sectors of life, then practices such as Gaga that are used by dancers for professional development remain pressured by the need to make progress for professional development and job security in the contemporary dance market. As long as these neoliberal pressures remain, dance training such as Gaga cannot be considered as artistic practice devoid of external economic influence. In acknowledging this relationship between dance and economics, we are able to better understand how the corporealization of Gaga practice exists in tension with neoliberal values.

Conclusion

During my research for this project, I was often physically separated from vibrant Gaga communities. Living in Los Angeles, a city where recurring Gaga classes did not become available until 2015, I kept up with Gaga news through digital media in between research trips. I receive the monthly Gaga newsletter from Gaga Movement Ltd. with announcements about classes, workshops, and intensives around the world, and follow the vast social media presence of Gaga on Facebook (there are separate Facebook pages for nearly every workshop and intensive, as well as more general Gaga pages). It was through one of these mediums that I first heard about the movie *Mr. Gaga*, a documentary that covers the artistic and personal journey of Ohad Naharin from childhood to his current status as a world-renowned choreographer and the developer of the Gaga movement language. The recent developments surrounding this movie's popularity, and thus its representation of Gaga, have reminded me of the stakes of my own research and my efforts to complicate the Gaga narrative by considering the politics and cultural histories embedded in and enacted through this practice.

The documentary, directed by Israeli filmmaker Tomer Heymann, focuses more on the "*Mr.*" part of the subject than "*Gaga.*" The film consists of archival materials as well as footage shot by Heymann over the course of eight years, and is intended to "dispel the mystery around the man named Ohad Naharin" (Heymann Brothers 2016). I first encountered footage from this documentary in December of 2013, when the Heymann Brothers (the film production company of Tomer Heymann and his brother Barak Heymann) began a Kickstarter campaign to obtain funds to complete their film.

They had been capturing footage of Naharin and his work with the Batsheva Dance Company for years, but needed extra funding to support the lengthy editing process required to work through this immense amount of footage. I was just starting my doctoral exams, and knew this would be a valuable resource on public representations of Gaga once I started writing my dissertation, so I donated enough to get a digital copy of the film when it was completed: \$30.

I quickly received a portion of my donation reward: postcards featuring photos of Batsheva dancers taken by the Batsheva Dance Company house photographer Gadi Dagon, a thank you letter, and a copy of one of the Heymann Brothers' earlier movies. I was notified that the film could not be disseminated to the backers until the film was out of theaters, and so the wait began. The *Mr. Gaga* Facebook page has been an important source of news during this lengthy waiting period, celebrating awards the film has won in festivals and notifying backers of the theatrical release in Israel. Just as I was beginning to write this conclusion, I came across a new post on the *Mr. Gaga* Facebook page. It was posted in Hebrew, but it translates to:

The good news - "Mister Gaga" won the Audience Award at SXSW in Texas, too! The better news - soon the film is going to reach many, many more screenings across the country! April is going to be an amazing month, and we hope you will join us 😊 details soon... (Facebook, Inc. 2016)



Image 5 - Screenshot of Mr. Gaga: a film by Tomer Heymann's Facebook page, taken by author on March 24, 2016.

I also continue to receive occasional updates about the film's theatrical releases, the largest being within Israel. The latest reached my inbox during the process of writing this conclusion. Part of the update sent via email on March 25, 2016 by the Heymann Brothers' Kickstarter page affirmed the growing popularity of the film alluded to in the Facebook post quoted above:

We are currently waiting for responses from a number of distributing companies in the United States so please cross your fingers that this movie will get the successful and widespread distribution that we believe it deserves. In May, the film will appear in movie theaters in Germany, in June in France, and later on also in Sweden, Poland, and Italy.

The festival awards and growing number of theatrical releases affirms the popularity of this documentary, and thus the dominant narratives being circulated about both Naharin and Gaga.

I was able to see a screening of an early edit of *Mr. Gaga* in August of 2015 during the Gaga intensive I attended in Tel Aviv, which allows me to summarize the narratives and bias presented about Gaga in this film. The film had been created with support from the Batsheva Dance Company and Ohad Naharin, who approved the use of personal archival materials, interviews of himself, his family, and his dancers, and access to his studios and performances for the filming of raw footage. Thus, it was not surprising that the Gaga organization – which has significant overlap with the Batsheva Dance Company in terms of artists and teachers, though not always administration – and the Heymann brothers collaborated to offer a screening for the Gaga students. Though this was still a draft, and thus some scenes would still be added, deleted, or moved after my viewing for the current iteration being shown at festivals and in theaters, the bulk of the

material was described as final cut during a talkback with Barak Heymann after the screening. The reaction of the Gaga students to this showing was overwhelmingly positive. The footage was visually stunning, and images of some now-familiar local Israeli dancers at Gaga classes and choreography we had been learning during the intensive elicited some laughs and cheers from the audience. Clips of Naharin's personal life, studio process, and Batsheva performances also allowed for a look behind the scenes of an artist that many Gaga students deeply admire. The film tells several narratives, such as Naharin's childhood growing up on a kibbutz, his marriage with Alvin Ailey dancer Mari Kajiwarra and her subsequent death from cancer in 2001, his current relationship with former Batsheva dancer Eri Nakamura and their child Noga, and his rehearsal process with the Batsheva Dance Company.

What I found most striking about the film was not the personal history, but rather the constant admiration shown for Naharin and his work. The issue of bias is common in documentaries, but this film showed virtually no effort to attempt to hide its favoritism. The tone of the movie was reverent, with no critique of his history or work. This was not necessarily surprising: as I observed interviewing and speaking with Gaga teachers and others who have prolonged contact with Naharin, those who work with him overwhelmingly speak of him in an entirely positive manner. In the video announcing their Kickstarter campaign the Heymann Brothers showed a clip with them interacting with Naharin, showcasing their friendly nature, offering the first clue of the potential bias within the documentary. The way the trailer for the movie is produced also points towards this obvious predisposition towards an idolization of Naharin: positive reviews

of Naharin's work flash on the screen over clips of his choreography⁹⁶ followed by the promise to tell "the exciting life story of the boy from the kibbutz who changed the world of dance" ("IDFA 2015") as if there was only one famous boy to ever come from a kibbutz and influence Israeli dance.⁹⁷ As the film shows, this praise is not entirely unwarranted. Naharin has indeed become an incredibly influential figure in contemporary dance, as has his choreography and movement language, Gaga. Yet this flattering documentary misses an opportunity to critically interrogate the complexities of Naharin's work, a common pitfall of the various media representing Gaga. It is such simplistic representations that circulate so strongly in the dance community that this dissertation seeks to disrupt by considering Gaga's multilayered politics.

A key example of this film's unwillingness to critique or question Naharin is its representation of Naharin's self-narration of how he discovered his passion to move. I remember watching this scene, having already researched Naharin's background and interviewed his brother Yossi, and being confused. A voiceover by Naharin told the story of how he had been a twin, but his twin had tragically died at a young age, and he had become nearly mute. He explained that this grandmother danced with him, and that it was only through dancing that he began to return to normal after this tragedy. The narrative was long and emotional, with a lot of details, and was placed over home footage of Naharin dancing as a child on the kibbutz. Though some of the details rang true to my

⁹⁶ These comments include "one of the most important choreographers in the world" by *The New York Times* and "the most widely worshipped guru of modern dance" by *Dance Magazine*.

⁹⁷ Israeli dance journalist Giora Manor has covered the unique rise of dancers from kibbutz backgrounds, including Naharin as well as internationally famous choreographers Rami Be'er, Liat Dror, and Nir Ben-Gal (Manor 1994).

knowledge of Naharin's past, I had never heard this narrative before. Later in the film, Naharin confirms that this story was false, and that he had never had a twin. He describes how he has told this story to reporters before, exemplifying Naharin's tendency to disregard the idea of a single, stable truth. Though the film acknowledges the intentional lie, letting the audience in on Naharin's joke, this peculiar choice of offering a detailed false narrative and what it says about Naharin's personality and self-representation in the media is not further investigated. The inconsistencies of Naharin's self-narrative are evident to anyone who reads through each of his interviews and public talks. Naharin has publically claimed to have a bad memory, but the intentional telling of false narratives indicates that these inconsistencies are not just accidents. Rather, it indicates Naharin's intentional mockery of the idea of truth and the formation of narratives around celebrity figures. In an article on the making of *Mr. Gaga*, journalist Sonia Marmari describes Naharin as: "a serial refuser of interviews, a man who mocks celebrity and the superficialization of the dance world" (Marmari 2014). Even as the documentary claims to attempt to unravel the mysteries that surround Naharin and his work, it appears that the film is too closely tied to adhering to Naharin's self-narrative and intentional mockery of the idea of himself as a celebrity figure to truly "dispel the mystery" (Heymann Brothers 2016) of this choreographer and his work. Combined with the lack of critical scholarship on Gaga to unpack the many contradictory statements about Naharin and Gaga alike, such representations of the practice and its history leave a large gap for scholarship that challenges commonly made assumptions about Gaga and the "pleasure" it evokes.

The overwhelming support for Naharin demonstrated by the film is further bolstered in popular culture by the support of famous dancers and actors who were interviewed for the *Mr. Gaga* project. My favorite interview, now posted on the front of the Gaga homepage, is with Natalie Portman. This famous actress drew a great deal of popular attention to the dance world when she portrayed a ballerina cast in the leading role of a production of *Swan Lake* in the 2010 film *Black Swan*, directed by Darren Aronofsky. Although she had no formal dance training prior to the movie, and used a body double for most of the dance scenes in the film, Portman did begin training in ballet prior to shooting. In addition to her ballet classes, she also studied Gaga. This information is relayed through an interview shot in Studio Dalia, a floor-level studio at the Suzanne Dellal Center in Tel Aviv, Israel. In the full video, she recounts how she studied Gaga while in Israel and eventually trained directly with Naharin. She refers to Naharin's influence on her dancing in the film and how he encouraged her to keep finding pleasure in movement, a phrase that is often repeated in Gaga classes. In a clip now posted on the front page of the English-language Gaga website, she shares a ringing endorsement of Gaga:

Gaga had a huge impression on me because there was so much about, first of all, finding your own way of moving, that it wasn't like: 'This is the step and you have to do it.' It was: 'What do you do with this idea? Like, take this idea and then make the movement that your body makes.' And everyone's movement is different. [Gaga] is a way of healing, I mean, people heal their injuries with this language. People express themselves in a very personal way with this language. And the language isn't like a set vocabulary that everyone has to learn; it's like a vocabulary that you are asked to create yourself, too. So it's like every person who uses this language will have their own dialect. (Portman 2013)

In this clip, Portman praises the individuality welcomed in Gaga's practice and its ability to heal injuries, positioning herself as a clear Gaga fan.

The placement of such a famous participant on the first digital entry point to accessing Gaga, and the frequent use of clips of this interview in relation to advertising for the *Mr. Gaga* film, is a very strategic marketing tool that represents Gaga as a part of popular (read: not just dance-specific) culture.⁹⁸ Not only does she provide a succinct and simple explanation of Gaga that is accessible to both dancers and non-dancers, supported by a wholehearted personal endorsement, but she also adds cultural cachet to the practice by virtue of her celebrity status. The inclusion of Portman specifically on the Gaga homepage, rather than a celebrity from within the concert dance world, is also striking because Gaga circulates almost exclusively in the dance world outside of the Israeli context: actors and non-dancers rarely attend classes in the US and Europe. The draw of learning to dance in the method that Batsheva's dancers train in is enough to continue bringing dancers to Gaga, thus it appears as if there is a marketing strategy geared towards non-dance communities in order to further expand the practice to people who would not readily self-identify as dancers.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Clips featuring Natalie Portman (Portman 2013) are also seen in an article announcing the showing of the film at SXSW (Davis 2016) as well as at the top video that automatically plays when visiting the Heymann Brothers YouTube channel (Heymannbrothersfilms 2016).

⁹⁹ I interviewed Deborah Friedes Galili and Yossi Naharin, at the time of the interview the Communications and Website Director And Executive Director respectively for Gaga Movement Ltd., and asked them directly about the marketing agenda regarding the Natalie Portman video on the website. Galili explained that they had so little video of Gaga that any clips of dancing that were passed along to them, they posted: "we didn't talk, I think, really, that much about that decision. ... that clip really came out simply from what Tomer was doing with the *Mr. Gaga* film. In a sense, we don't have a huge

I offer this critique of *Mr. Gaga* and its reverent representation of Naharin and his work not to dismiss the movie – in fact, I find it visually stunning – but rather to point out the overwhelmingly uncritical narratives that continue to emerge surrounding the practice of Gaga. In the film, for instance, although Gaga is presented in an Israeli context it is done only to celebrate it, and not to critically consider the influence this culture may have on the development of Gaga. This sort of uncritical praise heaped on to Naharin and Gaga demonstrated by Portman and many others in the film is also representative of many Gaga participants: I have spoken with many Gaga students who treat it as a therapeutic and life-changing practice. It is not just a blind mimicry of Gaga’s advertising materials, which similarly promote the idea of Gaga as both artistically and physically transformative, but rather the result of a visceral reaction to the pleasure that is so often encountered in the Gaga studio. The movement done in Gaga so often *feels* good, both physically and emotionally, indicating a sharp contrast from the often-painful practice of form-based techniques. I, too, have found moments of pleasure in Gaga classes that were both physically and emotionally cathartic. Yet these moments, which initially made me shy away from writing about Gaga, do not cancel out the complicated politics of the practice even if journalists and participants continue to focus on these moments when discussing Gaga.

amount of video. So when we get something that's useable, it's really lovely to use it.” (Deborah Friedes Galili in conversation with the author, August 2015). Both she and Yossi Naharin stated that it was not a conscious marketing agenda, and that if they were interested in making a strategic marketing move they would have plenty of people to interview that were supportive of Gaga. In spite of their dismissal of this post as a strategic marketing move, its presence and its (pop) cultural significance remains noteworthy.

In this dissertation I sought to challenge these narratives that present Gaga as the apolitical, universalist, inherently pleasurable creation of a singular artistic genius that is to be trusted implicitly: Ohad Naharin. Instead, I considered the complexity of Gaga both theoretically and politically. Rather than relying on descriptions of Gaga coming from its creator, I focused on my own embodied experience and statements from other Gaga dancers, teachers, and administrators. This method allowed for critical distance from rhetoric about how Gaga is intended to be or should be experienced. This ethnographic research was followed by an analysis of these experiences through various critical theories, exposing the many complicated layers of Gaga. I did not intend to write a new narrative of Gaga, as if the existing popular perception of Gaga was incorrect and needed to be rewritten, but instead attempted to indicate that there are multiple narratives, histories, and politics embedded in this practice that must be recognized alongside the overwhelmingly flattering rhetoric that is so often used to describe (and, in my opinion, depoliticize) Gaga.

In Chapter 1, I suggested that the strategic move to call Gaga a movement language rather than a technique conveys much more than just a refusal of the term technique, which is politically loaded in its own right. It also indicates a pedagogical shift within Gaga from the imposition of a single form-based technique to a meta-technique that teaches students strategies for employing multiple techniques that already exist within their bodies. I argued that this approach to other techniques needs to be decolonized by recognizing the ways in which it emphasizes Europeanist techniques, and acknowledged that the act of being able to pick and choose from a variety of techniques

reinforces the logics of white privilege often seen in the history of modern dance and its early white performers' appropriation from non-Euro-American cultures. In this way, I challenge the commonly held idea that Gaga's claim to break bodily habits and go beyond familiar limits is rooted in a universalizing idea of natural or free movement available to all bodies. Rather, it is a consciously cultivated and politically loaded process of abstraction and appropriation, primarily being applied to dancers trained in Western concert dance practices. This analysis of Gaga's relationship to the idea and histories of techniques reinforces the presence of racial and cultural histories and politics embedded within the pedagogy and practice of Gaga.

Chapter 2 focuses on the national politics of Gaga as an Israeli practice. The representation of Gaga as Israeli is not new. Although Gaga is often represented in more universalist ways, appealing to the idea that "every body" can do it and that the sensations explored in class are something everyone can experience, its Israeli roots are not masked. The Gaga website is available in both English and Hebrew, Naharin's biography on the website clearly indicates his Israeli childhood and current residence, and the biggest Gaga event each year – the summer intensive in Tel Aviv – requires students to travel to Israel. Yet what is overlooked, without fail, are the cultural and international politics of associating this practice with the State of Israel. Rather than an analysis of Gaga in relation to the ongoing cultural boycott of Israel, in this chapter I considered the ways in which Gaga may be embodying specifically Israeli cultural values stemming from early Zionist politics such as open access to the practice, strong bodies, and the blending of European and non-European cultural practices. I suggested that the

potential to embody a contemporary Israeli-ness (and, thus, Zionist values) through a practice of Gaga must be acknowledged in order to understand the deeply rooted ways in which Zionist politics can circulate within culture, even if done subconsciously and inadvertently. I do not argue that the values embodied are necessarily negative, rather that they hold culturally and politically specific relevance when considered in the Israeli context. Considering the controversial role Israel plays in both regional and international politics and the growing movement against Zionism, I argue that it is important for cultural actors – such as dancers and performers – to be aware and critical of the politics embedded in their practices and aesthetics and the potential harm they may have. As scholars on the Israeli/Palestinian political situation have noted, the normalization of Israeli culture as universally accessible does not just benefit Israeli society and artists, but also undermines the atrocities of ongoing military and cultural violence that the State of Israel continues to enact on its Palestinian neighbors. By acknowledging the embodiment of Zionist values in Gaga, then, I take a step towards recognizing the cultural inequalities in the Israeli/Palestinian context and the socio-political privileges afforded to both Gaga and its participants.

In Chapter 3, I moved from the specificity of the Israeli context to analyze Gaga's place in international dance communities and economies. I suggested that the simultaneous rise of both Gaga and neoliberalism beginning in the 1980s makes Gaga an excellent case study for the place of neoliberalism in contemporary dance training. I analyzed the presence of neoliberal values such as independence and efficiency within Gaga's work instructions, and then unpacked how neoliberal economies shape students'

participations in Gaga intensives. Throughout, I argued that Gaga both upholds and challenges the core values of neoliberalism. A prime example of this contradiction is how Gaga's focus on affects such as pleasure and bodily sensations challenges the neoliberal focus on financialization rather than material reality while at the same time employing this attention to affect in order to increase dancers' movement efficiency. This case study analyzes Gaga within the context of neoliberal values and economic systems, acknowledging the pressures put on its dance participants, and also adds an embodied analysis to the neoliberal discourse that so often remains theoretical and decontextualized. Building on the work of other dance scholars working on labor and globalization, this analysis of Gaga illustrates new ways in which dance can both embrace, challenge, and move forward broader economic and social frameworks that shape how dancers approach training systems.

Beyond the individual scope of each chapter, this project focused exclusively on practice rather than performance contexts. This is a critical choice that builds on a small number of scholarly studies on practice and training methods,¹⁰⁰ thus challenging the dominance of performance analysis within the field of dance studies. While many studies of dance and performance acknowledge training and technique as an important element leading toward performance, these works overwhelmingly privilege analysis of the performance as the pinnacle of the subject matter. Yet, dance studies as a field creates an

¹⁰⁰ Some notable studies of training and technique that have been cited throughout this work include Bales and Nettle-Fiol 2008, Monroe 2011, Foster 1997 and 2010, and Galili 2015. There are also some important in-depth studies of specific techniques and practices (such as Horosko 2002), but these are primarily focused on the physicality of the practice with little analysis from a critical cultural or political perspective.

important space to privilege practice and process as valid sites of research. Through an attention to the body in motion, dance scholars are able to analyze the socio-political and interpersonal significance of movement, regardless of the context. Drawing on discourses of technique and bodily training such as Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the *habitus*, among others, dance scholars acknowledge that the process of creating movement – even with no choreographic end goal or conscious decision to produce and replicate a given movement – has value and meaning. Scholars interested in improvisation – such as Cynthia Novack (1990), Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere (2003), and Danielle Goldman (2010), among others – reinforce this concept of the innate value of movement regardless of its connection to choreography, which has so long been a guiding concept in the field of dance studies. This is a unique contribution to the wider discourses of performance studies, which are so often focused on analyzing the distinct choices made by artists rather than the process of training that informs the final product. To reinforce the value of recognizing the creative process and training as a subject in and of itself, which is not subservient to a choreographic goal, I avoided any prolonged attention to the choreographic productions of Naharin that are tangentially related to the practice of Gaga. The fact that Gaga exists as a separate organization apart from the Batsheva Dance Company, and thus can circulate without a direct tie to choreography, provided the initial justification for this strong focus on the training process.

I also intended to contribute to the fields of Israel and Palestine studies through this work, offering a critical analysis of a dance product coming out of Israel and the cultural politics of its international circulation. I have seen very little scholarship on the

cultural boycott of Israel beyond journalism, activists' statements, and interviews about the issue with respected academics such as Noam Chomsky, which is likely due in part to its relatively new level of international support and its extremely controversial nature.¹⁰¹ Rather than focusing on the boycott itself, which elicits very strong opinions from many different perspectives and adheres to a very specific set of guidelines that are ripe for further analysis in another project, I analyzed the politics embedded within the practice of Gaga and how they may both align with and challenge nationalist politics such as Zionism. Applying a dance studies perspective to the cultural politics of an Israeli dance practice acknowledges the ways in which the bodies that practice Gaga embody political values, as well as noting the bodies that are not present in these studios. Analysis of the physicality of bodies requires an attention to the actual bodies that are in the space, and who may be barred from entrance. While I did not suggest that Gaga actively discriminates against any person or group of people, I noted the structural frameworks of the Gaga organization – as with any other Israeli company, by virtue of its state affiliation – that serve to continue the normalization of Israeli culture as internationally accessible without acknowledging the difficulty that Palestinians and Israel's non-Jewish

¹⁰¹ Within the academic community the BDS movement experienced a strong moment of popularity in 2013 and 2014, which has continued to grow since. Particularly in the US context, debates ran rampant over the legitimacy of an academic boycott following the American Studies Association's vote to support the BDS movement in December 2013 and several similar votes being held in other academic organizations. Palestinian activism within the academy has continued to be a controversial issue, seen particularly in the rescinded tenure-track job offer to Steven Salaita (an American Indian Studies scholar who also writes on the intersections of indigenous communities in America and Palestinians) following some Twitter remarks critical of the State of Israel during the state's Operation Protective Edge attack on Gaza in the summer of 2014 and the continued debates about the call for civility in debates about Israel.

geographical neighbors may have in accessing the practice. In spite of the common claim that Gaga is open to every body, and encourages experiences of freedom, my analysis suggested that this is only true insofar as people are granted access to the studios, which requires economic and social freedom.

I view this work of recognizing the layers of complexity embedded in the practice of Gaga as an increasingly important project, and one that requires further research particularly in light of the growing popularity of simplified representations of Gaga as seen in the film *Mr. Gaga*. Further research on Naharin and his intentionally crafted public persona requires more investigation, as does further analysis of Gaga's function in various communities and geographical locations. Studies of Gaga's influences from other dance practices that should be undertaken include Naharin's interest in Butoh and Japanese culture as a whole, illustrated not just by his romantic relationships with women of Japanese origin but also the inclusion of Butoh-inspired approaches to bodily expression in Gaga and Japanese words in the Gaga lexicon. There are already important studies underway about the potential healing and therapeutic nature of Gaga, which are also valuable projects. Still, I argue that further attention must be paid specifically to the political and cultural complexities of Gaga's practice. This project serves as an initial foray into the many layers of Gaga's socio-political significance, which I hope will be followed by many more studies from a variety of perspectives.

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