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Competition Dance: Redefining Dance in the United States

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in

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Competition Dance: Redefining Dance
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by

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One of the most prevalent forms of dance training for young dancers in the United States, competitive dance has a significant role in the production of dance. This dissertation examines the multiple and various structures that construct this site of dance. Initially this project locates corporate competition dance within other familiar practices that characterize American culture while also considering the unique rules and regulations that frame dance within this context. In this project I call for an understanding of the distinct characteristics of the competition body that make it similar to but still unlike any other dancing body currently housed in the archive of dance studies. In addition, the role of this body in popular culture is explored through its presentation on the reality show *So You Think You Can Dance*. In particular, I examine how the competition body, in contrast to the hip hop dancer, becomes racially marked and how the marking of both bodies results in a presentation of dance as spectacle. The final chapter of this dissertation draws upon the theories established in the three preceding chapters as I argue for the position of competition as a technology that enables

and sustains hegemonic structures of the State. Through the inclusion of political theory and an understanding of how bodies work in relation to State structures I establish competition dance as a site that recreates the United State's practice of white nation building.

This project is a cultural analysis of competition dance within the United States and the American culture. Merging dance studies with cultural and media studies as well as political theory, I look at what is produced and reproduced at the site competition through the dancing body as well as the aesthetic and practice of competition. With a distinct focus on the systems that construct and contribute to competition dance I seek to place this dance practice in relation to the many others that have been well articulated by scholarship. In doing so, I hope to foreground competitive dance within the production of dance in the United States, and globally, in the 21st century.

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Introduction

As a first year dance major at a well-known art school, I was working on the stage crew for a graduate student dance showcase. While going through our duties with the technical director for the dance program, I asked a relatively simple question, "How many numbers are in the show?" Expecting a simple answer, I was caught off guard by his firm response, "We don't do numbers here, we do pieces." At that time I had heard people refer to dance work as "pieces" but I could not recall a time in which "numbers" didn't suffice for what I was trying to communicate. Until that moment, I knew dances literally as numbers, entry numbers which indicated program sequence. This was the first moment in which I realized that the dance I had know before college did not look like the dance I would be immersed in during college.

I was thirteen the first time I watched a dance competition and I thought the dancers were stars, celebrities in the making. I had danced for as long as I could remember, but had never been given a chance to feel like a star. I was fifteen when I first competed a solo and I won 1st place. It validated what I had always hoped was true, that I was a great dancer. I began to see the possibilities of my future as a dancer through competition. I learned quickly the importance of shaping my body and my mind to fit this space of dance. Competition offered me, as with many young dancers, a place of performance that doesn't exist in most towns and cities in the United States. Competition felt serious, like it was the real life of a dancer. I truly believe it was the best preparation for my future as a professional dancer. It wasn't until I got to college that I realized how unique this world of dance that I was accustomed to truly was.

The Project of Competition Dance

Emerging out of traveling workshops and conventions, dance competitions have gained prominence in American dance practice and education since the mid 1970s. Two types of competitions currently exist. The first structure of competition closely resembles its origins as the competition is affiliated with a convention/workshop. Competitions associated with conventions only allow participants that are enrolled in the convention workshop classes. However, an additional fee is required to compete; it is not included in the cost of workshop tuition. These events are usually shorter, as the primary focus of the overall event is one to two days of master classes. The newer model of competition, first utilized by Showstopper Competition in 1979, only hosts a competition and allows for a much longer competition event. Unlike dance team or other similar competitive practices, dance competitions are not united under a single national governing body. Instead, each competition organization is a for profit corporation. Because of this each organization has varying rules, regulations and systems. However, the general structure is the same for all dance competitions.

No matter what model of competition is in place or the specifics of the corporation, each competition relies on a system of categorization that sets each dance within an age division, category (dependant upon the number of dancers performing), and style or genre (determined from the dance forms performed in the dance). That is to say, the structure of competition is not simply many dances all competing "against" each other. Instead, the event is broken up systematically, much like the use of weight class in boxing, to ensure that dances are being judged against like dances. While genre is used

in this systematic break down, age and category are most often maintained in the determination of "overall" awards, at which point like dance techniques and styles are compared and contrasted via the score each dance achieved during its performance. Though the details of each competitions awards process and structure vary, there are normative structures from which the specifics are determined.

Each competition has a judging panel, typically three or four for a regional event and four to six for a national, which adjudicates each dance. The judging criteria can vary for each competition but generally includes a focus on technique, choreography, costuming and overall presentation. Some competition corporations assign a numerical or percentage value to these and other specific criteria. However, it is the overall score assigned by each individual judge and combined with the total number of judges that determine the scoring and placement of each entry number. In addition to the awards that result from the numerical scores, most competitions also award a variety of "special" awards that can range from those conceived of by the judges or more standardized ones such as "best costume" and "best choreography".

Differing from other competitive forms, such as gymnastics or ice skating, this type of dance competition never requires certain movements to be performed and the judging rubric is often more subjective. Even those competitions that have a list of judging criteria do not have a prescribed list of expectations or movements for any dance. The result then, even when competitions offer an additional system of categorization for skill level of dancers (i.e. recreational versus competitive), is a wide variety of movements and skill levels even in individual categories and age divisions. In this

manner competitions, despite the sport-like structure of dance, maintain the subjective nature of dancer wherein movement and composition aesthetics can vary widely. Moreover, this encourages the constant and, often times, rapid, evolution of dance practices within the circuit and industry of dance competitions. This evolution of competitions over the last 30 years has resulted in the development of a complex and unique site of dance as it has adapted to fit the needs and desires of the larger American dance culture while also constructed new elements of the larger American dance culture.

While the awards and results of the competition appear to be the primary goal of competition, many corporations maintain an educational element by providing judges' critique during regional events. This critique can take the form of hand written response to many of the judging criteria. Other forms include verbal adjudication either on audio tape or, more recently, on a DVD critique. These critiques not only provide information for improving the dances but also give each dance, regardless of awards or placement, a tangible object of value to reflect the participation of its dancers. These critiques are generally geared towards the most common clientele, private dance studio owners and teachers.

As a driving force for many dance studios across the country, competition has begun to shape the lives of many young dancers in the United States. As studio owners and teachers begin to locate their own teaching practices within the structure of competition, the dance training of their students begins to adapt, sometimes with competition being the guiding force for the pedagogical structure. Evident in industry magazines like *Dance Teacher*, the methods for and effects of training young dancers

from competition are often debated. Some fear for the physical (for example, poor alignment, which may lead to injury) or emotional (how does it affect self-esteem?) results, while others question the artistic integrity and training of dancers at this site. Meanwhile, others see competition as an excellent performance opportunity for students, which simultaneously expose them to dance beyond their studio, which encourages individual growth and group unity. Though many in the dance world, including competition participants, hotly debate the function and purpose of competition its effects and importance are clear. Competition, for better or worse, is a primary site of dance training for many amateur dancers, across many backgrounds and experiences, throughout the United States.

Since my first experience with competition dance almost fifteen years ago, it has unexpectedly become prominent in my life. I anticipated its departure from my life when I went off to pursue dance at the collegiate level however, the result of a job opportunity, competition dance is the most common type of dance I experience today. While enrolled as both an undergraduate and graduate student in dance I have simultaneously work seasonally as a regional director for two dance competition organizations, Danceamerica and International Dance Challenge. Through my positions at these organizations I have expanded my familiarity of this particular industry of dance from that of a participant to an employee. Moreover, there have also been periods of time within my work as a competition employee that I have also been a dance teacher and choreographer at a competitive studio. As a result, I have experienced many potential roles within competition.

This project emerges out of my own complex and, sometimes, confusing experience of participating in dance competitions, made even more complex by my experience and growth within the scholarly site of collegiate dance. Although this is *not* an ethnographic project, the trajectory of this work is largely influenced by my own experiences that have left me with a desire to merge dance competition into and in relation to other structures of dance. Moreover, I hope to reveal the details that led me to understand dances as only "numbers" as well as those elements that placed my dancing body in conversation with so many others long before I could even conceptualize other industries and communities of dance.

In order to alleviate the seemingly endless gap between my own two worlds of dance, competition and collegiate, I began this project by placing dance competitions within the context of dance scholarship. Though the field of dance studies has not directly addressed competitions, many of its primary characteristics are developed from American social, entertainment and concert dance forms. The structure of competition, including the categorization of dance styles and techniques, closely relates to other normative American dance structures. For example, the use of a proscenium stage as well as the expectations and notions of the dancing body clearly locate competition within concert dance. Therefore, the application of dance studies to the topic provides an understanding of the dancing bodies' training and performance as well as illuminates lacks in dance studies' understanding of the current dancing body.

The work of authors such as Ann Cooper Albright, Jane, Desmond, Susan Foster, and Randy Martin, all of whom have done extensive work addressing the dancing body,

will be utilized to parse out the dancing body found on the competition stage. Moreover, these authors will also assist in reading and theorizing the composition of movement and bodies on the stage. The current understanding of how the dancing body is constructed and performs within formal training methods will begin to reveal the functions of the body performing at competition. However, the application of the field of dance studies will also reveal the many elements of competition dance that make it distinct from traditional structures of concert dance in the United States. The unique limitations and alterations created by the structure of competition make it impossible to view this site entirely through the methods established for concert dance. The use of dance studies within the project will ensure that the dancing body, which is central to the function of this site of dance, will be accounted for both in training and performance as a variation upon the concert dance body.

Though dance competitions are mostly comprised of young white female dancing bodies, dance theorists who have focused their work on the performance of gender, sexuality and race will also be included in order to complicate the seeming simplicity of the performing bodies. Moreover, other authors who have worked in various aspects of cultural studies will add to the complexity as their work address bodies beyond the dance stage. Authors such as E. Patrick Johnson and Robyn Weigman will enhance the complexities of racial performativity while others, such as Judith Butler and Peggy Phelan, will bring the concern of gender and sexuality to the surface of an exploration of competition. It should be noted that because the makeup of participants predominantly consists of females (for example, in an event with 300 females there is

generally fewer than six males), this project does little to address the role of male bodies at competition. Although the complexities of these bodies is also worthy of investigation, particularly as they *always* play masculine parts in a hetero-normative matrix, it is not a topic of discussion within this version of this project. As a result, male bodies are rarely theorized for their gender or sexuality within this manuscript.

Because the training of bodies at competition also is closely related to popular culture other theorists, such as Louis Althusser, Jean Baudrillard, and Henri Lefebvre, help make sense of the relationship of competition to a postmodern mediated world as previously theorized within the field of cultural studies. In many ways, competition functions as a microcosm of the larger American culture, constantly reflecting and creating aspects of popular culture. Toby Miller's work on sport and John Berger's theorizations of art address the complex layers of this form of dance in relation to popular culture. Addressing various elements of cultural studies, in particular popular, consumer and mediated culture, is central in understanding the construction and evolution of dance competition and related aesthetics.

The last field that this project will incorporate is not only the least the obvious at first glance of dance competitions but it is also the most crucial. The field of political studies is used in an analysis of the disciplining of bodies found at competition, revealing the manner in which these practices reflect those of the State. The intensive bodily training necessary for successful participation on the competition stage results in bodies that participate and concede to a particular bodily construction that promotes a an identity that serves to maintain State structures. That is to say, by constructing and maintaining

subjects—young, white female identities, in a heterosexual matrix—that uphold structures of power via the domination of nonwhite bodies, dance competitions are working alongside the apparatus of the State in its racial project of white nation building. This construction becomes evident through the training of the body and identity constructed on, and by, the participants, as well as in the various relationships competition, and its subjects, have to flows of capital. Moreover, non-dominant bodies are appropriated in a manner that ensures their incorporation into dominant structures, suppressing any transgressive elements.

Supporting the construction of non-transgressive bodies is the power structure established through the competitive system. Here, the work of authors such as Michel de Certeau, Joy James, Eva Cherniavsky, and Michael Omi and Howard Winant, which investigate the direct training of the body and subjects within structures of and related to the State, become useful. Though some of the work directly addresses this training within structures such as the penal system, much of it deals with the ways a body is trained through structures that are not directly State controlled. Additionally, this project will be theorized in relation to the work of Giorgio Agamben and Denise Ferreira Da Silva. Though both authors focus on sites and events seemingly distant from competition—the Holocaust, violence towards people of color in the West— applying the theoretical constructions of each of these authors points towards the way in which competition is not so distinct from such social and historical structures. By utilizing these theories it becomes apparent that not only are dance competitions related to State practices of bodily constructions, but also that these theories are applicable in *many*

different circumstances and at varying sites. In this way, this project strives to connect many different fields in order to draw out competition as a significant site of production in the United States but also to locate the many ways in which competition, through reproduction, is deeply imbricated in the basic and complex power structures prevalent within the nation state.

This project will provide several valuable contributions to the fields to which it relates. First, it stands alone among a broad range of dance literature that addresses a long history of cultural dances, both social and theatrical. While dance literature has covered a vast array of history and topics, the practice of dance competitions has yet to be equally addressed. Dance competition, as an object of study, will serve to bridge the gap between several social, popular, and artistic dance forms currently housed in the archive of dance studies. Combining concepts, aesthetics and elements from different sites of dance, competition coalesces ideologies of "high art" with those of social and pouplar dance. Dance competitions provide a liminal space to begin questioning notions of "high" and "low" art and culture. Moreover, by intersecting dance performance found at competitions with frameworks already established in the field of dance studies the prominence of high art values with in the field will become apparent. Though recent shifts in dance studies ha begun to incorporate and acknowledge non-concert dance forms beyond the "othering" common in previous dance scholarship, in fact, these value systems are still in place. The current methods for reading dance do little to go beyond the Euro-American notions of dance and still maintain divides between high/low and formal/ social dichotomies of dance practices. The types of subjects allowed to

participate as well as the means through which participation is granted give dance competitions a level of democracy for all its participants that is not common in high art practices. Moreover, the development of subjects, as well as the way subjects develop the aesthetics and practice of competition, establish it as a site of dance wherein individual names are not as significant to the development of the practice as the workings of the entire community. It is in this juxtaposition of high and low, formal and social dance practices that competition will serve to complicate and advance current dance scholarship.

A second important aspect of competition is the way in which it reflects and creates popular culture. Music choices as well as choreographic themes often reflect activity of the broader American culture while costume aesthetics often exaggerate urban, particularly highly accessible, fashion trends. Moreover, dance competitions have been used as a model to construct reality dance shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance*. As a site of popular culture *So You Think You Can Dance* is worked on to the competition stage in many ways. However, as a site of competition, *So You Think You Can Dance* has brought many practices of dance competitions into mediated and popular culture. The viewing audiences of shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance* have become exposed to dance and methods of viewing dance that they may have not normally experienced. These shows function as vehicles that bring dance to a larger American audience. Moreover, these vehicles bring dance via a competitive structure training the audience to read dance in a particular manner, which reflects this competitive structure. In this way dance competitions have elevated dance to a new status in mediate popular

culture. These mediated dance competitions make dance accessible to a much larger audience than traditional structures of concert dance thereby continuing the expansion of the space of dance between high and low culture. The dancing bodies constructed at competition, both televised and not, inform the viewing audience, expanding broader cultural readings of dance.

The last significant contribution of this project is the way in which it conjoins dance studies with political theory. By establishing the ways in which dance competitions function as a technology of the State through the construction of bodies the significance of political theory to dance studies becomes apparent. More importantly, the ways the dance studies, as a field that investigates the training and construction of bodies, can be used to interrogate and advance to political theory become obvious. Competition, through the development of reality dance shows and other mediated dance experiences, produces one of the most visible dancing bodies. And the construction of this body, which gets reproduced a countless number of times, is primary to understanding the location of dance competitions within culture. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the reasons it has gained and maintained the status it currently has in society as well as to understand the influence of this particular body and aspects of its always evolving aesthetic. These are not just dancing or performing bodies, but also bodies that educate and train other bodies in a variety of ways. As the product of competition, the body has a particular way of developing and sustaining structures of State practice that maintain the status quo and ensure the power status of hegemonic bodies. Not only an influential body

with the construction of American dance, this body also enacts and represents important functions of power in the United States.

Facets of the Rhinestone: Breaking down Competition Dance

After the dancers have left and the competition staff has packed up the last of its gear, even after the cleaning staff has come through the venue, there exist many tiny remnants of the competition, sprinkling the dressing areas, backstage and even in the house. Only visible to the eye when light reflects off of them are tiny rhinestones scattered throughout the space. Having fallen off of one of any number of the hundreds of costumes that moved through the space, they are the only remaining evidence that a competition was once in the now empty theater space.

While costumes are an important fringe industry to, the silent industry is that of rhinestones. An evolution of the sequin, the rhinestone has made such an impact on the practice of dance competitions that it is often used as a verb: "I am rhinestoning my costume". Just as the many facets of the rhinestone each reflect light, making the stone sparkle at its greatest, the many representations held in the rhinestone reflect the various aspects of competition. The primary facet of the rhinestone is to highlight the glamour of the presentation as well as the costuming. It is used to exaggerate the audiences' experience of the costume as the smallest details gleam off the stage lighting, making each sparkle and design visible all the way to the back of the house. It also highlights the body by creating lines that both flatter the body shape—well placed design of rhinestones can distract from a less appealing portion of the body—a well as produce extended lines and movement during performance. The rhinestones on a skirt that floats as a dancer

turns accentuates the turn, while rhinestoned pin stripes on the leg of a costume extend the length of the lines on a leg. The rhinestone also reflects the constant and many exchanges of capital necessary within the structure of competition. Costing at least several dollars or more per gross, the cost accrued because of rhinestones can be extraordinary. Rhinestones even come in a range of qualities including the economical acrylic rhinestone to the high end Swarovski brand. Though it can appear to be a rather small item in competition, its size does not parallel its importance and priority. The rhinestone, placed on the laboring body of the young dancer, also reflects the labor of an unseen body, the parent or teacher who meticulously applies the stones. Whether it is a line of stones around the collar, the belt and the hem of the pants, or a stone in every other square on a skirt pattered with small checkers, rhinestoning is a tedious process requiring extensive time investment. Moreover, the finger, hands and eyes must work hard to ensure the correct patterning. Designing consistent geometric and color patterns with these stones can prove very taxing on the physical body. Much like competition dance, the skill of rhinestoning is learned through disciplining of the body with the intended result focusing on a specific performance of spectacle.

This project approaches the topic of competition similar to the way the rhinestone reflects elements of competition. Just as each facet of the rhinestone displays distinctly different, yet related, aspects of competition, this project separates competition in to three distinct elements and sites. Though each of these different facets of competition can remain discreet entities, and, therefore, are approached as different chapters, they can only be fully understood in relation to each other. While each chapter can function as a

freestanding investigation of a particular aspect of competition, there are significant elements imbricated each separate investigation into the larger investigation, which becomes most salient in the fourth chapter.

The first chapter of this project outlines the structure of competition in many ways. To begin with, the fundamental structure of competition, including all of the standard elements detailed by the rules and regulations as set by individual competition corporations, ranging from entry fees to judging and scoring as well as awards, is explained. This portion serves as a step-by-step guide of the process of entering and performing in a competition with a focus on the rules, or limitations, established by the corporate structure. Moreover, it ensures that those unfamiliar with the distinct details of competition will understand the particulars of this structure of dance as well as debunk any misunderstandings held by those only familiar with limited aspects of the structure.

The second section of the first chapter addresses various elements of competition as each relates to a larger performance and structure of American culture. Specifically, this chapter discusses three particular aspects—capital, sport and fame—which each hold a significant role in the larger structure of competition dance practice and are highly visible parts of the normative practices that construct the American experience. It is within each of these components that competition functions as a microcosm of American culture. Therefore, this section seeks to breakdown and defines the importance of each element within competition and American culture in order to understand the way in which the practice of competition reflects Americanness.

While the first chapter takes a broader approach to understanding the practice of competition, the second chapter hones in on the dancing body, taking a more specified approach to understanding the practice. In order to do so, this chapter is a close reading of the training and performance of the competition body, specifically the young, female body. In both this chapter and the previous I rely on a survey of material produced by various cornerstone competition organizations in order to examine how these dance and bodies are defined, classified and approached within the practice. This facet of the project addresses the successful body found on the competition stage in order to excavate the movement and compositional aesthetic common to competition practice. Starting by considering the methods of training behind the competition body, in particular the body in relation to other American dancing bodies, and progressing through the composition and performance of these bodies on stage, the dance scholarship is implemented. Specifically, the competition body is read using rubrics created within dance studies for examining concert dance. This chapter also seeks to excavate the dance forms utilized by the competition body and the subsequent manipulations of the forms that are created and produced by this body. The historicity of the competition body with the practice of ballet and jazz are addressed while the body's use of hip hop and its unique creation of lyrical are also discussed. Ultimately, this chapter provides a critique of rubrics established by dance scholarship while simultaneously producing a new, more relevant approach to this current dancing body produced by competition.

The third chapter departs from the site of the corporate competition to examine the newest evolution, the televised reality dance competition. Though there are several

shows that have, over the last several years, capitalized on dance for reality contests, *So You Think You Can Dance* has been one of the most successful. With reality competition dance shows so prevalent, these are the spaces in which many Americans are learning to read and experience dance. And the end result is affecting how audiences read corporate dance competitions as well as other dance performances, including concert. This discussion not only encompasses an intersection of dance and media studies in order to deconstruct the bodies on stage but also begins to excavate how dance functions in a mediated world. Because, much like corporate competitions, *SYTYCD* focuses on a multi-skilled body capable of adapting to and performing multiple styles, competition trained bodies are often very successful in this venue and even directly shape the show's development. This chapter initially addresses how this particular competition produces knowledge as it instructs viewers to read and understand dance through a specific lens. This knowledge production is specifically focused on the language used by the show to defines, describe and respond to dances and dancers, as it shapes the viewers' experience. This chapter provides a particular analysis of the show's lexicon that reveals juxtaposition of two different dancing bodies—the contemporary dancer and the hip hop dancer. At this juncture there also lies an inquiry of the correlation of competition bodies to the mediated bodies found on *SYTYCD*. The contrast of these bodies reveals a racialized marking of both dancers and dance forms on the show. In addition, the cyclical relationship of corporate competitions and the show is addressed as the constructions of dance created by the show become visible on the competition stage.

This chapter culminates in a discourse that addresses the manner in which the show, through its lexicon, enhances the spectacle of dance.

The fourth and final chapter, "The Competition as a Technology of the State", draws upon theorizations and developments from the previous chapters in order to engage the site of the dance competition in discourse used to theorize the State. By looking at the ideological structure of competition through which bodies are trained and policed as well as how this policing constructs and deconstructs particular bodies, it becomes apparent how competition, as privately owned corporations and popular television shows, functions to maintain the structures of the State. Specifically, this portion of the projects identifies how competition promotes the young, white female body as a safe and stable body that does not threaten State structures. However, this is not an overt promotion but, instead, seems to give freedom and choice to *all* bodies. Moreover, this comparison will reveal how, like the State, competition successfully constructs this body on a multitude of bodies through an attempt to remove potential threats to the State structures. I utilize a case study of *gay hop*, a particular form of hip hop found in gay communities, in order to investigate how competition suppresses any transgressive behavior and ensured normative performance of the body and subject.

By viewing dance competitions as a racial project, I locate the functions of power in competition that position it as a *technology* of the State in its reproduction of normative ideals constructed by the State. Moreover, I will explore how these particular ideals of the body and identity satisfy the State's need for an "unstable equilibrium" in the racial order in an effort to maintain current hegemonic structures in a racial project of

white nation building.[1] Ultimately, all bodies participating in competition are incarcerated within the analytics of race that are re-inscribed through the practice of dance competition.

This project concludes with an examination of what is left at the completion of this dissertation. The final section considers what the next step is in the process of including this topic in the archive of dance. It specifically addresses a noticeable lack in this incarnation of the project and considers how to give authority to the dancing bodies that are subdued in this text. Moreover, it addresses the phenomena of dance within competitive structures and its spread throughout a globalized world. This chapter addresses how this structure of dance packages cultural experience for the purpose of consumer export.

The structure of this text functions like the rhinestone. Unlike a rhizome's ever shifting center and unlike the structure of a building, which first requires a foundation, each portion of this text stands alone as a distinctly separate facet. However, these facets are not discreet entities. Collectively, each chapter has related theoretical through lines, although it is not necessary to have read the other chapters to make sense of the theory applied in each. And, while they can be approached individually, it is together that they shine. The boldness and greatest significance of this project lies, not within the seams which connect each facet to another, but rather in the whole article as seen from a distance. The rhinestone's full affect and purpose is visible once it is seen under stage lights from a seat far back in the house. Only then does it become possible to recognize the true power of visibility gained from a small three millimeter plastic stone. Similarly,

this project makes the most sense and has the greatest worth once placed within an archive of dance studies that has spent decades reading and theorizing concert and social dance forms. While each chapter can be addressed individually, and while this project can even be dealt with as an "othered" project of dance, it is most useful when put in context with other past and contemporary work focusing on American concert dance and other American cultural practices.

Endnotes

[1] Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge, 1994. p 84.

Competition & the American Landscape: The Structures of Corporate Competition

At the turn of the 21st century, dance competitions are a significant component of American dance performance. First started in the mid 1970s, dance competitions gained notably popularity in the mid 1990s. Originating from traveling dance workshops, the short history of the industry of dance competitions has been composed of many significant changes to this structure of dance. In 1959, Dance Caravan launched the first traveling dance workshop that did not require a membership.[2] Prior to Dance Caravan, Dance Educators of America (DEA) was the most well-known traveling workshop. These workshops sought to engage with dance teachers affiliated with private dance studios across the country. By eliminating membership requirements, Dance Caravan made the industry of dance conventions accessible to many more teachers from "big cities to small towns across the United States."[3] Over time these conventions expanded, first by adding "gala" or exhibition performances and then eventually adding competitions. These competitions began as solo only competitions, acknowledging individual dancers their solo performances. In 1979 Showstopper started as the first corporation that was strictly a competition event. Unlike ballet competitions, which already existed, these competitions opened up the stage to a wide variety of dance forms, not only those attributed to classical training. The 1980s saw the rise of approximately seven organizations that continue to hold events, some convention/ competitions, others only competition based. Meanwhile, the 1990s saw the arrival of eleven more, eight of which began in 1995 or later, and many of which are only competition organizations.

Since this time competitions of this style have begun to spread and can be found internationally, including in Australia, Spain and Italy, sometimes autonomously and other times connected to American competition corporations.

At its origin the industry of dance competitions existed to provide young dancers performance opportunities reflective of professional experiences. Prior to the popularity of competition the primary performance site for amateur dancers in the United States was the dance studio recital or annual performance. Recitals, however, particularly in areas inundated with dance studios, are limited to audiences directly associated with the dancers performing, giving dancers minimal exposure. In contrast to the recital format, the professional dance experience utilizes advertising and marketing, to increase the social value attached to attending live dance performances, resulting in broader audience attendance and greater exposure. Although the dance recital attempts to afford young dancers a performance experience that takes their work beyond the classroom, the disparity between amateur and professional experiences is vast, regardless of the venue in which the performances occur.[4]

The dance competition attempts to bridge between these two types of performance in several ways. By definition, competition attracts a wider audience base than studio recitals. The majority of audience members found at competition, not unlike recital audience members, are affiliated with at least one dancer onstage; and, although events are open to the public they are not often attended by the public. However, because competitions attract many studios to a single event, dancers are often performing for an audience more diverse than their own studio's audience community. Therefore, dancers

have less familiarity with the audience, increasing their exposure to a broader audience. In addition, the judging panel, which is presumed to provide a greater expertise than the rest of the audience, adds to the professionalism of the competition experience. For example, a dancer could potentially find herself in front of the same judges at an audition for a professional job.[5] In this way, competition allows the dancer to move beyond her small community and towards a greater, more significant dance community.

Each competition corporation functions through the implementation of several pages of fine print rules and regulations. From entry requirements to scoring ranges, it is these rules that make each corporation unique. However, it is also the vast similarities in these rules and regulations that unite these organizations as a single category of dance performance. This chapter investigates both the fine print that structure these events as well as the social conventions that shape it. The first portion of this chapter describes the structure of competition as it is outlined by the rules and regulations established and written by competition corporations. While the bulk of this fine print is often embedded in the knowledge and experience of competition participants, the details are specific to this type of competition and, therefore, are typically unfamiliar to those uninitiated to the practice. However, these written structures are not the only structures at play in the competition experience. Following the discussion of rules and regulations is one which addresses the key structures which shape competition. Three structures, sport practice, celebrity and capitalism, construct the experience of competition while also situating it within a broader scope of American culture. Both the fine print, as well as that which is

not explicated by competition corporations, illustrate the experience of competition as well as its connection to culture writ large.

Competition: The Fine Print Defined

Currently in the United States there are at least twenty-five corporations that operate competitions or dual competition/conventions on a national level. Corporations that operate only on a regional level are not included in this figure. Each corporation runs multiple regional events across the country that culminates in one or more national event each year. Many of the convention/ competition organizations hold a limited number of events, approximately eight to fifteen. At these dual events the competition judges are also faculty members, making them highly visible figures as they teach class throughout the weekend. Rather than merely sitting behind a judge's table in a darkened auditorium, these teachers are highly present in the experience of competition participants. Meanwhile, the judging staff for companies that only host competitions do not act as spokespersons or representatives for the competition corporation as they are significantly less visible for competition participants. While workshops make themselves marketable based upon their faculty/judges, strict competitions rely on advertising the competition experience and the corporations' unique opportunities and policies. In this regard, the individual judges are of less significance to the corporations' overall identity. Judging panels for such competitions can constantly shift for a variety of reasons, results in many different judges on payroll, making it possible for multiple events to occur in a single weekend in multiple states. This allows for a competition tour schedule that can contain as many as thirty-five or forty different regional events in a single season.[6] The

variety in touring schedules is extensive and is dependent on factors such as holidays, venue availability and other events in a city that may deter from a corporation's success on a given weekend.

Unlike dance team or cheerleading organizations, dance competitions are individual corporations and there is no national governing body. Though a recently established Federation of Dance Competitions (FDC) attempts to create such a governing body, underlying its structure, as well as that of all competitions, is a focus on capital and success in order to maintain its financial advancement rather than the governance of competitions.[7] Similarly, each competition corporation seeks to achieve financial success, as any business does, by creating a niche within the industry by constructing innovative characteristics and elements that set the company apart from competitors. For this reason, though there are many generalities found at each competition experience, the specifics are often different amongst organizations. What follows is a discussion of the general structure of dance competitions; however, within each of these elements each corporation establishes its own variations in order to maintain its autonomy.

For the reader unfamiliar with this structure of dance I will begin at the end: what the dancer wins. I start here because the award is what the dancer ultimately trains for and the goal of each dance. Moreover, competition's categorical system only makes sense in relation to this awards system.

There are two different types of scoring systems: the original is a placement system, while the more recent, and most common for strictly competition events, is an adjudicated system. Under the placement system each entry in a category is ranked (i.e.

first place, third place, honorable mention, etc). Each judge (usually three at a regional event and more at a national) has a predetermined number of points to award each dance. In a placement system, after individual judges' scores are totaled, if two dances score within the same placement range, the highest score gets the placement while the lower follows it. If two dances have the same numerical score a tie must be broken before awarding placements.

In contrast to the placement system, in an adjudicated system an entry only has to reach a point value to achieve a particular award such as platinum, high gold, or emerald (these award labels and structure vary for corporation). In this system every dance in a category could score the same, without needing to break a tie. Newer competitions often use an adjudicated system as it does not require dancers to compete directly against other dancers. In doing so dancers are less often awarded lower end placements. For example, with a placement system a category with five entries only one dance can receive first place and one must come in fifth; however, with an adjudicated system all five dances could feasibly receive a gold. The difference between ranking and adjudicating dances affects and alters the experience of dancers as these systems determine the probability that dancers and dances will achieve higher awards.

After placements are determined the point value attributed to each dance is used to rank dances for high point awards. Each competition acknowledges anywhere from one to ten of the top scoring routines in each of the categories solo, duo/ trio, small group, large group, line and production (this breakdown is discussed more in-depth following this explanation of awards). The top scoring routine in each category most often wins a

monetary award, which increases for each entry based on the number of dancers.[8] These awards are given out in each age division with the top scoring routine in each division usually being recognized, often with an additional monetary prize. Within the award structure for each competition corporation there are many variations; what has been described is just the basic structure for all competitions. For example, some corporations have an additional solo competition with specific requirements (which may include an interview portion or multiple solo performances, etc) and additional entry fees. Other corporations give credit, for national finals entries or competition merchandise, in addition to or in lieu of monetary awards.[9]

Another element of the competition awards are "special" awards. These can include the traditional awards such as "Best Costume," "Best Technique/ Technical Execution," and "Best Choreography." Typically given to one dance in each age division, these awards do not usually have a monetary award, only a title and plaque or trophy. To supplement these, many competitions have begun to incorporate more creative awards that are given out by the judges. These awards usually only come with ribbons and the title, which can range from "Most Graceful" to "Peanut Butter & Jelly," for the most compatible duet, for example. Judges awards are usually written on-site of competition in response to the dance and can be given out to any dance or dancer they choose. This method of awards allows competition staff and judges to recognize any dance or dancer, including individuals within group dances that might fall outside of systems of recognition within the standard system of awards. Typically not based on scores, these awards can even be given to acknowledge lower scores entries and/ or

studios. All aspects of competition awards, particularly placement/ adjudication and high point awards influence the categorization of entries. Competition entries are organized so that similar dances compete and are judged in like categories. These categories are determined through a variety of divisions that group dances together based on several variables, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The cost of the competition entry is based on the number of dancers competing in each individual dance. The cost for a regional **Solo** ranges from approximately $70 to $90. Meanwhile **Duos** and **Trios** (always grouped together) generally cost five to ten dollars more than a solo, though this cost is split among two or three dancers. The next grouping, **Small Groups**, can range from four to approximately eight dancers (the actual number of dancers at the end of this range is determined by individual competition corporations). **Large Groups** follow with approximately eight to fourteen dancers (again determined by the corporation). As with all entry fees, both small and large groups are charged per dancer, ranging from $22 to $27. The last two categories, **Line** and **Production**, typically cost the same as other group entry rates. While *lines* are determined by the number of dancers, anything exceeding the range set for large group, *productions* often require the same number of dancers as a line (though a few competitions allow a smaller number of dancers). Productions are defined as those dances that incorporate a wide variety of staging, primarily entrances and exits of dances throughout the dance, typically multiple pieces of music edited, or mixed, together, and, most commonly, utilize characters. This categorization of dances based on the number of

dancers allows dancers to compete in multiple groups of dancers without competing against themselves.

Group sizes, according to the rules and regulations of many competition corporations, also determine the time limit for each dance. The standard limit for dances can range from two minutes and forty five seconds to three minutes and thirty seconds. However, productions come with extended time limits up to eight minutes. Most competitions deduct points for over-extended time, which can affect the overall placement of the entry. Many competitions also include stipulations in rules and regulations that also consider stage entrances and exits, and sometimes even prop setup, within the time limit. A limited number of competition corporations allowed extra time to be purchased at approximately $20 for every thirty seconds. This allows the entry to be safe-guarded from penalty as well as ensures the corporation additional profit. Although some competitions, at certain popular regional events, extend the length of the event by adding an extra day or afternoon (if a week day is needed), the corporation will gain its greatest profit by reducing its largest overhead cost, venue rental and staff pay. Therefore, it is in the corporation's best interest to fit in the most dances, and entry fees, in the shortest amount of time possible.

In addition to the number of dancers, the average age of the dancers is used to categorize the entries, to ensure that older dancers are not competing against younger dancers. Though some competitions break it down to specific ages (such as 9 or 15 years old) for the more popular categories such as jazz or lyrical or simply for the more popular age groups (typically anything from 9 years through 16 years old), many competitions

simply use age ranges (i.e. 7-8 years or 16-18 years). These age averages also determine the age division the entry competes in. There can be a variety of division with **Junior** (ages 5 to 12 typically) and **Senior/ Adult** (13 and up) being the most simplistic. The more complex age divisions have a typical breakdown as follows, with variations occurring in each corporation: **Petite** (up to age 8), **Junior** (8-12), **Teen** (13-15) and **Senior** (16 and up). Each competition corporation acknowledges top solos, duo/trios, small groups, large groups, lines and productions within each age division through awards, titles and monetary prizes. In particular, the national winners of each solo age division (both male and female) are given a national title award and usually appear in the magazine advertisements the following year for the corporation. This is not unlike pageant competitions wherein the winning person is used as the "face" of the organization.

While all competitions make use of age averages, rather than using a complex age division system some competitions will also make use of a dancer's experience. In this system, the rules call for dancers to be entered based on the number of hours a week they attend class as well as the number of years they have competed. The resulting classifications include terms such as **Novice** to identify the less-experienced competition dancers and **Competitive** for those who have extensive competition experience. Some organizations separate these categories out from the traditional age classifications, while others combine them to create multiple age divisions, each with a different experience classification. While age and experience categorizations can always be contested at the competition by judges, competition directors or other studio owners, it is up to the

honesty of the entering studio to place dances and dancers accordingly. Though each competition requires that birthdates accompany a dancer's entry, there is no efficient or exact method for determining a dancer's experience at the competition site, besides assuming a trustworthy answer from the studio owner, teacher or choreographer. One of the murkier aspects of categorizing entries, this aspect of the categorization system is entirely self-policed as the competition corporation does not have access to the actual information and merely trusts the accuracy of entry forms.

Experience classification is a more recent practice at competition, as it is based on the theory that it allows less experienced competition dancers a comfortable entry into the industry of dance competition. Competition corporations that include this categorization also have alternate scoring systems for these dances, which is typically a lower score range for each placement or award level. In establishing this practice competitions are actually confirming several important facts. First, it clearly opens up a "safe space" for less trained or experienced dancers where they are more likely to score and place better. While establishing a judging system that views novice dancers for what they are, it ensures that these dancers will not face a low score or poor award simply because they are competing against more trained and experienced dancers. In doing so the corporation is cultivating the young dancers and safeguarding studio owners, choreographers and teachers from failure. By achieving greater success these participants/ customers of competition will be more encouraged to return to future events to gain additional success. Also, acknowledging the particular needs of dancers at various levels implies that competition requires a particular training in order to be successful. The use of terms such

as novice and experienced points to the notion that competition is a significantly different performance experience that can only be understood and trained properly for *at* the site of competition. In making different competitive spaces for different levels of dancers, the industry of competition actually begins to reveal itself between the lines of its rules and regulations.

Followed by the group size, the age and experience of dancers, each competition entry is then categorized by the dance style or genre used. An examination of this last level of categorization reveals even more unwritten complexities of dance competitions. Previous to this form of dance competitions, ballet competitions were the most popular site of competition for dance studios in the United States. However, in opening up a wide range of genres available for competitors, corporate dance competitions discovered and capitalized on a particular niche of dance education. Although **Ballet** still exists as a genre at corporate competitions (in rules it is often defined simply as "executing ballet technique," always requiring ballet shoes to be worn by all dancers), it is arguably one of the least entered genres. Even less common is ballet on pointe. Distinguished from ballet simply by the type of shoes worn by the majority of dancers (male dancers in this category are not expected to wear pointe shoes), **Pointe** is a particularly rare, though available, competition genre. Corporate competitions opened up genres such as **Jazz** and **Tap**, thereby enticing studios that either less focused on ballet or have students that prefer other dance forms. Over the years the basic dance techniques and forms that were popular enough to establish distinct competition genres have expanded significantly.

And many competitions have anywhere from a dozen to approximately twenty-five different categories to cover this variety in training.

Competition genres include traditional training forms common in all dance studios,[10] such as the "basic" trio of ballet, tap and jazz. However, many other genres have developed at this site of dance during the course of its history. For example, one genre that is now a standard at many competitions is **Dance Team**. This particular form is lucrative because many studios across the country offer dance team as a training form to bring in new students as well as make a specific space for current students that participate in school dance teams. Another structure of competitive dance, dance team draws on ballet and jazz while focusing on a regimenting of the body designed by cheerleading. Therefore, when placed on the competition stage it is necessary categorize it separately. Another newer addition to competition is **Hip Hop**, which did not arrive until the mid to late 1990s. Despite the popularity of hip hop throughout American and international popular culture, it took years after it was codified in the dance studio to receive its own recognition on the competition stage. In this case, competition corporations were not only gaining access to a lucrative aspect of dance but also to address a growing dance training. Within a decade of its rise to popular culture, hip hop dance had been commodified and codified as a dance form that was being taught in studios nationally and internationally. Once it was clear that hip hop was not a passing fad and was deeply rooted in the industry of private dance studios, as well as commercial and mediated dance forms, it was necessary for competitions corporations to "catch up" with the industry of their clientele, which meant adding hip hop as its own competition

category. Both of these examples, dance team and hip hop, illustrate the differing ways in which competition corporations respond to current and evolving aspects of the dance studio industry.

There are a multitude of other forms that have been incorporated into the competition system, including **Ethnic/Folkloric** or **Musical Theater/Character**. Most competitions also include a category listed as **Open** which, depending on the specific competition corporation, may cover various dances including those that incorporate different styles of dance—e.g. an entry with some dancers in tap shoes and other dancers performing ballet technique—or those dances that exceed that maximum number of allowable acrobatic passes (often defined as a movement where both legs go above the head, this can include something as a cartwheel) in other categories. While the **Acrobatics/Gymnastics** offered at most competitions allows an unlimited number of acrobatic movements, it is not uncommon for a jazz dance, wherein the choreography is clearly primarily jazz technique, to include several acrobatic passes. Because exceeding the number of allowed passes in the jazz category could result in a deduction of points, it is necessary to have an additional category. Therefore, 'open' exists to include dances that are not eligible for other categories due to specific regulations, including acrobatics. The existence of this category addresses the limits created by the definitions of other categories and creates a space for any dance that does not fit into a more specific category. In a dance practice that simplifies dance, the 'open' category unassumingly acknowledges the potential complexities while still attempting to contain these complexities in an easily definable categorization. This category stands in a long list of

dance genres utilized and created by competition corporations to ensure that a wide range of dance forms and choreographic styles are eligible to participate in a competition event.

With the ever-increasing options of competition genres it is necessary to define each genre within the competition's rules and regulations. Therefore each competition corporation creates a specific definition for each genre, usually only a few sentences, to describe what can be a very complex dance form with extensive history. Ballet often gets defined as using ballet technique, with an emphasis of classical movements, with no discussion or definition of what ballet technique includes or what defines a "classical" movement. Modern is a particularly interesting case wherein, despite the vast modern techniques that have been developed since the turn of the twentieth century, the definition often include mention of a "demonstration of balance, extension, isolation and control" and interpretation, either of music or movement.[11] A close reading of these definitions of modern, as a category of competition, reveals a definition applicable to *all* dance forms and techniques suggesting that modern is either too complex to be summed up and/ or too unfamiliar a dance form for those writing the definitions. A small portion of the fine print outlined by the rules and regulations of competition corporations, the brief definitions used by competition corporations results in vague descriptions of dance forms which rarely accounts for the complexities and intricacies of each genre.

In these definitions and rules the complexity of competition dance becomes evident. In a world of dance closely monitored by rules and regulations, definitions and fees, numbers and points, these figures that have be carefully constructed are not able to describe the dances that perform on the stage. Though competition seeks to define dance

for its organized reproduction, it is the failure of its definitions that subsequently defines the practice. Because the language associated with the dance is not enough to give readers information, it is the other structures that construct this practice of dance and assists readers in understanding competition. The failure of definitions requires participants to use other structures, and it is reading competition dances through these structures that reveals the true value of the practice. That is to say, though competition has attempted a categorical organization of dance performance, at the heart of competition is a structure of dance that is dynamic and evolving. The fast paced changes at this site of dance are a result of its relationship to other cultural practices. Therefore, competition can only be partially understood through the definitions and rules it provides and becomes completely transparent when read in relation to the larger culture, particularly the structures that directly influence this site of dance and the moving bodies it produces and displays.

Competition: Beyond the Fine Print

While many people may be familiar with the idea of dance competitions, often the actual details of the experience are unclear, and many have difficulty making sense of this structure of dance. Though the complex rules and regulations are often the most noticeable, it is the physical and mental experience constructed by these regulations that is most definitive of this site of dance. Open to the public, dance competitions are typically attended by only competition dancers and their close supporters, who are often family and friends. In fact, attendees are often so well versed in the workings of competition that they appropriate the venue space for their particular purposes, even if it

reshapes the space's original purpose. This appropriation is less visible in a theater space wherein the use of space is similar to the intended use of the space, though with many more bodies and for a much longer period of time. Unlike a show which has a limited cast and crew backstage as well as designated performance times, competition participants are numerous and often in the space for many hours, if not days, at a time. It is in the experience of this space that the unique practice of competition becomes tangible.

The transformation of space is most obvious at competitions held in hotels and conference centers. In these venues one large ballroom is rented in which a stage is built, complete with pipe and drape, while several other smaller rooms, normally used for board meetings and wedding receptions, are reserved as dressing rooms. Meanwhile, the other ballrooms in the same hotel may be concurrently rented out for business meetings or other group functions. Often times the organizations renting these rooms have registration or information tables set up in the main corridor connecting each room. However, only the competition has participants sitting in the hallway eating McDonalds, six-year olds playing leap frog and seventeen-year olds, fully made up, complete with fake eye lashes, text messaging and giggling in a corner with their friends. For many of the participants, the duration and size of the competition event allows them to forget that the space is typically and sometimes simultaneously designated for other events. Between the use of space and the time commitment involved in attending competition, many participants become easily disconnected from the outside world, both inside and outside the competition event. This disconnection results in a community that not only

often *feels* isolated, but also often *appears* isolated from a broader culture. Despite appearing as an isolated community of dancers, unassociated with the greater American experience, this project argues that the industry of dance competitions and the experience of singular competition events, in fact, represent a typical American experience. Dance competitions are not a unique practice within American culture and do not represent marginal aspects of "Americanness." Instead, dance competitions incorporate some of the most universal aspects of American culture, uniting communities of people through the practice of dance. This section addresses several key aspects of American culture that are directly related to the structure of competition.

Several American practices weave together to create the structure of dance performance that characterizes competition. First, the structure of competition was developed and has succeeded because of the translation of dance from strictly a subjective art form to a more accessible space of sport. The creation of a competitive site of dance allows for many viewers to gain a comfortable set of tools with which to experience dance. Because competitive sports are often a popular leisure activity across America, through ranking, judging, and winning many viewers already come equipped with experience to understand this space of dance. Moreover, a structure of winning allows for many who may have been previously unfamiliar with dance to gain an investment in the immediate performance as well as long-term outcome. In this regard, the American experience has not only trained bodies to participate in competition dance but it also developed the particular competitive structures into which the competition industry inserted dance.

The practice of competitions, fueled by the recent surge of reality dance competition shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance*, draws on the American desire for fame. By this I mean to highlight the way in which many competitions, through solo title awards and other marketing tools, attempt to reflect the achievement of fame and celebrity. While the notion that dance competitions can result in nation- or world-wide fame is central to dance reality television such as *So You Think You Can Dance*, it existed within the framework of many competition corporations for many years and is not new to the competition circuit. The ability to achieve an elevated social status over the course of a career or lifetime is significant to the American experience.[12] As an idea that the nation was built upon, dance competitions are merely a more recent development of using the body and physical skill to achieve upward mobility.

In his text *America*, Jean Baudrillard illustrates several of these ideas. To begin, early in his text Baudrillard writes: "The marathon is a form of demonstrative suicide, suicide as advertising: it is running to show you are capable of getting every last drop of energy out of yourself, to prove …That you are capable of finishing… [It is] free publicity for existence."[13] Several times in his text Baudrillard mentions the prominent role of exercise in American culture. But in this statement he illustrates the physical state of exercise, which later he defines as "a new form of voluntary servitude", as it situates a subject within the social landscape.[14] Although he most often references running and, occasionally weight lifting and gym work, Baudrillard's arguments can be applied to all sport practice, including dance competitions. Dance competitions both corporate and mediated, like the marathon, use intense physical training in order to advertise the

subject. And, unique to the corporate competition, the dancing body not only advertises herself, but also the subjects that support her. That is to say, this particular type of "servitude" allows the financial body (typically the parent) that pays the entry fees and the dance teachers that train the dancing body to broadcast their own existence through the dancing body's performance on stage. In this regard competition draws upon a long-standing American tradition of bodily in order to animate the subject within the social landscape.

In addition to his notions of the over-exercising of the American body, Baudrillard also writes of the unique role of fame in the American landscape. Painting fame in a particularly negative light, he writes:

> "One of America's specific problems is fame and glory, partly on account of its extreme rarity these days, but also because of its extreme vulgarization… since the more conformist the system as a whole comes, the more millions of individuals there are who are set apart by some tiny peculiarity. The slightest vibration in a statistical model, the tiniest whim of a computer are enough to bate some piece of abnormal behavior, however banal, in a fleeting glow of fame."[15]

Despite Baudrillard's apparent dislike for fame in the United States, twenty years after he published his text that "fleeting glow" is even easier to attain and no longer so rare. And it is often done so through the regimented training of the body discussed previously. Fame in American culture can be achieved in a variety of ways, not all of which require talent and even sometimes through notoriety. Although it can be sustained, it often looks

just as Baudrillard illustrates it, short-lived and momentary. Moreover, fame can be acquired through skill and hard work or luck, depending on the situation. The specifics of the way in which fame functions for each individual can often be different, but are always determined by the "conformist" system that defines American culture.

Sport and fame consist of an important ideological practice—capitalism—that makes both practices, as well as competition dance, interrelated structures of American culture. Composed of a complex exchange of capital, competition functions as a dense microcosm of the structures of capital prevalent throughout American culture. In particular, competition utilizes similar exchanges of capital that function in sport and fame. Exchanges of money for both material and intangible commodities as well as exchanges of money in relation to the laboring body, with concerns of exploitation, are embedded within the general American structure and within the competition structure. In many ways it has been the ability of the competition industry to package dance performance experience as a commodity that has separated this site of dance from traditional concert dance practice, which is often granted artistic status over entertainment.[16] These practices—sport, fame, and capitalism—are the primary connections between the structure of competition to the greater American experience, but not the only ones. A closer examination of each of these elements reveals how they encompass not only the crucial elements of corporate dance competition but also train all bodies into a particular ideological structure of the American experience.

Dance as Sport

The saying "If dance were any easier it'd be called football" has become commonplace in the competition circuit. It has been penned on many merchandise items, such as t-shirts and sweatshirts, found at competition events and often gets a positive reaction from dancers and parents alike who believe the comparison accurate as well as humorous. Another similar slogan assures that "Dancers are athletes too." The significance behind these words lies in the complexity and, often, contradiction, of dance as art versus dance as sport. Much like any other sport, dance, in a competition setting or not, requires a mastery of the body and an intense use of physicality. However, the high art, elitist background of dance performance, particularly Western concert dance, has constructed a social understanding of dance which often diminishes the physical demands dance requires. That is to say, the very point of professional dance performance, understanding ballet as the basis for concert dance, is not to see the struggle towards mastery but rather to experience the ease of the dance.[17] Though this false notion of dance has begun to shift in America as a result of the popularity of reality dance shows, which emphasizes the work of the body, many competition participants still find comfort in the substantiation of the practice of dance as sport, as it confirms what they already know about dance's physical demands.

In describing it as a sport practice, rather than art, the work of competition participants is more readily validated in the larger society. A site of popular culture, sport incorporates many different economic classes and other categories of social division. However, high art, where concert dance resides, is most often associated with upper classes and privileged social categories. Although several practices, including

social forms, shift dance from high art spaces, in taking dance to a competitive platform it becomes associated with a social structure that incorporates a multitude of communities and classifications. In this setting dance is dis-identified with standard concert practices as competition dance restructures dance to be experienced by a greater number of subjects and participants.

Slogans that affirm the status of dance as sport fit well into the practice of dance competitions because the structure of dance competitions and its participants, by the time they are examining the "football" t-shirt, have already begun to approach dance through the competitive lens of sports practice. Though this shift towards dance as sport often raises concerns for many affiliated with traditional forms of concert dance, which are often deemed "more artistic", it delineates an interesting alteration of dance to fit leisure practices. Dance in a competitive structure resembles structures of sport, as a leisure activity in the United States, in allowing individuals and communities to assess success. This ability to qualify dance allows for a level of accessibility that it lacks in high art practices. Competitive sport as leisure practice is already emphasized within the American educational system, wherein sports from football to soccer to cheerleading are often privileged often over arts education. Because these and other significant corners of American life respond to and understand the quantitative aspects of sport more readily than the qualitative nature of art, it is largely beneficial for the competition dancer to locate herself as an athlete rather than an artist. More integrated into popular culture, the athlete receives greater acclaim and more elevated social status than the artist. Therefore, identifying as an athlete allows the competition dancer to be more readily accepted.

Much like the mixed martial arts Ultimate Fighting competitor, whose sport is a highly sought after entertainment venue, or the floor routine of the Olympic gymnast, which combines her athletic skill with artistic intent in competition, the competition dancer is better understood by herself and others as an athlete because of the prominence of sport within American cultural practices.

There have been many instances of people striving to make dance accessible to a wider variety of dance experiences. In many ways, one of the primary goals of postmodern dance pioneers was to bring dance to a wider audience and participant base by shifting the site and assumptions of dance.[18] Today, throughout American modern dance, in particular, there is a broad range of choreographers and dancers who focus on site-specific work and community based art. Central to such practices is the desire to remove the perceived elitist experience of concert dance by breaking down the barriers, including space and accessibility, that deem it a "high art" form. While particular dance practitioners have worked to bridge the gap between concert dance and the larger community, the industry of dance competitions has done so by shifting the structure of dance performance.

In the preface to the anthology *SportCult*, Toby Miller and Randy Martin identify several reasons why sport is so easily incorporated into American culture. These authors address the existence of "a work ethos" through the "self-disciplining of the body, to maximization of efficiency, the drive to succeed" found in amateur and professional sports.[19] Additionally, they write that "[p]art of what helps to naturalize sport is the presumed objectivity of the rules." [20] As both a representation of a work ethos and the

regularity of the rules sport maintains a normative structure that is easily adapted to. This allows sport to sustain a foothold in American culture because of the Foucauldian bodily experience of power wherein the body is disciplined by training, regimented by rules and overseen through visible and non/invisible subjects. Directly opposite sport experience is the less controllable practice of art wherein the rules are not defined and success is not the result of a comparison against another form—as is evident in multiple mediums and eras of artistic practice. In fact, the disciplining of the *artistic* body often comes as a reaction against Foucauldian practices discussed in *Discipline and Punish*. Rather than maintaining normative behaviors as if being constantly policed, the artistic body is often transgressive, pushing the standards of customary representations. Such a reaction is illustrated by the development of modern dance in relation to ballet or hip hop and urban dance forms in relation to codified, high art dance practices.[21] However, in adapting to the normative disciplining of the body, wherein sport, as opposed to art, always functions similar to other social conventions, competition is locating dance *inside* other social practices. Competition, by structuring dance as sport, diminishes or entirely removes the artistic element, in particular those that often situate it outside normative social practices in a place primarily accessible by a small number of elite participants, making it accessible and readable by a significantly larger portion of trained American viewers.

The primary method for extinguishing the difficulties of reading art practice lies in the restructuring of the viewer's experience. Rather than requiring audience members to read a dance for content or context, competition trains viewers to read dances only for their place in the hierarchical structure of awards and titles, which this structure

centralizes. Miller and Martin write, "competition is both means and ends, an animating spirit that infests the body and compels excellence, and the just reward, the final judgment that affirms—with unrivaled clarity—the purpose of the event."[22] Much like a game or a match, wherein two teams or individuals compete against each other for a win, the competition award ceremony, as well as the tangible trophies, monetary awards, and titles, explain to all participants the purpose of the events and, ultimately, each dance. Whether it is through ranking—1st, 3rd, honorable mention etc—or placements—diamond, platinum, high silver, etc—awards at competition function as explanations for those participants who may typically feel disconnected from the experiences of dance found in other concert spaces. By instating a classification system, the participants' role no longer requires them to understand or make sense of each dance.[23] The audience is relieved of the standard role of the viewer, who is expected to read a dance for content and skill; instead they are only responsible for understanding the end result, as this clarifies the purpose of the event and, effectively, each discrete dance.

This method of viewing dance is in direct contrast to the "reflexive" practice that Susan Foster defines in her text *Reading Dancing*. In this text Foster solidifies a particular viewing practice wherein the audience is actively engaged the in the production of meaning for the dance.[24] However, the intersection of dance with sport practice not only reduces the active role of the viewer but also does not require that the s/he understand or read the dance at all, only the outcome of the win and/ or loss. In this setting it is only the viewer as official judge that is required to read the dance with any active engagement. The typical audience member escapes or is removed from this

potentially authoritative role and subjected to a passive position. As a result, there is no need for the audience to understand the context or content of a dance. Additionally, traditional artistic value does not need to be the primary focus in choreographing a dance or determining its value. The award and/ or title given to a dance create the most important method for understanding the meaning and value of a competition dance.

Rather than relying on the audience's reading and attribution of value to the dance, competition uses a numerical score and related awards to define and describe the value of each dance. Ranking dances amongst a series of dances, after having applied a system of categorization, attributes a particular value and social capital to each dance and dancer. Once a dance is deemed a winner all other dancers are placed in a hierarchical order. Some dances and dancers clearly know their place as "second runner up" or "ninth overall" while others are aware of an unspecific place behind the winning entry. Miller and Martin write, "sport appears to affirm a rigid distinction between fact and value, talent and reward, even as it belies this distinction in a promise of transcendence and the prospect of other avenues of social development."[25] What they describe is not only hierarchy and value established through competition, but also the social capital accessible through such value determinations. Clearly the "winner" has the greatest social capital. This dance, and its dancers, whether they win the highest score in the category or highest overall score or largest monetary award, gain an elevated social status as the win is announced to all competition participants during the awards ceremony. Much like winning an Olympic medal, there is a public display of this elevation, which directly references the winning performance and/ or performer. And, accordingly, the result is a

hierarchical structure of social capital and esteem built upon the hierarchy of awards systems developed by competition corporations. Placing a dance within this hierarchal relationship is central to understanding and properly reading competition dances.[26]

Through the imbrication of sport practice, dance competition subsequently alters the stage of dance performance. The structure and industry of competition have developed a new form of dance performance wherein notions of art vary greatly from those held by choreographers, dancers and viewers in other sites of American dance performance, such as modern or post-modern dance. Additionally, the desire to achieve a high-level of entertainment value is visible in the concentration of those elements which ensure a high placement or scoring. "Entertainment" at competition actually shifts aesthetics associated with entertainment values visible in the broader popular culture experience. For example, fashion found in media sites like television shows and music videos become highlighted at competition and are even altered, sometimes through the exaggeration provided by adding rhinestones to basic clothing items, as they work to simultaneously reference popular culture and establish an aesthetic unique to competition. This form of sport dance merges dance with an American experience prevalent in popular culture, creating a new site of dance.

Dance as Fame

In their introduction, Miller and Martin briefly address "fandom" and its relationship to capital.[27] As the pinnacle of the structure of competition, fame is the result of the social capital established by the hierarchy of winning. The body is trained to win so that the body gains fame. In this regard the sport practice exists for the rise of

celebrity. The significance of celebrity status, is a complex driving force of the American experience,[28] which is played upon and used by the industry of dance competitions in order to ensure its own success. In recent years fame, and desire for it, in the United States has gained popularity and importance, which is visible through the prominence of tabloids and even reputable media sources that often focus on experiences of celebrities. Reality television shows have given Americans a new outlet for achieving fame, elevated social status and, occasionally, wealth. The structure of many reality shows relies on the participation of American audiences in several ways, including auditions. Whether it is *The Amazing Race* accepting video applications or *Real World's* open casting calls held in various cities across the country, the audition process is often the initial broadcast of each televisions show's season. Certain shows, such as *American Idol* and *So You Think You Can Dance*, have capitalized on this audition process, making highly anticipated episodes that exploit both the talented and the untalented to entice viewership. These shows, which promise fame as the end result for the winner, allow anyone to audition, removing all limitations on accessibility to potential fame. In doing so, these shows open up a new venue to achieve an elevated social status and greater capital. Dance competitions capitalize on this desire by implementing title competitions for soloists. These title competitions, as well as other awards, resemble a similar status of fame through the use of the winners' images in advertising. Moreover, some competitions, particularly those affiliated with workshops, offer short-term scholarships to dance studios or workshops to winners. In some instances the solo title competition winners travel the following year assisting the corporation's faculty, thereby making professional

connections and potential upward mobility. More broadly, all competitions, through the establishment of a hierarchy and social capital, offer all dancers an opportunity to experience fame via exposure and recognition even if only on a regional level.

Although the global media stage has increased its ability, dance as the vehicle through which subjects gain fame is not new. In Europe during the nineteen century Romantic ballerinas began to gain acclaim over their male counterparts and choreographers.[29] Meanwhile, in the United States, free Negro William Henry Lane was achieving fame on the minstrel circuit as the top bill on a program with four white minstrels.[30] Today the fame of the dancer can extend even further as prominent dancers such as Mikhail Baryshnikov get supporting roles on popular television shows or choreographers like Twyla Tharp become associated with major Broadway musicals.[31] While fame acquired by the dancing body is not new, the popularity and prominence of dance as a method to gain fame has significantly increased.

Fame only brings such force and influence within a capitalist system. The evolution of this practice can be located following a discussion John Berger begins in his text *Ways of Seeing* (1972). Berger begins with art, specifically paintings, locating its role in capitalism in a discussion of the value of Leonardo's *The Virgin and Child with St Anne and St John the Baptist*. According to Berger, "[i]t has become impressive, mysterious, because of its market value", which increased dramatically after an American offered to purchase it from the National Gallery for an extraordinary amount.[32] Berger goes on to state that "[t]he bogus religiosity which now surrounds original works of art… is ultimately dependent upon their market value". What Berger is suggesting is that

contemporary notions of works of art do not inherently exist in the work itself but rather in the value it attains on the capital market. This is not unlike the production of social capital via successful sport practice. Therefore, dancing bodies wanting to be judged to receive a monetary award, regardless of how much, fit clearly into a culture where values of capital are central to establishing and understanding relationships. For the dancer, her medium is the body and the intense physical training of this body intends to perfect the moving sculpture into the most valuable dancing body on the stage. Like paintings in a gallery, bodies on the competition stage are vying for a spot in the capitalist system in order to gain "religiosity" or, more exactly, social capital and market value.

In his discussion about publicity as an extension of art and painting Berger writes that publicity "proposes to each of us that we transform ourselves, or our lives, by buying something more. This more, it proposes, will make us in some way richer—even though we will be poorer by having spent our money."[33] In the case of competition, the lifestyle suggested not only indicates an enrichment of life but, specifically, a valuing of the body. Competition offers an awarding of numerical scores and trophies along with titles and monetary awards, which gives a market value to the dancing body and places it in the capitalist system. In a capitalist society a commodification of the body, or artwork, becomes equivalent to its meaning and value. And in a capitalist world where images, particularly those associated with marketing and publicity, are encountered regularly, it becomes standard to gauge wealth through tangible goods, even if the purchasing of those goods makes us "poorer by having spent our money." Therefore, a monetary award, even if less than the original expenses, still indicates a greater market value for the competition

body. That is to say, she may have spent a certain amount to get to the competition stage but if she earns back even a small portion of that, which not everyone accomplishes, she is still ranked above others around her.

Berger highlights "glamour" as an important dimension in publicity. He writes, "[t]he spectator-buyer is meant to envy herself as she will become if she buys the product. She is meant to imagine herself transformed by the product into an object of envy for others, an envy which will then justify her loving herself."[34] In order to accomplish this Berger identifies glamour, which he believes did not exist in "the hey day of oil painting" but is a modern invention.[35] Glamour uses the contrast of "social conditions" and "the pursuit of individual happiness" to evoke envy and sparking desire.[36] Berger writes of the individual's desire to move beyond the day-to-day tasks primary to the experience of the industrialized world. Marketing and publicity offer the idea that such a thing can be accomplished through the purchasing of goods when, in fact, "Publicity turns consumption into a substitute for democracy… [and] helps to mask and compensate for all that is undemocratic within society."[37] In her text on competitive ballroom dance, Glamour Addiction (2006), Juliet McMains coins the term Glamour Machine of which she writes, "Glamour is both the machine that powers American DanceSport and the industry's primary commodity."[38] According to McMains glamour is the central element to the structure of this particular dance form as well as what it produces and is, with enough hard work, accessible for all in various forms. Similarly, Berger writes that glamour reaches to all viewers, not a limited sect, asking all possible consumers to participate in the lifestyle it is offering. In doing so, it opens up the

practice, item, or other consumable idea to all, giving an appearance of accessibility and masking potential limitations; specifically, competition offers an opportunity towards celebrity.

Berger's work begins with oil paintings and completes itself with publicity, that is, print media. Since the publication of his text, marketing and publicity have changed dramatically in the face of new technologies and a globalized world. While glamour, in varying forms, is still, arguably, primary to publicity, a new element of fame and celebrity has been added and is now central. In his text *It* Joseph Roach examines the production and presentation of celebrity status, tracing its origins to seventeenth-century Europe, particularly England, during which "the production and distribution of personal images underwent an expansion" which allowed "ordinary mortals [to] reach for the publicity once reserved for sovereigns or divines."[39] Roach's 2007 text addresses current manifestation of celebrity, stating that this expansion was "minor in comparison to what was to come, yet significant as a harbinger of long-term trends in the history and culture of celebrity."[40] This statement rings true in a world of consumer markets inundated with advertisements that rely on the familiarity of and desire created by the image and endorsement of a celebrity. Moreover, in an age of reality shows, *YouTube* and viral forms of media it does not take long to become an American celebrity. Routes for attaining and elevated status, which is a key element of glamour in American culture, are open to all subjects more than ever before, with less visible and forceful limitations on who can succeed. There is no better example of this than William Hung, the *American Idol* Season 3 contestant who received a record deal and huge fan base after a failed

audition. The ability to achieve celebrity status lies not in talent or even necessarily lack of, but in the act of attempting to reach stardom.

Critically addressed by authors such as Roach and visible in the creating of identities such as Hung, the result of attaining celebrity status, regardless of the means, is the commodification of one's identity. Fame functions as publicity for other consumer objects only if the famed identity is a commodity itself. According to Roach "'It' is the power of apparently effortless embodiment of contradictory qualities simultaneously: strength and vulnerability, innocence and experience, and singularity and typicality among them."[41] This "It" factor must not only exist but also packaged in a particular way for the associated body and identity to successfully promote other products. "At the juncture of the It-Effect and modern synthetic experience, celebrities themselves became accessories—useless for all practical purpose but symbolically crucial to the social self-conceptions of their contemporaries."[42] For an identity to be worth using for marketing purposes, that very identity must be appropriately branded as well as bought and sold. Tabloids are successful because of the focus on the aspects of celebrity identities that do not make it into the branding process. The industry of tabloid magazines, websites, television shows, and personalities function because there are elements of a famed identity that are not made public. Therefore, it stands to reason that the public identity is carefully crafted for the purpose of branding. The result of this act is the creation of a commodity, an *object* that can be exchanged on the market.

With this understanding of celebrity as the creation of an object, I return to the practice of dance competitions and its use of American values of fame. Using Berger's

theories about glamour in relation to the notion of celebrity as it exists in American culture and is reproduced through the practice of competition, the construction of body and identity solely as object becomes evident. Because the structure of competition intends to offer an opportunity to achieve celebrity for its participants, the evolution of the related bodily dance practice has resulted in a system that focuses on the construction of object, rather than subject, formation.[43] This is in direct contradiction to the bodily and performance practices of many American modern and post-modern choreographers (Bill T. Jones and Deborah Hay, for example) whose work centralizes the experiences of the performers in the creation of choreographic work. The drive for and success found in fame result in not only an objectification of the body but also a highly public display of the body. Roach writes, "to have It is to serve no obvious useful purpose for anyone, and thus to be available to belong to everyone."[44] As described by Roach and enacted through dance competitions, fame acquired through celebrity status always results in a public objectification.

Berger theorizes similarly: "the surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight."[45] However, Berger's theorization adds to the notion of objectification by gendering each side of performance—viewing and being viewed. Closely related to Laura Mulvey's "male gaze," this gendering of the viewer is particularly interesting when used to describe an industry like competition, which is primarily composed of young women.[46] Because the performers found at competition are largely young female dancers, the majority of the audience members are these same performers. Competition's

structure results in dancers also always participating as audience members throughout the course of the event. Additionally, competition audiences do not contain a wide variety of audience members as these events do not attract a public audience, though open to them. The resulting audience then is a limited number of non-competitors, such as family and friends[47] as well as dance teachers and studio owners, and primarily competitors. Because of this, each competitor both performs and views, she is surveyed and also surveys. Also taking the role of surveyor the competitor participates in her own objectification as she objectifies the performance of others. This gendered objectification and the associated act of seeking celebrity lies as a central aspect of dance competitions, revealing how this practice utilizes elements of the American experience to construct this particular stage for dance.

Dance & Consumer Culture

Up to this point sport and celebrity, which both function at the site of competition, have been addressed separately in this text. However, central to these two practices is the structure of capitalism. Berger discusses it in relation to market value while Miller, in a discussion of "fandom" (the social and financial support of professional sports) parallels sport with capitalism citing the "mutual association of interdependent labor, rationalized techniques of production and consumption, privately mandated allocations of social wealth, all at an immense scale, that goes by the name of competitive individualism."[48] Roach even locates the rise of celebrity status with the development of technologies that allowed for mass circulation. Prevalent throughout many other structures of American culture, capitalism is the driving force of the American experience. Making this fact

clear is the constant presence of capitalism in controversial issues over Westernization and the preservation of culture. As the primary aspect of American culture, capitalism can be found in every element of American life, including dance competitions.

Competition is composed of many separate but related private organizations and corporations that can only survive through financial success. Because competition corporations are not non-profit and few of the participating studios are, the need to fit into a consumer structure is crucial to the individual success of each organization. The exchanges of capital are deeply complex and function in an intertwined network that includes various parties, including the dancer or her financial guardian, the dancer's private dance studio, one or more competition corporations, as well as costume companies, related dancewear vendors and on-site competition vendors, to name a few.

Because many competition corporations do not allow dancers to enter unaffiliated with a studio or organization, private studios across the country seek to attract dancers through the opportunity to compete. As competitions become more popular they are also becoming more crucial within the industry of dance studios and many studios either align as a competition studio or in direct contradiction to the practice of competitions.[49] Private dance studios, as opposed to ballet academies or other private dance institutions, have been embedded with the practice of competition even if it means an adamant rejection of the practice. And the vast numbers of private studios that do choose to participate in competition often use it as a marketing tool to attract higher enrollment and more skilled and involved students. Of course, marketing ability relies on the studio's own success at competition; greater competition success leads to greater success,

exposure and financial gain for a studio.

Meanwhile, competition corporations seek to attract as many studios as possible, guaranteeing a larger number of competitors. The costs of running a competition includes a multitude of fees such as venue rental, staff travel and payment, administrative costs, liability insurance and music licensing fees. The associated costs necessitate entry fees for each dancer. Slogans such as "Where Everyone Gets A Standing Ovation…" and "A Cut Above, Reaching Beyond," suggesting a more premiere status than other competitions, are used like any other product or brand uses a slogan, intending to achieve greater recognition and greater consumption.[50] Competitions also use aspects such as critique mediums (i.e. audio tapes, DVDs, flashdrives), award titles and monetary award amounts to attract studios and participants.[51] These marketing tools become necessary in order to ensure a sufficient volume of participation to cover the overhead costs and produce a profit for the long-term success of the competition corporation.

Adding to the entry fees, corporations often sell programs and other merchandise, such as clothing and souvenirs, to increase profits. The key demographic for these items is the competitor. This is often one of the final exchanges of financial capital by the dancers or, more likely, her financial guardian. Prior to this purchase the dancer has paid for tuition at the dance studio, which can include the cost of choreography for each competition dance, costume costs and accessories, entry fees and travel costs (which, depending on the region of the country and the proximity of competition events, can often include hotel costs). More importantly, just as each of the key players in exchanges of capital at competition are constantly seeking, in varying ways, to achieve their greatest

use-value, so is the competition dancer. The attempt of these exchanges is to increase 'use-value' and, in response, exchange value. And the competition body makes these values of both the studio and the corporation visible. Similar to Henri Lefebvre's discussion of dressage—a term originating from the training of horses, Lefebvre writes, "the bodies of broken-in animals have a use-value"—the competition dancer works endlessly to achieve a greater use-value as encouraged by the structure of competition.[52] The well "broken-in" dancer not only gains success for herself but also for the studio and the competition corporation. With each competition title her work can be used to attract new students and competitions can use her image to sell themselves as a higher caliber of competition. All of her exchanges of capital are with the purpose of achieving such a highly regarded use-value based on her celebrity status.

In a peculiar order, the exchange of financial capital reveals her use value rather than her use value determining her financial capital. Karl Marx defines "use value" as "the utility of a thing" and writes that it "become[s] a reality only by use or consumption."[53] As a commodity, the competition dancer's use value is revealed only *after* an exchange of financial capital. In typical paid dance performances the dancing body acquires financial capital based upon its use value. However, the reverse trajectory of capital found at competition results in the dancer paying to have her use value defined. The financial cost placed on the competition body is the same for all bodies; entry fees remain the same regardless of talent, skill or use. However, after the fee is paid, the competition body is granted access to the stage. And in this performance that the true use value of her body is readable and, as a result, she receives forms of capital that provide

her social prowess. Because the site of corporate competition is not a professional site, this use value will never translate back into financial capital within this site. In order to achieve notable financial capital she will have to transition to a professional site that values and utilizes any skills she learned through competition. However, there exists no site that mimics competition and/ or utilizes the entirety of her skill set that will pay her for her labor as a dancing body trained through competition. Although certain competitions utilize, in particular, solo winners in the following seasons as assistants to choreographers and teachers, there is never any financial gain from these experiences. In such moments, the most successful competition body is mined for additional labor. While on one hand the use of these bodies for further physical effort may appear exploitative, for these amateur bodies this labor functions as experience that may lead to professional employment in other, related circuits of dance. Nevertheless, there is no financial gain that will cover the full cost of the competition body's initial financial investment. The only gain achieved through this investment is cultural capital, which allows the competition body to be ranked against other similar dancing bodies.

It is within the visibility of the competition body that all the exchanges of capital intersect and become readable. Competition creates a highly complex and structured environment of dance training and performance that functions primarily through exchanges of capital. This environment could not be restructured to remove or lessen the exchanges of capital as it is central to the competitive relationships. Additionally, much of its appeal is a result of these exchanges and the possibilities for body/ies relationship(s) various forms of capital. While the desired end result is elevated social

capital, the structure of competition limits the number of people who can achieve such. That is to say, the structure of any competition not only requires a winner but a loser as well, even if a competition attempts to conceal this through a system of adjudication. And in a competitive structure that relies on more than two "teams," the number of losers will be always be greater than winners. Therefore, though winning is the goal, it cannot be the expectation. However, by partaking in the exchanges of capital necessary for constructing competition body competition participants are able to display their ability to gain a greater social status through capital. The number of dances entered or the number of rhinestones on a costume make visible a participants current economic and social status as the items and purchases associated with competition are luxuries only available with excess financial capital.

The result of excess and luxury, dance competitions have drawn upon a fundamental aspect of American culture in order to establish and maintain its work as a site of dance. In his 2008 text, *The Great Derangement*, Matt Taibbi describes American culture specifically by identifying, what he terms, George Bush's Americans, who were "trained for decades to be little more than good consumers."[54] In doing so, Taibbi makes clear the centrality of consumer culture within the contemporary American experience. Looking at sites distinct from dance competitions—an evangelical church organization in Texas, an American convoy in Baghdad, the development of laws and earmarks through Congress, and meetings of the 9/11 Truth Movement—Taibbi notes the way consumer values have shaped each site. More specifically, he suggests that within this consumer system individuals are trained to function without disrupting the structures of the State.

He writes, "we had become a nation of reality shoppers, mixing and matching news items to fit our own self-created identities, rejoicing in the idea that reality was not an absolute but a choice, something we select to fit our own conception not of the world but of ourselves."[55] This idea is no more evident than in a practice of dance that functions though strictly capitalist methods. Though it cannot be argued that skill is necessary to win at competition, this win is still bought through entry fees and other costs. Moreover, because of the capitalist nature of competition, no one walks away designated with the title "loser" as that would result in unhappy customers that would cease to support the corporation. Instead, all titles are designed to sound like a high placement (i.e. bronze sounds like third place despite it being the fifth or sixth placement in an adjudicated system or the use of "champion" at the end of the placement: "silver champion"). Moreover, this structure of dance has created a dance practice that highlights the performance of "good consumers" by encouraging a constant and complex consumer practice that is imbricated with sport and celebrity practices.

The direct incorporation of capitalism through the economy of competition and focus on sport and celebrity creates a dance site that is far from disconnected from the greater American experience. More accurately, dance competitions function as a microcosm of American culture. Dance competitions have established a structure of dance that is more readily accessible to American participants, supporters and audiences through the incorporation of these elements. And though the dance forms presented on the stage are similar to many forms of American dance, many have been manipulated in response to the unique structure of competition. From this particular site arises a practice

of dance which reflects a distinctive American culture that is not as highlighted in other sites of dance. In this development also lies a production and reproduction of American culture and ideologies that situate competition as arguably the quintessential American dance form. This form of dance has created a dance 'package' that reflects key aspects of the American experience including sport, celebrity and capitalism. This chapter served to familiarize the reader with structures of competition, both written and unwritten. These structures—the rules and regulations as well as those drawn upon from other practices—have driven the practice of dance competitions as all competition corporations uses these basic structures from which to build unique organizations. Moreover, as underlying structures, they are necessary for understanding the practices and aesthetics that are discussed in the following chapters.

Endnotes

[2] Gold, Rhee. "Taking the Show on the Road." Goldrush Magazine October, 2006. Print

[3] Gold, Rhee. "Taking the Show on the Road." Goldrush Magazine October, 2006. Print

[4] I include this because it is not uncommon, particularly in smaller communities or with larger studios, that recitals take place on the same professional stages used by touring dance companies.

[5] This is never a spoken idea, but rather the structure created by competition wherein it is assumed that the competition dancer wants to improve so that she can be viable as a professional dancer.

[6] Competition/ convention events accrue income through entry fees as well as a flat tuition rate for classes. With more limited space for competition entries than strict competition events, which are able to run more regional events, it is hard to gain the same profit margin.

[7] Established in 2007 by several competition owners, the Federation of Dance Competitions organizes participating competition corporations under a single code of ethics. In addition, the FDC provides an additional aspect to the competition wherein studios are awarded points based on the placement and scoring of the competition entries placed in each participating organization, which culminates in a national ranking of studios. While this organization attempts to unify the practice of competition it should be noted that this non-profit organization seeks to financial benefit the competitions that join in its endeavor by rewarding, ranking, and titling studios based on the extent of participation with affiliated competitions. It is no less embedded in the capitalist practices that reign in this structure of dance, it merely masks as something other.

[8] It should be noted that this monetary award never covers the cost of the entry fees. While the award amount typically increases based on the category it never equals the total of the entry fees for the dance. The only way to achieve this is if a single dance wins both its categorical division *and* the overall high point award and even this total amount is dependant upon the specifics of each competition. Moreover, it is rare that the entry cost of a single dancer's entry fees for a competition could be recouped unless she only entered a few dances. The highest scoring routine(s) are almost always performed by dancers who highly competitive and enter a significant number of dances.

[9] This aspect of competition will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2

[10] Here, and throughout the text, I am speaking specifically of the industry of dance studios that seek to provide a wide range of dance education to a wide range of students.

I want to distinguish these from studios that cater to professional dancers as well as ballet studios that focus primarily on that technique.

[11] "2010 Official International Dance Challenge Regional Competition Rules." International Dance Challenge. International Dance Challenge, Web. 1 Dec 2009. "2010 Showstopper Regional Rules and Regulations." Showstopper Online. 2010. Showstopper, Web. 11 Feb 2010.

[12] Alluded to in the Declaration of Independence which includes "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as "inalienable rights" for all men and coined by James Truslow Adams in his 1931 text *Epic of America*, the American Dream reassurance citizens of their ability for upward mobility.

[13] Baudrillard, Jean. *America* translated by Chris Turner. New York: Verso, 1989. p 21

[14] Baudrillard, 38.

[15] Baudrillard, 58-9.

[16] Here I take in to account how dance is addressed by scholarship. Concert dance, according to authors such as Susan Foster, Ann Cooper Albright, Jane Desmond and others, addresses it for its artistic merits, including choreography and composition, rather than the entertainment status within broader socio-cultural experiences.

[17] To understand this fully I recommend turning to any of a multitude of dance sources that describe it as such, including:

Alderson, Evan. "Ballet as Ideology: Giselle, Act 2" in Meaning in Motion New Cultural Studies of Dance (Post-Contemporary Interventions). Ed. Jane C. Desmond. New York: Duke UP, 1997. 133. Print.

Foster, Susan Leigh. Reading Dancing Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance. New York: University of California, 1988. Print.

Lee, Carol. *Ballet in Western Culture A History of Its Origins and Evolution*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.

[18] This idea has been discussed and elaborated on by many scholars including Sally Banes and Susan Foster and is also embedded in Yvonne Rainer's "No Manifesto".

[19] Martin, Randy, and Tobey Miller. *SportCult*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. p 6. Print.

[20] Martin, *SportCult*, 7.

[21] A variety of texts discuss modern dance or hip hop as emerging in direct response and

contrast to regimes of power and systems of bodily discipline including Jack Anderson's *Art Without Boundaries* (1997) and Susan Foster's *Reading Dancing* (1988), which address modern, and Sally Banes' article "Breaking" (1985) and Tricia Rose's seminal text *Black Noise* (2004).

[22] Martin, *SportCult*, 4.
It should be noted that no author throughout Miller and Martin's text refers to *dance* competition, only competition in sport practice at large.

[23] Throughout this text "participant" is used to identify dancers as well as those bodies that only participate through viewing.

[24] Foster, Susan Leigh. *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. p 188.

[25] Martin, *SportCult*, 1.

[26] Here and throughout this project I use the term "reading," referencing the Susan Foster's work in *Reading Dancing* (1988), in order to address the active process of viewing and experiencing dance as a spectator.

[27] Martin, *SportCult*, 5.

[28] I argue that the significance and complexity of celebrity status in the United States is visible in many media outlets including the popularity of auditioning for and participating in reality television that often promises fame, television shows and websites such as TMZ that focus on the lives of celebrities, as well as tabloid magazines and paparazzi which centralize the high, lows and normalcy of celebrity lives while simultaneously making celebrity status of important fodder and interest in the standard American experience.

[29] Lee, 2002.

[30] Winter, Marian Hanna. "Juba and American Minstrelsy" from *Moving History/ Dancing Cultures* edited by Ann Dills & Ann Cooper Albright. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press. 2001.

[31] From 2003-2004 Baryshnikov starred in the HBO hit series "Sex and the City." Tharp choreographed the hit musical "Movin' Out", which premiered on Broadway in January of 2003, began touring nationally in 2004, opened in London in 2006 and is still currently running.

[32] Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. British Broadcasting Corporation; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972. p 23. Print.

[33] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 131.

[34] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 134.

[35] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 146.

[36] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 148.

[37] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 149.

[38] McMains, Juliet. *Glamour Addiction.* Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press. 2006.

[39] Roach, Joseph. *It*. New York: University of Michigan, 2007. p. 49. Print.

[40] Roach, *It*, 49.

[41] Roach, *It*, 8.

[42] Roach, *It*, 55.

[43] The specifics of this bodily practice will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 2.

[44] Roach, *It*, 55.

[45] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 47.

[46] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, vol. 16, issue 3. 6-18. 1975.

[47]However, these events are rarely attending regularly by many of these audience members as the dancer(s) they wish to watch dance sporadically throughout the event requiring an extensive time commitment from these members should they remain viewing the entire time.

[48] Miller, *SportCult*, 6.

[49] Because of the increasing popularity of competition, there are studios that must publicly reject competition as they emphasize their own pedagogical methods which privilege non-competitive dance performance opportunities.

[50] "Bravo! National Dance & Talent Competition." Bravo! National Dance & Talent Competition. 2010. Bravo! National Dance & Talent Competition, Web. 1 Dec 2009.

"Spotlight Dance Cup." Spotlight Dance Cup. 2010. Spotlight Dance Cup, Web. 1 Dec 2009.

[51] At the regional level competitions offer critiques from at least one judge. These critiques offer information specific to each entry and offer dancers and choreographers an opportunity to improve dances for future performances as national competitions.

[52] Lefebvre, Henri. *Rhythmanalysis Space, Time and Everyday Life* (Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers). New York: Continuum International Group, 2004. p 40. Print.

[53] Marx, Karl. *Karl Marx Selected Writings* edited by David McLellan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 2000. p. 458-9.

[54] Taibbi, Matt. *The Great Derangement*. Random House, Inc., 2008. p 5. Print.

[55] Taibbi, *The Great Derangement*, 5-6.

The Competition Product: Defining the Competition Body

Posed on top of a short set of stairs, she stands with her back to the audience. At approximately nine years old, she stands no more than four feet tall. She is dressed in a pink and black leotard with black fishnet tights, making the white of her skin even whiter. The sleek lines of her costume are completed with her blond hair in a tight bun. Clearly energized, she stands perfect still, unfazed by the noises and cheering around her, ready to dance. With her weight on her right leg, her right hand is flex and place carefully above her right hip, which juts slightly out away from her body. Meanwhile, her left forearm placed on her head, she cocks her left knee upward, creating a juxtaposition between the straight line of her right leg and the angular shape of her left side. Turning to face the audience as soon as her music begins, she développés her right leg to the side of her body and extends both arms low behind her body, thrusting her torso and leg forward. Holding it there just long enough for the audience to see her knee by her ear, she pulls it down, stepping front and then back, throwing her arms forward in contrast to the motion of her body. Her leg comes back up, behind her this time, as she extends it with such height that her legs are now at a 180-degree angle. Grabbing her right leg just above the knee with her right hand, her right hip lifts, ensuring a perfect split of her legs; she looks just past the fingers on her extended left arm. And directly on beat with a "pop" in the music her head looks forward, once again acknowledging her audience. Her leg comes down just long enough for her to fan it back up in front of her face, across her nose, back by her ear, all in one smooth movement, her leg never dropping its height,

right hip still lifted. With another "pop" in the music, her leg reaches directly behind her body. She begins to bring her leg in a passé, rotates around to the front, stepping behind herself, creating a similar position of her legs as her opening pose. She snaps her head back and then again forward, quickly returning her gaze to her audience, over-extended her spine in to a swayed position, as she drops her left hand to her knee, extends her right arm on a diagonal behind her body, plieing both legs. This sharp movement phrase is accented by a framing of her body that draws the audience directly to her. She does one more last extension, kicking her leg swiftly back to her nose as she steps forward. Hurriedly stepping forward down the stairs, she prepares herself and slowly and controlled she completes nine pirouettes without faltering. All before the lyrics to her music start.[56] This is the *competition body.*

Trained specifically for this site, the competition body is designed by the expectations upheld by corporate competition experiences as they have been developed over two decades. She raises the expectations for future competition bodies; she, too, shapes the competition body. Able to perform a range of genres, the competition body is identifiable by her ability to create unique shapes that subvert traditional body positions found in whatever genre she is currently performing. Frequently relying on a display of the flexibility of the legs and multiple turns in various positions, the competition body looks similar to other dancing bodies but is identifiable in her significant morphing of other dance forms. Despite this similarity to other types of dancing bodies, including traditional concert bodies such as ballet, modern and jazz, the chorus girl and several

others, the competition body is a distinct dancing body that has been created in relationship to the structure in which she performs.

It is important to clarify that competition does not attract *only* one type of dancing body; there are a wide variety of dance styles included on the competition stage which attract many different bodies. Because it offers multiple categories, no amateur dancing body (defined by all competitions, "professional" is typically considered to be any dancer making fifty percent or more of his/her income through dance; student status is occasionally also considered) finds itself limited from the competition stage.[57] For example, while ballet competitions are still popular across the globe, it is not unheard of to see a dancer who has had intense ballet-focused training on the competition stage. Although competitions most generally attract studio organizations that incorporate a multitude of dance training forms, there are instances of hip hop "crews"[58] as well. These types of variation can depend on many things, including the particular corporation running the event (some corporations attract more hip hop, others ballet) as well as the regional location of the event (certain cities and regions cultivate particular styles). Regardless of the wide variety of dancing bodies found on the competition stage, one is more prominent than any other: the competition body.

Despite the other dancing bodies on the competition stage, the competition body not only is the most successful (as is evident in scores and awards) but, because of this success, is the most re-created and emulated dancing body at competition. As competition has gained a foothold in American dance practice, the industry of dance studios has begun to structure a bodily training to ensure success through high visibility

on the competition stage. As a result of a competition system that utilizes a wide range of dance styles, the more genres in which a dancer is able to perform, the more visible she is, the more opportunity she has for success. Gendered female because of the prominence of female bodies and the lack of male dancing bodies, the competition body, competition's iconic dancing body, is identifiable off-stage in her movement aesthetic and muscle structure. She is not only constructed *for* the structure of competition but also *by* the structures of competition. In this chapter I define and examine the unique body shaped by the competition stage's particular demands and expectations.

Competition relies on a heightened need for skilled perfection; as a result, movement repetition is the best method for training the competition body. Although many movement practices rely on repetition, this particular use is designed for producing specific images identical to or better than those produced by another competition body. This repetition ensures the competition body's ability to perform with exactness, guaranteeing success at competition. Though chances for additional performances could occur if performed at another competition event, competition, with the specific judging panel, the same order of dances, categorical placement and competitors, can never be recreated, leaving more at stake for each performance.[59] Because the results of competition, and associated capital, rely entirely upon elements that cannot be remade, substituted or repeated, mistakes have a greater potential for lasting harm, particularly within the competition results.[60] Therefore, repetitious training works to secure the competition body's ability to perform accurately and identically at each performance.

Less concerned with the internal feeling of the movement, the competition body functions almost entirely on the images presented. Specifically, the competition body utilizes the images from the reflection in the mirror during class and rehearsal to shape her performance as she is constantly looking to see if she has performed a movement exactly like her *demonstrative body*.[61] Identical to the demonstrative body defined by Susan Foster, the competition body looks to emulate those instructing and choreographing her own body. However, the competition body also looks to current successful competition bodies for instruction. Many times these bodies can be more informative than the older and less physically able bodies of her instructors and choreographers. As current manifestations of competition practice, current competition bodies are often the most informative for other competition bodies since they are each other's own competition. Looking to imitate the physical skills and images of other competition bodies is crucial in the development of the competition body as well as the overall aesthetic and experience of competition.

Always looking to emulate outside images and other bodies, the competition body seeks mastery over her physicality. In her text *Dancing Identity*, Sondra Fraleigh contrasts "mastery" with "matching", which she defines as "a somatic strategy" that "allows us to slow down and notice what we are already doing in our movements and thought process."[62] Meanwhile, mastery, the idea of replicating another body's movement, is related to domination and, according to Fraleigh, "should not be the goal," because there are competitive interests at play.[63] The competition body uses repetition as she strives for what she hopes to be capable of, rather than what she can already

physically accomplish. In opposition to traditional Western concert forms, such as modern and post-modern dance, which rely on matching as a tool for training bodies, the competition body, much like the ballerina, is trained through mastery over her own body.

Many of the traditional American concert dance forms that have been archived by scholarship, such as modern and post-modern dance, use matching in order to create dance and performance. Matching has been used by choreographers and teachers in order to create dance that more fully engages a "natural" human experience and/ or pedestrian movement experiences of the body. However, the competition body works for mastery over her body, disregarding her "natural" or given body and attempting to construct a wholly new body. Earlier in her text Fraleigh writes about "the language of dominance that sustains" mastery.[64] With this theorization, the power and control behind the training of the competition dancer is defined along with its relationship to Lefebvre's concept of *dressage.*[65] The repetition she is performing is not about a connection with herself as matching would be but is about dominance over her own corporeal experience in the studio and, ultimately, on the competition stage. If the goal is to achieve identical performance skills for group dances, then it benefits the competition dancer to strive for mastery. Her "natural" body potentially limits her from being a successful competition body and mastery can overcome this.

This chapter excavates the dance forms mastered by the competition body and examines how the construction of this body relates to lineages of other dance forms while also departing from normative production of these techniques and genres. With aesthetics developed from related sites of dance, many of the competition body's most

prominent skills are derived directly from traditional and popular Western dance techniques and genres. Moreover, this chapter will examine how the structure of competition, as it lies within a structure of late capitalism in 21st century America, has created a dancing body composed not only of dance training but also popular culture imagery and knowledge production. The distinct role of the competition body, as a selectively chosen mosaic of traditional concert dance and capitalist influenced popular culture, will also be made clear as her relationship to other dancing bodies is explored.

What the Competition Body is Not: Relationships to Other Dance Structures

Though the competition body resembles other dancing bodies in a variety of ways, she is a dancing body unto herself. The competition body fills a particular gap between high and low art forms as she merges popular culture with traditional concert dance forms. While the competition body performs on a proscenium stage and with technique similar to a well-trained concert dancer, she is a conduit for many familiar and normative aspects of popular culture. From her costuming, which often draws on current fashion trends, to her illustrative use of music, which always utilizes lyrics and musical cues to drive her movement, the competition body approaches her work with the primary intention of entertaining. Rather than working with the same artistic intent displayed in the typical concert dance, the competition body performs to entertain her audience, using her gaze and imagery to acknowledge them throughout her performance. The following discussion addresses several sites of dance in order to clarify the ways in which the

competition body diverges from and is created into a different, albeit related, dancing body.

Many viewers often associate the competition body with that created by dance team training. Although there are many dancers who participate in both, resulting in a parallel evolution between the two sites, the competition body extends beyond dance team training. The dance team dancer is trained as one piece of a larger unit. The technical training behind these dancers is for the overall success of the group, thus requiring a dancer to have a skill set exactly identical to those dancers around her. Originating in the 1890s, this aesthetic was first manufactured and produced by John Tiller in Manchester, England. The first performance of the Tiller Girls was so well received that Tiller began to "mass produce"[66] as many identical bodies as possible. Sigfried Kracauer describes Tiller Girl's training as producing "an immense number of parallel lines."[67] Tiller made an aesthetic of geometrical patters and masses of women performing synchronized movement popular and accessible. This production of dancing bodies continues in many current sites of dance. Most commonly it is recreated in the chorus girls of Broadway musicals or the iconic Radio City Rockettes. But it is also visible in both dance teams and at corporate competitions as large numbers of female bodies turn, kick and leap in unison, when working as a corps.

However, while being able to dance identically strengthens the overall performance of the group routine, the competition body must also be able to dance as a soloist in order to be of the highest caliber dancer found at competition. She must be more than a physical body able to achieve technical feats; she must also be able to

express a marketable identity that judges, as well as viewers, will recognize and score well. Although she must be able to blend in with a larger group, the competition body must also be able to stand out as a soloist. The competition body's ability to traverse between the corps and a soloist makes her more versatile than the dance team body, which can only perform as a part of a larger unit.

Despite its placement on the proscenium stage, the competition body is framed markedly differently than the concert body that typically inhabits the space. In her text *Reading Dancing*, Susan Foster delineates programming and other framing elements necessary for reading dance performance. She uses well-archived choreographic works by Deborah Hay, George Balanchine, Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham in order to clarify the codes and conventions that are used to create "a system of meaning" in contemporary American concert dance.[68] Using five categories—frame, mode of representation, style, vocabulary and syntax—Foster accounts for elements including the physical space of framing, lighting and stage, as well as the program, style and quality of movement by individual dancers, and the historical significance of various body parts. It is from these various elements that Foster believes one can begin to informatively and accurately read a dance. However, American competition dance, despite its placement on a proscenium stage and many other qualities that resemble concert dance, does not employ many of these elements that Foster outlines. Moreover, several of the ways the competition body departs from the concert body are simultaneous digressions from the chorus girl as well. In understanding the way in which the competition body differs from these other dancing bodies the codes and contexts particular to the this body become

evident, making clear the unique role the competition body holds within American dance practice.

While Foster highlights lighting, the use of curtains (such as opening the curtain to begin a piece or beginning on an already visible stage), and many other technical facets as framing choices available to concert dance choreographers, many, if not most, of these facets are unusable for the competition dance. Lacking any on-site rehearsal or technical options, competition choreographers function under a set of assumptions regarding the stage space. Many elements such as lighting, use of curtain and other frames are pre-determined by the competition corporation and remain constant for all dances. Dances must be adjustable since the size of the stage can also vary from venue to venue. Backstage space, including crossover and wings, can also differ, requiring flexibility within the choreography and by the dancers based upon venue capabilities. Time limits as well as other regulations, including those that typically ban the use of fire, live animals, water, confetti or other objects that may require clean up,[69] also hinder choreographic choice that are normally granted towards American concert choreographers. Though fire codes, liability and resources may limit the concert choreographer, the competition choreographer must fit her work into multiple pages of fine print rules. Although competition dances are choreographed by many various choreographers, the elements pre-determined by the competition corporation and the venue rented by the corporation unify all the dances through an identical and limited frame.

In addition to the framing of the stage, competition dances, unlike concert dances that are programmed based on an overarching structure or theme, are placed arbitrarily in the event program. The competition program is dictated by the categories, rather than compositional choice, which affects the reading of these dances and bodies. Some competitions begin the event with categories in the younger, less experienced age divisions, working upwards from there, which privileges skill and experience in reading the dances, while others arbitrarily organize a program to fit into a particular time frame, based upon venue availability, length of categories and necessary program breaks. With the exception of categories, dances are organized, not according to artistic relationship, but in consideration of elements such as quick changes—the amount of time it will take dancers to change from their previous or future dances—and, sometimes, props (if it takes an extended period of time to arrange or clean up, some corporations will put these dances before or after breaks during the program). So, while most concert programs anticipate that viewers will experience dances as a unified collection, the organization of competition can not account for this collective experience of dance viewing. Although competition dances are intended to be viewed discretely, entirely independent of those surrounding them, it is impossible to guarantee that the viewing will be experienced this way.

The restrictions employed through rules and regulations are just a few of the reasons the codes and conventions that Foster outlines are not applicable in their entirety towards competition dance. The framing of competition work is largely influenced by the venue or competition corporation as lighting and other stage design elements are pre-

determined. While concert choreographers have the power to choose many of these elements, the competition choreographer does not, resulting in an arbitrary framing of the competition body's performance. Because the dancing body/ies are the only element over which choreographers have control, this is the primary location of production for this particular site of dance. While composition is an important element in traditional concert dance, this often becomes secondary in the competition aesthetic. That is not to say that choreography is not accounted for in the judging of dance but, instead, to acknowledge the importance of the body as the primary tool and vehicle for the dance produced by the structure of competition. A reading of the competition body, therefore, requires looking beyond these elements of the frame which are already in place in order to reveal the potential of the competition dance and the competition body. Although she must be understood within her framing, the competition body cannot be sufficiently read without acknowledging the limitations that construct this framing, as it is these same limiting structures that also construct her particular dancing body.

Underneath the Competition Body: Fundamental Techniques of Competition

Although not the only body present on the competition stage, the competition body is the only one constructed entirely as a result of these structures. Made for the proscenium stage, competition dance is not a social dance form like ballroom dance or early forms of hip hop that are considered vernacular dances. Morphing the codes and conventions, including the space, of American concert dance resides, competition dance exposes a gap in the current categorization and theorization of American dancing bodies.

The resulting dancing body is one which is gaining popularity and visibility but has not yet been given adequate space within dance scholarship. Although the competition body relies on similar paradigms as other dancing bodies, its development, function and presentation require a different analytical framework designed specifically for the complexities of this body.

As is true for other forms and sites of dance, competition has a lineage associated with other dance practices. Competition dance did not arise discretely, but rather, in the path of other dance forms found in the United States. However, it also formed in relation to other aspects of culture. It is its relationship to the latter that has contributed to the development of the competition body as its own distinct dancing body. In her text *Reading Dancing*, as well as her article "Dancing Bodies," Susan Foster prioritizes training as a means of reading the moving body. Foster rightly suggests that it is within the training of the body—the methods of teaching and modes of learning—that the necessary aspects for reading movement exists. Following Foster's lead, this section addresses the training techniques that construct the physicality of the competition body. Specifically, I consider both the use of these techniques as they align with the history of each as well as their departure from normative training and uses. Assembled of jazz and ballet, she performs the history both her primary techniques while shifting the social conventions, expectations and abilities contained in each.

Jazz: The Foundation of the Competition Body

The competition body trains in many different dance techniques and styles. However, the cornerstone training technique and compositional genre of competition is

jazz. The particular style of jazz in which the competition body trains is not the traditional American jazz form that arose out of African American vernacular dance forms and the evolution of jazz music. A foundational text on jazz dance, Marshall and Jean Stearns *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* discusses "American dancing that is performed to and with the rhythms of jazz… dancing that swings."[70] They also state that by the mid-sixties this vernacular jazz dance of which they write no longer existed. However, citing Roger Pryor Dodge's article "Jazz Dance, Mambo Dance" from a 1959 *Jazz Review*, Stearns and Stearns suggest that jazz dance evolved into a dance form vaguely similar to the original style. Dodge writes, "a new breed of dancer, fortified with ballet and modern dance training, took over show business," which "became a choreographer's idea of what dancers with ballet and modern training should do to jazz."[71] From this "new breed" emerged the jazz aesthetic found on the competition stage. While this particular version of jazz dance retains many elements from the great jazz masters, such as Katherine Dunham, Jack Cole and Bob Fosse, it is also infused with popular culture aesthetics, which are obvious within the music and movement composition as previous jazz techniques are manipulated into a new style.

Before analyzing competition jazz it is necessary to address the complexities within the history of jazz as an American dance practice. Minimal theoretical work has been done on jazz, which has been largely left out of the scholarly archive, specifically the variation of jazz that extends beyond the vernacular dance forms that inform the current jazz aesthetic often found in commercial dance practices. Though it has been left on the margins in academia, jazz has been recognized within industry magazines for

many years in a variety of ways, including editorials, historical articles, and education, such as breaking down steps and combinations as well as proper shoe fitting practices. This particular forum has given notable recognition to jazz as it has arguably had the greatest impact on the industry of studio dance. Moreover, it has evolved rapidly and significantly as it has taken shape within American dance culture. Jazz dance has created the greatest room for discussion over the longest period of time within the dance interest magazine.[72] For this discussion in particular, I address two articles from *Dance Magazine*: K.C Patrick's "So What's American? What's Jazz" and Michelle Vellucci's "Call it Post-Jazz." Both of these articles examine the complexities of jazz dance in the 21st century while harkening to its history and extreme variety.

Patrick's brief article begins with an assertion of jazz as "a major American art form."[73] Certainly the history of jazz, as it evolves from minstrelsy (and the form's history within slavery laws) through the Jazz Age to musical theater and beyond, positions it as one of the few original American dance forms, in as much as 100 years of dance history within the United States compose the form.[74] Though Patrick does not ever define jazz, she does compile an extensive list of the things that jazz *is* and *can be.* In this list Patrick includes: "jazz tappers rifling percussive improvisations", MTV, "classical and contemporary musical theater", "angst filled pop lyrical contractions", and "ragtime rebels". Patrick conjures up the ideas of another well-known theorist, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, when she lists "the slinky, pelvic-centered low blues". In her text *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance* Gottschild defines several premises for identifying an Africanist aesthetic. Within this discussion she writes of

"polycentrism," during which she juxtaposes the "nobly lifted, upper center of the aligned torso" found in "academic European aesthetics" with the significant use of the pelvis and lower body rhythms found in descriptions of Earl "Snake Hips" Tucker, as written by Stearns and Stearns.[75] Additionally, Patrick lists "hot and cold" in a definition of jazz, harkening to Gottschild's "aesthetic of the cool." In this premise Gottschild again contrasts the Africanist aesthetic with the "centeredness, control, linearity, [and] directness" of the "European attitude."[76] She writes, "the Africanist mode suggests asymmetricality…, looseness…., and indirectness of approach. 'Hot,' its opposite, is the indispensable complement of the Africanist cool. Hot illuminates cool; cool illuminates hot."[77] Although Gottschild is speaking more broadly of dance practices in the United States, both she and Patrick are referring to crucial aspects of jazz that originated in the vernacular dance history that contribute to the current practice. These elements of jazz have been retained over many decades of change, which include a dramatic shift of jazz from primarily marginalized African American bodies to largely mainstream white bodies.

In her article, "'Oh, You Black Bottom!' Appropriation, Authenticity, and Opportunity in the Jazz Dance Teaching of 1920s New York", Danielle Robinson looks at the invisibility of the black body within training and choreography of dance in the Jazz Age as the practice shifts from vernacular to codified. She writes:

> White jazz dancers, especially females ones, were the primary clients of the black Broadway studios, not professional black performers. Furthermore, it was white celebrity women who were most able to market black dances (such as the Shimmy, Charleston, and Black Bottom) directly to the American public through films, magazines, sheet music, and theater shows.[78]

Robinson confirms that jazz was created within a site of performance more closely associated with entertainment and commodity practice than art. In particular, the commodification of jazz through its codification in dance studios and popularization on stage relied on appropriation of the practice from marginal bodies. Originating from vernacular forms initiated primarily in social dance settings (i.e. jook joints, dance halls and parties), its visibility on stage was largely in the context of shows that focused on entertainment value, in order to sell tickets and fill seats. As a result of its placement in the high/ low art divide, jazz has not been well archived by academic dance scholarship. Instead, it has been archived by industry magazines which largely focus on its entertainment, rather than artistic, value.

The notion of jazz as entertaining rather than artistic is made clear in Vellucci's article wherein she includes descriptors and comments from some of America's premier concert jazz choreographers. In her article Vellucci writes of the 2003 Jazz Dance World Congress[79]:

> [T]he performances ranged from modern dance and hip hop to Broadway-style showmanship and martial arts flavored acrobatics. The hodgepodge seems to confirm that a tidy definition of jazz dance remains as elusive today as it was fifty years ago, when the form first began to emerge on the concert stage.[80]

However, despite the difficulty she suggests, Vellucci, through her interviews, unearths some worthwhile and interesting aspects of a potential definition of jazz dance. Moreover, the elements which she does connect within the article become increasingly more interesting when applied to jazz as it is utilized on the competition stage and within the training of the competition body. Working to define a more recent incarnation of jazz

in the United States, the manner in which Vellucci defines jazz describes the competition jazz aesthetic particularly accurately.

Although she attempts to locate jazz in its historical upbringings within "variety shows, movies, Broadway and TV," Vellucci states "Jazz dancers were not 'artists,' but 'entertainers' whose acts were designed as crowd pleasers. Jazz dance was more showbiz than high art."[81] She continues on to quote Frank Chaves, choreographer for the prominent jazz company River North Chicago, who says, "There are companies that will choreograph only for art's sake, whereas we still keep our audiences in mind." In the final chapter of her text, "Writing Dancing: The Viewer as Choreographer in Contemporary Dance," Foster defines a fifth method of representation, reflexive dance.[82] Opposed with objectivist dance, reflexive dance "involves viewers in the task of sorting through and synthesizing the multiple interpretations it identifies."[83] Foster sees this reflexive form of dance as one where "viewers not only read but also write" and through the application of "a set of choreographic conventions," have the ability to actively engage with the performance and practice of dance.[84] By "keeping audiences in mind," jazz, as a concert practice, seems to be offering audiences the opportunity to not be reflexive in their viewing practices. Instead, jazz, described by Velluci as an entertainment form, is an objectivist dance form. In an era of dance training laden with interdisciplinary training, which often includes a crossover between jazz, modern and ballet, *many* jazz dancers and choreographers would likely disagree with the contrast of entertainment and art as a method for defining jazz. However, as a result of the industry magazines which document the practice with an emphasis on entertainment, and the

historical development of jazz, "middle-brow art" practices are most visible in the competition jazz aesthetic. The entertainment value of competition jazz, characterized by high energy music, visually appealing presentation of the body coupled with brightly colored costumes decorated with rhinestones, is an effect of the accessibility of its particular aesthetic.

The influence of jazz on the competition body is visible in its execution of, among other things, extended lines of the body, isolations and various levels of rhythmic complexity, which when performed in unison with other bodies, maintain advanced and entertaining performances. The use of rhythm is the most significant relationship competition jazz has to the original forms of jazz found in the United States. The more advanced, skilled competition bodies can be found dancing on the *on beat* and the *off beat*, with various parts of the body, ensuring a variety of rhythms throughout each dance. In addition to footwork, other bodily isolations are used to create these rhythms. The most common isolations are found in the head, shoulders and hips, though she is not limited to these. Isolations are contrasted with the elongated use of the legs including battements, leaps and other similar movement as well as pirouettes and other turn sequences. And it is this contrast of movement that points to the "new breed of dancer," identified by Dodge and quoted by the Stearns.[85]

In her article Vellucci suggests that "what makes jazz accessible to audiences and yet somewhat problematic for artists is its connection with sex and sensuality."[86] She continues on to trace the word "jazz" to a slang term for sex, "jass," "that developed in early twentieth-century New Orleans."[87] The isolations that have developed over many

decades and become codified within competition jazz training are some of the primary movements that general audiences easily relate to while artists view them as exploitative and non-artistic.[88] I contend that this movement and imagery are inspired by popular culture dance forms, such as those evident in nightclubs and advertisements, especially those related to fashion. While the model's static image strives to convey movement, the competition body *is* the live, moving version of the model's pose. The most successful fashion advertisements, even those in print, seek to display the clothing as though it is in motion. Fashion photography accentuates the curvature of the body and utilizes angles to convey movement. The competition body uses these angles and continues to accentuate the curvature of the body within movement. Whether it is an opening or closing pose or other choreography, current successful competition jazz practice relies on innovative and awkward positions of the body, such as the simultaneous inward and outward rotation of different sides of the body visible in the opening pose of the competition body described at the beginning of this chapter.[89] As these positions begin to move, they create a stylized movement practice in which standard lines of the body typically found in other dance practices are manipulated. These positions and movement typically seek to display the legs, stomach, arms and face. Accentuated by costuming, this competition aesthetic alludes to a sexual body without crossing social boundaries of eroticism. This display functions as a point of accessibility for audience members as it draws upon familiar social conceptions of fashion and advertising.

Although it was Dunham dancer Syvilla Fort first credited with teaching "isolations while crossing the floor,"[90] isolations have been a part of jazz dance practice

in dances since its origin in vernacular forms. Currently, these isolations have developed within the technique and aesthetic, often reflecting poses and movement used in social practice and media images, primarily related to fashion. These isolations and movements can be derived from contemporary social dance forms used in dance clubs by go-go dancers and patrons or from current fashion modeling movement trends. Because sex and sexuality is more often more visible in these space, particularly fashion and advertising which typically relies on sensuality and desire, the reading and association of the jazz isolation to sex has increased. However, rather than dismissing the competition body's jazz isolation as sexual it is important to read these isolations for the complexity within them. It is not surprising that an entertainment based dance form that strives for ease of accessibility would also rely on a tacit of using the body as a vehicle to create desire for a commodity, a method already familiar for the American consumer. As a result, there is certainly an element of sexualization in the jazz isolations of the competition body. However, it is also important to acknowledge the historical role of isolations in the jazz aesthetic. Although in dialogue with the images of the body in current social and media spaces, the isolations of the competition body also derive from the non-seuxalized isolations of Fort and other originators of the jazz aesthetic.

The sensuality found in jazz's lineage and the sexuality of these current trends assist in the construction of the competition body. However, the competition stage alters how this sexual performance of the body is read. Many competition participants perceive movements as non-sexual because of the performance space, which creates a sort of 'safety'. The notion of safety results from the competition stage as a private space.

Because participants learn to read this sexualized performance not as sexualized but as trained, skilled and entertaining, there is a sense of control over the interpretation of images. The continued recreation of this aesthetic and validation through awards suggests that participants see this seemingly sexualized performance as necessary for the successful competition body.

The need for a unique set of "codes" and "conventions" in order to understand the framing of the competition body becomes visible in trying to read this sexualized performance.[91] Sometimes viewed as an exploitation of the young female body, this controversial performance is primary to the experience of the competition body. Vellucci posits that "[p]erhaps what makes jazz accessible to audiences and yet somewhat problematic for artists is its connection with sex and sensuality."[92] This issue escalates when competition dance is put in the context of academic dance scholarship wherein the codes and contexts are designed for artistic (modern) dance endeavors. If the competition body was viewed exclusively through the practices identified by Foster in her text *Reading Dancing*, the performance would be seen as a sexual exploitation of the competition body. Jazz found on the competition stage materializes an extensive history of American dance practices while also using imagery from current consumer culture. Jazz is only the initial site at which the complexities and relevancies of the competition body are visible.

Ballet: The Technical Basis of the Competition Body

Jazz technique and training is only one layer of the competition body. To continue making sense of the codes which construct the competition body, the body's use

of ballet must also be addressed. As I begin this discussion I turn again to Dodge's highlighting of ballet's role in the development of jazz choreography, which is enhanced in the competition aesthetic as it relies heavily on the physicality trained through ballet technique. Starting simply with outward rotation of the legs and advancing to common ballet movements such as *fouettés* and *á la seconde* turns, the competition body always uses ballet training. Though the competition body must be well versed in ballet, it does not need to be fluent. It never trains in ballet with the intent to pass as a ballerina and often alters ballet technique, such as hip or hand placement in order to accomplish the most current version of the competition aesthetic. Because the resulting competition aesthetic incorporates many different elements from various sites of dance and popular culture, it is difficult to determine whether the movement is an intentional change in ballet technique or the result of poor technique training. However the reason is irrelevant, as this stylized use of ballet technique functions successfully in the competition industry.

With an extensive history dating back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ballet gained significant moment in the United States during the 1930s, when George Balanchine, along with Lincoln Kirstein, established the School of American Ballet. And in 1948 Kirstein and Balanchine opened the New York City Ballet, which gave the United States an internationally acclaimed ballet company.[93] As the artistic director for the New York City Ballet, Balanchine "required his dancers to submerge their individuality for the sake of the greater whole, absorbing themselves in the classical purity of the academic technique."[94] Balanchine became known for his neoclassical

choreography that was based in traditional classical ballet practices while simultaneously shifting choreography, use of plot and story as well as movement technique. In addition to Balanchine, choreographer Jerome Robbins began working in the 1950s at New York City Ballet alongside Balanchine as well as choreographing musicals. Robbins's choreography became known for its "highly individual *demi-caractère* idiom,"[95] which also manipulates the use of traditional ballet technique. The ballet traditions drawn upon and established by Balanchine and Robbins have continued to be present on several American concert stages, including ballet competitions for youth amateur ballet dancers, such as USA International Ballet Competition, New York International Ballet Competition and Youth America Grand Prix. And while these and other communities of dance have sustained classical ballet training, corporate competition training, though it often uses ballet as the basis for bodily education and choreographic practice, has altered ballet.

Competition jazz training heavily utilizes skills provided by ballet technique, such as flexibility, outward rotation of the hips, length of lines of the legs and arm, and strength of the core, often including many ballet positions and movements.[96] However, despite competition's high regard for ballet, there is a restriction imposed upon competition body's fluency in ballet technique. While a body extensively trained in ballet technique will likely score well in ballet categories, her overall competition success will be limited. The physicality trained through traditional ballet techniques includes an extensive use of outward rotation of the hips, which, without cross training, makes the parallel position utilized by other styles and genres, such as jazz and lyrical, difficult.

Additionally, the upright posture of the spine enforced through ballet training can make styles such as hip hop, which use a more relaxed posturing, awkward for the ballet body. The highly fluent ballet body is trained so meticulously in a particular technique and vocabulary that it is often difficult for the ballerina to perform anything else. Because of the structural design of competition, which seeks to promote versatile dancers, over-training in any technique may hinder the competition dancer's skill in another technique and her overall success. Therefore, while ballet is employed in the training of the competition body, it is altered in order to construct a successful competition body rather than a successful ballerina.

Despite her lack of high fluency in ballet, the competition aesthetic centralizes particular skills that are found in ballet training. To begin with, the successful competition body typically is recognized by the length of the lines of her legs created through flexibility and strength as well as extension of the toes and feet. These lines are found in a variety of movements including battements, *jetés*, as well as simple movements such as walking, *tendus* and *piqués*. On the competition body, shifts in placement, such as lifted hips, as opposed to the square and level placement in traditional ballet technique, and the use of tilts, which displaces the torso off the central balance line of the body, alter the technique and aesthetic of ballet from its normative training. Additionally, in the last ten years there has been a notable change in jazz as well as the general competition aesthetic wherein the extended lines of the leg are contrasted with flexed feet even in movements such as at the top point of a high *développé*, which is commonly performed with a pointed foot in standard ballet technique. The successful

competition body is often seen completing a variety of turn sequences which include basic movements such as an outwardly rotated *passé pirouette*, a single leg turn, usually performed in multiples during which the standing leg is straight with the toes of the other leg held at the knee, and more advanced movements such as *fouetté rond de jambe en tournant*, another continuous single leg turn during which the other leg is held at hip height as it rotates from the front of the body, to the side and then pulled in to a *passé* position, with the toes at the knee of the standing leg.

In order to accomplish these sorts of movements the competition body has a particular spinal posture. She prepares by strengthening, among other things, her legs and abdominals. However, unlike the posture and alignment of the ballerina whose muscle strength is visible in the verticality of her spine, the competition body, particularly those constructed in recent years, often has a swayed spine. Though this fact is not true for all competition bodies, it is a physicality that is not only present on the competition stage but also a method for quickly identifying the competition body off stage.[97] Even when walking, the competition body is seen with a significant sway in the spine that results in the chest thrust forward, leaving the shoulders and tailbone protruding behind the torso. Highlighting certain sexualized body parts, including the breasts and buttocks, this posturing of the upper body is a distinctly different upright posture than that of the ballerina, as the competition body reshapes a stiff use of the torso to draw out her bodily curves.

The inclusion of acrobatic and gymnastic training in the ballet aesthetic of the competition body contributes to her particular spinal curvature. Many movements

associated with the competition body derive from rhythmic gymnastics. For example, many turn sequences performed by the competition body include pirouette, *fouetté* and *á la seconde* turns with illusions, a movement in which the leg, during a turn sequence, swings downward and the force of the momentum causes the torso to replace the leg, with the leg using a *fouetté* motion to reach the foot above the space in which the head was previously placed. Found in rhythmic gymnastics, this action of the leg, utilizing the momentum of the turning body, can be preformed singularly and outside a turn sequence or in multiples and/ or leading into additional turns. Another movement, 'leg wraps,' also known as 'leg hold' turns, which look more like acrobatics than traditional dance, are also commonly found on the competition stage. In this movement the momentum of a turn initiates from a *grandé battement*, at the height of which the leg is held, with the hands, at its peak in either the front or side of the body. In addition to these steps, many others that rely on manipulated ballet technique are used to construct the competition aesthetic.

These movements, considered 'feats' of physical prowess and virtuosity, are highly regarded on the competition stage. As markers of a successful competition body the need to train the competition body for these movements is clear: the amalgamation of ballet and acrobatic skills enhances the spectacle performed by the competition body and found in the competition aesthetics. Much like the historical evolution of ballet, the competition body has and continues to evolve with the goal of appearing to accomplish tasks beyond natural human strength. Ballet has evolved over many centuries through the advent of new technologies and shifts in social conventions, including its move from

courts of royalty to the proscenium stage in the 17th century, advances in stage lighting, the introduction of the *pointe* shoe in the 1880s, or the shortening of the skirt towards today's modern platter tutu. And these technologies served to enhance the spectacle of the ballerina. Evolving along a similar path, the competition body is constantly seeking to increase her skill and spectacle in order to stay on the cutting edge of the aesthetic. Once a movement, such as an illusion, has become popular and commonly trained into other bodies, she must raise the stakes of her physical performance in order to ensure that she is the most successful at the competition event. She then seeks to perform with more repetition, speed or flexibility in order to keep her audience greatly impressed with her as spectacle.

In addition to the need to be the most innovative among other competition bodies, the competition dancer is also performing alongside a particular era of popular culture in which the moving body can be found throughout media. Whether it is the dancing body in a music video, who is highly edited, or the martial arts body found in movies such as *The Matrix* (1999), American audiences are becoming increasingly accustomed to witnessing the mediated body accomplish impossible physical tasks. Found throughout popular culture, the moving body has evolved significantly since the 1894 filming of Spanish dancer, Carmencita, who performed for just a few seconds, making her the first woman to be captured on an Edison camera for a kinetoscope. The body's capabilities, both physical and through editing techniques, have continued to grow tremendously and now it commonly appears to have even greater super-human skills than that of the ballerina. As these 'skills' develop, audiences increasingly become accustomed to the

kinesthetic response that digital technology and CGI evoke. Therefore, audiences have a strong reverence for these extreme physical abilities, and anything the competition body can accomplish to meet similar super-human criteria is met with acceptance and acclaim.

By incorporating acrobatic skills into the already established techniques of both ballet and jazz, the competition body is able to provide the audience with a dance aesthetic that resonates more closely with other visual aesthetics prominent in the 21st century. However, in doing so, the structure of this dancing body, the competition body, also changes from the standard long lean body of the ballerina and other American concert dance forms. In addition to the curvature of the spine that has already been discussed, the competition body is also identifiable by her bulky muscular legs, specifically of the thighs. The ballerina is known for her lean musculature that assists in making her appear taller on stage. In contrast, the competition body, because of the acrobatic skills which she trains in, merges the physicality of the ballerina with that of the gymnast, who is known for her strength and compact muscles. While the ballet or modern dance body relies primarily on the core/ abdominal strength for power within movement, the competition body focuses her strength and power in the work of the thighs, thereby altering her physical structure from that of other concert dance bodies.

Manipulations to traditional ballet technique in the training of the competition body have resulted in a use of ballet that functions differently than normative structures of ballet. While one could argue that these manipulations are the result of many years of poor training of both instructors and students, it could also be determined that each shift was pivotal in constructing the current, and future, competition aesthetic. Ultimately, the

reason for its development is irrelevant. What is significant is that these shifts have not only occurred but are also that they have been accepted into this practice and help construct the successful competition body. These shifts illuminate competition as a site of dance by revealing its distinct aesthetic and performance and training conventions.

On the Competition Body: Choreographic Styles of Competition

The competition body privileges jazz and ballet by using the physicality of these techniques to inform her other movement practices, choreographing it into other techniques—such as modern, tap, and hip hop—and styles, including musical theater and lyrical. In this discussion I make a distinction between techniques and styles. For this I define technique as a from wherein its origin and evolution resulted in the development of new methods of moving and composing dance that require training in that specific form. In contrast, a style is created from shifts in already established techniques. These alterations to a technique, including aesthetic changes to and/ or noticeable focuses on specific elements of a technique, as used by the competition body, do not require training in an additional technique, only adequate choreographic support. I make this distinction in part because forms such as hip hop which are techniques are used by the competition body as styles, and not as a technique. Moreover, it is significant because the competition body is always returning to jazz and ballet techniques, developing a unique aesthetic of these styles through a complex hybridization. The competition body's performance alters all the dance forms she relies on while also centralizing any popular uses of these forms off the competition stage. The training of the competition body also results in the creation of dance styles original to her body. The manipulation and

development of techniques and dance forms are the result of the competition body as the intersection of the elements that sustain a dancing body within this particular structure of competition.

The following discussion is the second layer of training and performance of the competition body. Though she is physically trained in the techniques of jazz and ballet she is composed of other styles in two categories—those techniques and forms which she adapts and those that she creates. Rather than functioning as techniques of the competition bodies, these styles are choreographic and compositional mediums, in which her jazz and ballet training is always present. This section will address two particular forms, lyrical and hip hop, that have been adapted into the structure of competition. Composed primarily of jazz and ballet techniques, the discussion of lyrical will examine the form as one that encompasses the work and aesthetic of the competition body in a single genre. In contrast to lyrical I posit hip hop, a form that originated without the use of ballet or jazz techniques, as an example of the competition body performing the 'other'. Here I consider the 'other' in different sites of dance already well covered by dance scholarship. Though it is just one of many such forms, hip hop represents the way in which the competition body, and the structure of competition, in response to popular culture, co-opts non-Euro-American vernacular dance forms for reproduction on the competition stage. While lyrical is a style of dance, which requires other training techniques, hip hop could be trained as a technique unto itself. However, in the case of the competition body, both these dance forms are trained as styles, relying on ballet and jazz as the techniques driving the physicality of the dancing body. This section examines

lyrical and hip hop in order to address the versatility of the competition body wherein she is able to perform not only a multitude of techniques and styles but also manages to perform in and out of dance forms that represent herself, her positionality in contrast to the 'other', and her location within broader cultural production.

Lyrical: Performing Herself

Although still limited, the dialogue of lyrical within a larger community of dance, particularly in academia, has recently been ignited because of its rise in popular and dance culture. Not new for dancers in the studio and/or competition industry, for many beyond these communities of dance, lyrical is often an unfamiliar area since it was conceived and functions primarily within studio and competition dance sites. The first wide use of the term, wherein it began to exist beyond studio and competition circles, was in 2005 during the first season of *So You Think You Can Dance*, making lyrical a household term; however, it has still not been incorporated into dance scholarship. As a result there has been no authoritative definition of the term *lyrical*. While many industry magazines have written about the dance practice, no clear definition has been written.

Even prior to its visibility on *So You Think You Can Dance*, lyrical was popular on the competition stage, evident in the genre's lengthy categories. Because of the notable amount of stylization, lyrical often functions as a site of innovation at competition, evolving significantly over the years and even more rapidly since the premier of *So You Think You Can Dance*. As it continues to broaden as a dance form, the origins of lyrical becomes a more pressing issue. Where did it come from? What purpose does it serve within American dance? And, most importantly, what *is* lyrical

dance? In this section I address these questions, positing lyrical as the quintessential competition *style*, which utilizes the competition body's particular training and aesthetic more effectively than other dance forms. In tracing the history and development of lyrical, I suggest that lyrical provides the competition body a style that specifically represents her.

Although existing on the proscenium stage typically ensures the archiving of a Western dance form's origin, the documentation of lyrical as a dance practice more closely resembles vernacular or marginalized forms. However, in contrast to forms such as vernacular jazz, wherein scholars including Stearns and Stearns, and Danielle Robinson, or hip hop authors such as Jeff Chang, Tricia Rose and Thomas DeFrantz, have done extensive archival and theoretical work to reconstruct the history of a previously marginalized dance form, lyrical has not yet been archived in an academic space. To date the most useful archival work done on lyrical dance has been in industry magazines and websites, which have a notably different approach to writing about such topics. Most recently, "The Lyrical Debate," by Wendy Garofoli, appeared on danceruniverse.com in October of 2008. In this article Garofoli interviews several individuals involved in competition, both choreographers and judges, in order to locate the history of lyrical.

Through her interviews Garofoli addresses several possible points at which lyrical developed. Jimmy Peters, artistic director of Temecula Dance Company, which was named one of the Top 10 Studios by the Federation of Dance Competitions in 2008 & 2009, suggests that the dream ballet, found in many musicals including *West Side Story*,

was the early stages of lyrical.[98] Meanwhile competition judge Cheyla Clawson locates the origins even farther back stating, "early dances of India like Kuchipudi dating back to the 16th century and Bharata Natyam dating back some 30,000 years, were said to be lyrical in style."[99] However, Phyllis Balagna-Demoret, owner of Steppin' Out—The Studio, also named in the Top 10 Studios for 2009, addresses the contemporary incarnation of lyrical, which she believes "started around 20 years ago" when "ballet as a category did not go over well on the competition stage, so teachers started choreographing ballet to Top 40 style music as opposed to classical."[100] Peters and Clawson point to an important aspect of lyrical when they compare the form to other dance practices wherein story telling through movement is central. However, Balagna-Demoret not only points to the site at which the term developed but also the site at which the practice of story telling became integrated with a stylized version of ballet and jazz without relying on characters from a story.

The overwhelming appearance of lyrical in contrast to ballet on the competition stage certainly confirms Balagna-Demoret's assertion. Although the competition body trains in ballet, she rarely, if ever, performs classical ballet. Instead, her technical ballet training becomes evident in the stylized choreography of lyrical performances. According to Garofoli's article, lyrical is "a hybrid of jazz and ballet, with a little bit of modern thrown in for good measure."[101] She writes that lyrical is "categorized by fluidity and extension, as well as isolation"; owner of Bobbie's School of Performing Arts, Bobbie Tauber, states that lyrical is "not the sharp contractions you use in jazz, but more smooth moving in the isolated parts of the body. The style is about balance and

lengthening" as well as the dancer's ability to "emote, whether to the specific lyrics of the song… or to the tone of the music itself."[102] The aesthetic of lyrical has evolved over an approximately 20 year history; however, what has remained constant is the form's use of ballet's lines and lifted torso and simultaneous utilization of isolations and style found in jazz. In its early formation on the competition stage lyrical functioned more like the dream ballet Peters mentions. The choreography was built around the lyrics of a song, requiring that a lyrical dance be performed to a song with vocals, while turning towards traditional ballet movements and positions. Similar to the movements of character ballet, which were developed in order to portray a story, lyrical sought to make the emotion and ideas of a dance even more readable to an audience through the use of gestures which match the lyrics, making reflexive viewing practices unnecessary. Moreover, the use of contemporary music allows the presentation of movement that is often read as antiquated, such as ballet, in a more relevant and contemporary manner.

The methods for lyrical's emotional story telling, an important aspect of the form, have broadened to a more stylized, less representational movement practice which has marked a shift in the form's aesthetic. Although it still works to tell a story, rather than using movement representation of the lyrics heard, there is now more focus on stylized movement that portrays a narrative. For example, modern dance practices such as contractions and off-centeredness are utilized which create a movement aesthetic that conveys a dynamic and unstable emotion. Instead of expressing words, lyrical in the 21st century has moved away from traditional ballet technique and relies on stylized movement that shifts traditional dance techniques, to portray emotions. Moreover, the

relationship of movement to music now lies more deeply in rhythms and instrumental, rather than verbal, cues.

Whereas previous incarnations of lyrical used the long lines of ballet and the upright torso, lyrical today alters these positions and movements significantly. The use of flexed feet and bent legs in positions normally reserved for straight, long lines as well as the use of abdominal contractions, which take the torso off the centered position found in ballet, typify today's lyrical. Additionally, the use of the upper torso, in particular the arms in non-traditional placements, modified from ballet, as well as a hyper extension of the spine, are also prominent in lyrical. In short, while using ballet as a technical basis, lyrical is about the composition of movement created through the integration of jazz rhythms and aesthetic shifts. Lyrical is not a technique but a style of choreography that relies on ballet and jazz techniques while constantly incorporating other movement forms, such as modern and hip hop.

The status of lyrical as a dance technique is addressed as Garofoli writes: "Although lyrical classes have been offered at professional studios for the last 20 years, many in the dance industry question the validity of the style as a technique."[103] The answer she appears to give actually comes from Clawson, who states: "qualities in movement aid in strengthening performance ability versus just training technicians."[104] Lyrical is known at competition for its emotive practices and it's often thought of as the first genre in which to award titles such as "Best Emotional Execution". This qualitative training learned through the choreographic genre of lyrical is an important experience for

the competition body, confirming that lyrical is *not* a technique but a style of dance that trains movement qualities.

Designed on the competition stage, for and by the competition body, lyrical gives the competition body the medium through which to perform herself. Lyrical, having drawn upon other dance forms, originated on the competition stage and in response to the competition body. As a site of dance more accessible than high art stages, for viewing and performing, the structure of competition and the dance styles produced on the stage engage with a broader audience.[105] Because lyrical and the competition body (both developed on the competition stage) simultaneously merge ballet, jazz and other dance forms, it is the most effortless genre for this body to perform. By providing audiences and dancers commercial material which they can read quickly, there is a greater appreciation for the danced material. In this regard, lyrical, by shifting ballet from high art practice towards a more commercial use, becomes a more viable dance practice in the late 20th and early 21st century United States. Lyrical allows the competition body to retain elite spectacle while presenting it through a new framework more relevant to her bodily and social experience as well as that of her audience. Rather than performing a ballet wrought with history, the competition body, through lyrical, is able to perform a more contemporary experience which she is already a part of. Through lyrical the competition body is making her own history.

In addition to the use of movement and performance that provide clear ideas, characters and readings for an audience, lyrical is typically choreographed to "Top 40" music.[106] Music that is/ can be made popular on the radio from a variety of genres

including pop, rock, alternative, country, folk, and many others is present in competition lyrical categories. The recent popularity of television show soundtracks are frequently used to discover music that has the commercial aesthetic without having been overly popularized yet. One recent example of this is Anna Nalick's "Breathe (2 AM)," which was popularized on the highly rated drama *Grey's Anatomy*. After its appearance in an episode in early 2006, the song became very popular on the competition stage both in the 2006 and 2007 seasons and can still be found in later years as well. Blockbuster movies, Disney music artists such as Hillary Duff and Miley Cyrus (which attract the tween/teen market that often characterizes the competition body), and, most recently, FOX broadcasting's *So You Think You Can Dance* are also sites used for finding lyrical music. As a result, lyrical dances are often performed to music that already has a place in popular culture. Although there is no guarantee whether judges and audience members will have an association to a piece of music's original location, the fact that lyrical dances have such an affiliation is significant.

In Garofoli's article, choreographer Mandy Moore, most known for her work on *So You Think You Can Dance*, is quoted saying that lyrical is "the one place where people can be artists in the commercial world."[107] While I do not wish to take on the full depth of this statement, including the role of art within a commercial dance field, I would like to investigate the juxtaposition Moore suggests. This statement indicates that lyrical provides a level of artistic expression, which she insinuates the commercial dance world lacks. However, because music choices often are from various sites of mediated culture, the lyrical dance becomes a re-production of the site and, therefore, limits the expression

accessible to the lyrical performer as well as the influences the reading of these dances by audiences. Whether it is the rise of images from a television show, a character's experience or plot lines from a movie, by utilizing music made popular through other visual sites, the images created by the competition lyrical dance are always influenced, adding another set of codes through which the dance is read. Ultimately, the space for expression in lyrical is then predisposed as the artistic output performed by the dancer, competition or commercial, is eclipsed by the images already established by another structure that has made use of the song.

Building upon the historical legitimacy of ballet by using the technique and adding aspects of commercial popular culture, lyrical is the quintessential dance form for the competition body, specifically for the young white female body. The previously distant ballet body becomes readable when incorporated with the commercial sites lyrical draws from and, therefore, more accessible to a diverse socio-economic audience. In referencing television, movies or other mediated spaces, lyrical ensures the association between the competition body and other parts of consumer culture. Not only is the competition body engaging in a complex system of capital by paying to dance (therefore, in her moment of performance she is already a consumer object as the only tangible result of the exchanges of capital that take place to construct her and her performance opportunity), by returning to other consumer practices, found outside competition, she is working to retain and represent additional consumer experiences within her performance. Lyrical as a competition dance practice, as well as an American dance practice, embodies elements of 21st American culture. This dance form relies on the competition body's

central technique skills while also addressing her complicated role as a consumer in mainstream culture. Originating on the competition stage, lyrical characterizes the competition body in movement construction and the style's association with popular culture allowing the competition body to compose and choreograph herself on stage.

Hip Hop: Performing the Other

A common competition genre in 2010 and still one of the newest, hip hop was added well after the form was codified in dance studios during the mid 1980s. Before hip hop could be established as a viable competition genre it needed to become a part of the integral structure of dance education in the United States. Once it was clear that hip hop was a not a passing fad but, instead, a popular and highly practiced form of dance, space needed to be created for it within the structure of competition to ensure that categories and genres were necessarily split for judging purposes. The addition of hip hop and other categories provides dancers more space through which to acquire social capital and experience while also creating another means through which competition corporations can accrue more income (i.e. entry fees). What follows addresses the complexities of including dance forms that are beyond the traditional realm of Euro-American concert dance practice in a structure of dance in which the central body type is trained primarily in Euro-American technique practices. I argue that the version of hip hop performed by the competition body is merely a reiteration of movement with intent to reproduce a particularly marked bodily identity. I draw a parallel between hip hop and well-documented Orientalist sites of dance to reveal how hip hop is the competition body's attempt at performing a different, marginalized and exotic identity.

Having begun in the mid 1970s, hip hop originated primarily from African American and Puerto Rican youth in Bronx, New York. Because for many years the dance practiced existed largely within marginalized communities of adolescents and young adults, it is often marked as black and/or urban. In his article "The Black Beat Made Visible: Hip Hop Dance and Body Power", Thomas DeFrantz defines "corporeal orature" as "the physical building blocks of a system of communication."[108] He continues stating, "Corporeal orature aligns movement with speech to describe the ability of black social dance to incite action."[109] Throughout his writing, DeFrantz compares Africanist dance movement with language, suggesting that it has an ability to communicate, exceeding the capability of spoken and written language. He delves more directly into a discussion of hip hop, addressing the spread of hip hop from black bodies to white "dancers in the vanilla suburbs."[110] As he writes about the reading of hip hop and black bodies by "cultural outsiders" and the complexities of the translation of hip hop to these outsiders he also states, "hip hop dance prepares its black dancers to do battle with oppressive societal forces," questioning if it can "accomplish similar goals for its white dancers."[111] DeFrantz defines the origin of the racial marking of the hip hop body while also articulating the potential problems within the translation of hip hop movement from one body to another.

DeFrantz locates the physicality of hip hop within aspects of the black American experience, such as the "post-civil rights era," and he proposes direct connections between the social experiences of the dance, i.e. the hip hop battle, with those of the youth who originated breakdancing, whose living conditions were often characterized by

social and political neglect as well as insider and outsider violence.[112] Because the movement of hip hop goes beyond the steps danced and is so closely connected to the experience of the marginalized urban body DeFrantz writes,

> [c]opying steps only achieves a repetition of outward shapes, as opposed to a rearticulation of the communicative desire that drives the dance. We may repeat what is done by the body, rather than what is willed by the act of dancing—personalized speech. In this repetition, the intimations of actionable assertion may still be present, but the ability of the dance to tap into religiosity or generate action—its core power—becomes stalled in a stuttering through phrases repeated incompletely and without modulation.[113]

While other bodies have the ability to perform hip hop movement, DeFrantz suggests that the meaning of the movement is shifted. In particular he writes of films released in the early 1980s, including *Flashdance* (1983) and *Breakin'* (1984), which are cited for having brought hip hop to the forefront of American popular culture. DeFrantz believes that these films not only made hip hop dance more visible but also "contributed to the movement of hip hop dance from the competitive, masculinized realm of ritualized battle to an integrated social space that accommodated dancing by men and women."[114] For DeFrantz, these films are just one example of how hip hop's shift from marginalized to mainstream sites of performance altered what is being communicated through the movement and how. While DeFrantz does not place any judgment on the result of these films he does believe that "these films offer predictable formulaic narratives of hip hop

culture as adolescent exotics."[115] The presentation of hip hop within the films of the 1980s frames the dancing bodies as foreign urban youth whose physicality is the result of innate skill, rather than extensive training. Moreover, these films often contrast the white jazz or ballet dancer with the hip hop dancing body, who becomes a clear cultural outsider, struggling throughout the film's narrative to become accepted by the mainstream culture.

Hip hop's role as an exotic cultural outsider, one which functions as a commodifiable consumer product, is consistent throughout its introduction into dominant culture. The incorporation of hip hop into consumer and mainstream culture has resulted in many shifts to the practice. And although it could be argued that there are many sites where "actionable assertions" are visible, albeit different than what might exist in the movement practice's site of origin, there are also sites wherein the movement of hip hop is simply the "copying of steps" to achieve "a repetition of outward shapes" (DeFrantz). The competition body is reproducing and represents a racially marked body through the movement of her differently marked body. In this experience of reproduction the competition body is attempting to perform an 'othered' identity, not only in her ability to reconstruct a movement practice that has been mediated through consumer culture but also in the moment her suburban, predominantly white female body performs movement that marks an urban, black, male body.

Dancing the 'other' has been a common occurrence on the Western concert stage with the work of Ruth St. Denis and Maud Allen being some of the most critically investigated instances. The use of foreign, exotic imagery for the creation of larger

choreographic projects by these performers has archived them within dance history as investigations into Orientalist and imperialist representations within dance. Many authors, including Amy Koritz and Priya Srivinvasan, have written about the work of these white American women who drew upon the dancing bodies of Indian women for inspiration and ideas. Contrasting the relationship of the white female dancing body with that which it is performing, the colonized Indian female body, in her article "Dancing the Orient for England: Maud Allan", Koritz writes:

> A Western woman's representation of that fantasy of the Eastern woman––Salome—became… an ideologically unstable event requiring the careful manipulation of available vocabularies in order to keep the overlapping and mutually reinforcing categories of Western woman and native clearly distinct.[116]

She continues on to suggest that the multifaceted result of such the cultural interaction visible in Allen's dancing embodies "anxieties about women and Orientals" within a patriarchical Western structure.[117] Throughout her article Koritz juxtaposes the way Allan's *The Vision of Salome* presented a progressive "sexualized body" of the female dancer with the regressive presentation of the Indian body within a Eurocentric structure.[118]

Koritz argues that the presentation of the Oriental woman in which "Allan had both to enact the East and to distance herself from that enactment"[119] allowed her to perform a taboo female identity with great acclaim. The performance of "spirit" allowed "the explicit expression of sexuality assumed to characterize Eastern dance… while at the

same time the authority of [Allan's] rendition can be maintained because of its accurate portrayal of some essential 'truth' about the East."[120] By masking a sexualized performance of the female body behind an 'othered' body, Allan was able to present a different female identity to her audiences.

Similarly, the performance of hip hop by the competition body allows young female bodies to perform identities that typically exist outside normative culture. The identity that hip hop allows the competition body to perform is two-fold. Initially, hip hop provides a vehicle for the competition body to present an urban, black body on a stage that is predominately white and middle- to upper-middle class. The moments in which the competition body signals an 'old school' hip hop body, one which references hip hop in the late 1970s to mid to late 1980s through movements such as the traditional up-rock or popping and locking, is an attempt to embody an urban, male dancing body. In doing so she is presenting the movement of what was once a marginalized body to a mainstream audience through the safety the white female body. Also turning to Koritz, Priya Srinivasan writes similarly of Ruth St. Denis when she suggests,

> it was easier to imagine the 'native' through the white American woman's body than the 'real' Nautch woman herself. St. Denis thus familiarized the unknown and domesticated the foreign, even polluted body of the Oriental 'other' and made her performance safer for American audiences.[121]

Rather than having hip hop presented by the marginalized bodies of young black urban men, which media and social conventions typically present as dangerous and threatening,

the easily controllable, visually appealing and safe young, white female body is doing so. She is executing the movements and creating the shapes of hip hop all while maintain her highly structured training of normative dance forms such as jazz and ballet.

The competition body performs an urban identity, utilizing music, clothing and movement, through the filter of her body already trained in opposing movement techniques. The Africanist aesthetics, as defined by Gottschild, previously applied to jazz are also present in hip hop. In particular, hip hop is characterized by a low grounding of the body's gravitational center and the torso. Part of the physical manifestation of Gottschild's "aesthetic of the cool," this posturing directly contrasts the lifted torso of the ballet found in ballet and the variation of jazz which the competition body trains in.[122] The competition body relieves this contrast in bodily alignment as she integrates the lifted torso in her performance of hip hop. While hip hop movement is known for using an internal rhythm to establish a bounce within the body from which movement emerges, the competition body is often found producing hip hop movement that uses positions of the body to create a series of images, rather than movement. Specifically, the torso, including the chest, sternum and shoulders, remain still unless used in isolation. Therefore, what would be a reverberation of movement in a hip hop results in a series of quick isolations in the competition body. While these both produce similar aesthetics, the execution of the movement derives from a different part of the body. Furthermore, the "actionable assertions" present in one body represents a marginalized physical experience while the other is a mainstream body appropriating the experience of the marginal.[123]

The second identity visible in the production of hip hop on the competition relates to DeFrantz's suggestion that the introduction of hip hop into popular culture created an "integrated social space"[124] for both genders. While in old school hip hop reproduction the competition body performs a masculine aesthetic, more contemporary hip hop references draw upon the addition of women within hip hop culture. Particularly since its rise in commercial popularity, hip hop has been known for misogynistic portrayal of women, using strippers and scantily clad women in music videos. While these portrayals of women could be read as disempowering due to the exploitative performances, they could also be seen as the empowerment of women who are making their own choice to perform a highly sexualized persona.[125] The competition body references this controversial version of the female hip hop body through the use of movements such as the 'bootie shake' and others that intent to suggest and display the sexual organs of the female body. Because the competition body is performing these movements on her young white body the reading of these movements shifts and the issue of empowerment becomes even more complex. What is read on the black, female hip hop body as overtly sexual and aggressive is performed in the safety of the semi-private performance, by the safety of the competition body, who, in her youth and amateur status, is directed to perform the steps and choreography she is taught.[126] In this way, just as Allan and St. Denis provided a space for a sexualized and foreign body to be presented to an audience of a differing cultural background, the competition body is able to bring a live version of an 'othered' body that is generally kept at a distance and usually only *safely* visible through sites of mediation.

While lyrical provides a choreographic style for the competition body to perform her own identity that contains Euro-American concert dance forms that originate on affluent white bodies along with her role as an American consumer entangled with capitalism, hip hop, used as a style rather than a technique, allows the competition body to perform a marginalized identity that has acquired a commodified role through popular culture. Lyrical and hip hop are just two of the more complex examples of the additional styles utilized by the competition body. However, to ensure her ability to participate in as many genres as possible the competition body also makes use of other styles as well. All of these dance styles are layered on top of her training in ballet and jazz, which always influence her performance. These variations of ballet and jazz are present in all her performances, always basing dance forms on Euro-American concert dance training.

The New Dancing Body: Situating the Competition Body

In order to be highly functional within the structure of competition, the competition body trains and is composed in a variety of dance forms. From the four that have already been discussed—jazz, ballet, lyrical and hip hop—the competition body is able to perform a multitude more, including character (a Broadway inspired form of jazz that typically has its own category known as either musical theater or character), song and dance, dance team and pompon genres, ethnic or folkloric styles (this is a single genre that houses all non-American dance forms), modern/ contemporary and open (which is effectively a catchall category for any dance routine that doss not abide by an individual competition corporation's regulations for another listed genre). The competition body is not highly versed in the intricacies of any of these techniques;

however the structure of competition has created versions of each dance form that draws upon the strengths of the competition body and the expectations for the competition stage. Ultimately, the competition body's value is not in her ability to perform individual dance techniques but in her ability to perform a variety of styles.

To begin locating this versatile body I turn again to Susan Foster's 1997 article "Dancing Bodies" in which she analyzes ballet, Duncan, Graham, Cunningham and contact improvisation techniques individually in order to develop ways of reading the Western concert dancing body. Accordingly, understanding these bodies assists in the reading of their performance. In this article she looks at the codes and conventions created through the training practices of American dancing bodies. Towards the close of her article, Foster writes about the "hired body" that she identifies as "new multitalented body."[127] Not trained in a single technique, the hired body successfully traverses several of the techniques Foster outlines in the article. This ability to replicate multiple styles allows the dancer to participate in the capital industry of dance more successfully.

Constructed by "contemporary practices of physical education" the goals of the hired body have "been set by the scientization of the body's needs."[128] This body is expected to "achieve a certain heart rate, general level of strength and flexibility, and a muscular tonus."[129] Albeit very subjective, the competition body is expected to meet a similar set of criteria that get numerically categorized based on her ability to achieve these goals. Moreover, the competition body functions in a win or lose structure reminiscent of 20Th and 21st century "practices of physical education"[130] wherein games and tournaments are the focus. Foster also writes that the hired body's training "occurs in

rooms full of body building machines or in dance classes whose overall aesthetic orientation may hold little appeal."[131] Generating this statement from a Euro-American concert aesthetic, she is attempting to describe a studio that does not promote the "natural" body she refers to in relation to techniques such as Duncan. Moreover, the reference to machines suggests a repetitive nature of the training. Rather than focusing on small shifts of weight or internal feelings, as many contact improvisers and modern dancers do, the competition body in training uses a reflection in a mirror to gain information about her bodily movements. The focus of this reflection lies primarily in her ability to execute movement consistently at or above a certain standard. Just as a weightlifter repeats sets and increases reps and weight, the competition dancer increases speed, numbers and height. She does so in order to sustain and advance her worth as a dancing body on the competition stage. The focus and methods for physical training of the hired body that Foster discussed are similar to the competition body's modes of training.

While the hired body is constructed out of the assimilation of multiple traditional Euro-American concert dance techniques within the body, the competition body, instead, builds multiple traditional and "untraditional" American concert forms and bodily training styles on top of each other within the body. The hired body compartmentalizes her different techniques producing them individually, as dictated by the choreography or performance, while the competition body layers each of her training styles on top of the others making them all visible simultaneously. For both the hired body and the competition body, capital is the end goal for the body's construction and performance.

The hired body trains in a variety of dance techniques in order to be eligible for a wider range of dance performance opportunities. Meanwhile, in an interesting juncture of various forms of capital, the competition body spends financial capital through entry fees for the opportunity to win social capital in the form of trophies, titles and monetary awards (I do not deem this financial capital as the monetary win rarely covers the full expenses endured). The competition body's versatility results in a reverse process of capital through which she receives cultural capital.

The resulting cultural capital of the competition body indicates to viewers how to read that body, others around it and future competition bodies. Using another term defined by Foster, the competition body becomes a "demonstrative body."[132] In particular, highly successful competition bodies assist in the instruction and construction of other competition bodies. Once a competition body is marked for her success it is conveyed to all viewers what must be achieved physically and aesthetically in order to acquire that level of success. Because the judging and scoring of competition bodies is highly subjective, the best method for determining what a successful body is and, therefore, how to construct one is by looking at previous winners. Ultimately, competition bodies with the highest visibility and greatest success, i.e. those with the most cultural capital, become models for creating future competition bodies.

In addition to other competition bodies, the physical and aesthetic appearances of winning competition bodies filters on to popular culture dance stages and become reiterated for many readers of dance, many of whom are experiencing dance for the first time. For example, there is a close relationship between the bodies on the competition

stage and those on *So You Think You Can Dance*. Many of the dancing bodies found in the show are the result of competition training and most of the top dancers on the show have had notable training and exposure on the competition circuit. This relationship results in the demonstrative bodies found at competition being the same demonstrative bodies that are so widely accessible to an American viewing audience. In this regard, the competition body is not *just* another dancing body but also a body instructing dancers and American viewers alike on how to train and evaluate dance.

The competition body not only creates popular culture but is also composed of it. In his article "The Composite Body: Hip-Hop Aerobics and the Multicultural Nation", Randy Martin locates and defines the "composite body" through methods of bodily training, both dance social, as these aspects of culture construct a particular dancing body. Specifically, Martin suggests that the composite body "seeks to grasp the very motion of cultural processes that emanate from different sources and never fully come to rest."[133] Having established Foster's "hired body" as only partially adequate for reading the competition body, I suggest that the addition of Martin's composite body to help illuminate the complex aesthetics that the competition body dialogues and presents on stage.

Martin locates notions of multiculturalism within bodies that dialogue hip hop and differing socioeconomic experiences through aerobics. He suggests that the dancing body's power is in its ability to negotiate several factors simultaneously, including the manifestation of social norms that typically remain unspoken. According to Martin,

> Dance both appears in the conjuncture of imaginary and performative spaces and puts the constitutive features of a composite body on display, for dance is both a bodily practice that figures an imagined world and a momentary materialization through performance of social principles that otherwise remain implicit.[134]

In this statement Martin suggests that the dancing body makes physically evident aspects of the imagined community/ world of which the body is a part. This materialization makes visible social, economic, and political affects that are had through first-hand and mediated experiences. According to Martin "[t]he composite body is less an empirical type than a heuristic for thinking the physical constitution of complex social relations."[135] The incorporation of many different elements within the construction of the competition body makes it a version of the composite body. From the inclusion of particular usages of traditional dance forms, the creation of new forms, the appropriation of other forms, and the use of popular culture are the embedded "complex social relations" which compose the matrix of the competition body's training.

A part of this matrix is evident in the performance and style of jazz and hip hop by the competition body as a manifestation of a deep historical bodily archive of movement in American culture. Jazz and hip hop on the competition stage illustrate the whitening of both practices. The historical transitions in the development of both , which are noticeable in the use of these practices for consumer purposes as well as the addition of normative Euro-American posturing of the body, become even more highlighted on the competition stage. The introduction and continued evolution of these practices on the

competition stage complicate the "social relations" observable in the competition body. Not only have the kinesthetic practices of jazz and hip hop evolved but the location or the dancer within culture has also shifted. The emphasis given to both of these dance forms on the competition stage, within reality dance shows such as *So You Think You Can* Dance and *America's Best Dance Crew*, as well as in other sites of consumer culture including movies (*Center Stage* (2000), *Save the Last Dance* (2001), both of which juxtapose ballet with jazz and hip hop respectively, *You Got Served* (2004), which is centered around hip hop dance crews, to name a few) and print and television commercials indicates their rise from the margins towards the center of culture.

As the competition body continues to incorporate the work of jazz and hip hop found in other sites, the complexities of the competition body continue to build. The competition body, while working to develop aspects of the movement and visual aesthetics of jazz and hip hop found elsewhere in culture, uses these spaces to inform her development. In large part due to the ability of viewers to read the movement quickly, the competition body frequently turns to the music, costumes and ideas used in these sites for the construction of her work.[136] For example, both *Center Stage* and *Save the Last Dance* inspired the use of popular music for ballet and pointe choreography, a tactic used in these films. In response to this choreographic choice several competition corporations developed separate categories for "classical" ballet/ pointe and "contemporary" or "innovative" ballet/ pointe choreography. Although the technique basis for these categories was ballet, the need for a new category was the result of the use of jazz and hip hop within the choreography of these dances, in order to appropriately match the music.

These categories, the popularity of which is an effect of media, is the dialoguing of marginalized forms, after a rise into mainstream culture, with traditional 'high art' practices. Conceiving of the competition body within the context of Martin's composite body allows the various cultural and racial relationships to become clear. In particular, the way in which different dance forms are adapted for the competition stage reveals the complexities of the relationships of historical and social elements that compose the matrix of the competition body's training.

In this chapter, the construction of the competition body has been explored, with a focus on the relationship of the physical training to the histories in which it is a part, in order to establish its role as a primary readable text. Extending beyond the labor of the hired body, both in training practice and accumulation of capital, the competition body is a 21st century American dance body that speaks to multiple historical and contemporary social practices through various dance practices. As a composite body, the movement of the competition body traces socio-economic experiences and the mediation of popular culture in these experiences within a dancing American body.

Whether she is performing excerpts of *Giselle*, replicating Bob Fosse's work, or reconstructing choreography from a Britney Spears music video, the competition body contains a complex discourse of many years of popular culture through dance. In her chapter "Embodying Difference" from the anthology meaning in *Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, Jane Desmond speaks about the "cultural transmission" of movement practices stating: "While markers of social 'difference' can be… reduced to 'style' and repositioned from a contestatory marginality to more mainstream fashionable practice,

both the specific practices themselves and their meanings shift in the process."[137] Throughout her chapter Desmond points to the complexities that result from the transmission of movement across various groups. In her example of hip hop, Desmond suggests that the transmission of the movement shifted the markers visible in related cultural practices. She uses the example of pop singing group New Kids on the Block, which used "whitened" versions of hip hop, contrasting it with the rap group Public Enemy, in order to discuss changes in movement that shift racial and cultural markers.[138] Drawing upon this example, Desmond writes "What was once a 'black' music and dance style has now become more of a marker of 'youth' than only a marker of racial identification."[139] The competition body is a complex intersection of various bodily markers that have been diffused throughout various channels of transmissions.

In her article Desmond sets out to make clear the importance of "movement as a primary, not a secondary, social text."[140] The competition body is a unique text and a bodily archive of American culture not contained by other dancing bodies. While other dance practices archive other elements of history, such as modern dance in America reflecting aspects of feminist history, the competition body serves as an important artifact in contemporary American culture. Filling and maintaining a gap between high and vernacular cultures, the competition body places herself in live performance, while always acknowledging mediated images of bodies. The discourse of the competition body is layered and complex, accounting for an extensive history of Western dance practices, both concert and social, while shifting each of these practices and merging them into a wholly new body that is not found dancing elsewhere. She does not attempt

to represent something other than what she is. However, the movement lexicon (in the words of Desmond) with which she speaks is always a modification of other lexicons. Within the continued manipulation and fluctuation of these movement practices, the competition body makes visible the history of dance techniques and styles, while also making clear the current implication of each within contemporary American culture.

As a highly versatile dancer the competition body contains many layers of training while performing various levels of historical and contemporary socio-economic relationships. She seeks to present the most viable dance forms for a broad audience as the structures in which she exists compel her to presents ideas quickly. She merges many traditional forms of American dance with contemporary forms, always adapting each dance style. Not fluent in any particular technique, the competition body is a construction of a particular aesthetic of dance that privileges an adaptable dancing body. Ultimately, the competition body is a dancing body that is able to reflect many different aspects of American dance and popular culture. She employs various elements of mainstream culture and combines them with different sites of Euro-American dance, effectively constructing a form of dance that is not about an individual technique or choreographic practice. Instead, she uses her ability to adapt many forms and blend in with or stand out among other dancing bodies in order to achieve a level of recognition. Although this fame exists primarily in the circuit of competition corporations and participants, it is steadily expanding to other sites of cultural production as the competition body's role in American culture increases.

Endnotes

[1] This description is based upon the following dance:
"All That Jazz." YouTube. 2007. 1 Aug. 2009
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQHhdAntb_Q>

[57] The notable exception to this statement is the exotic or erotic dancer whose dance aesthetic does not adhere to the "family friendly" environment of the competition. However, it could be argued that elements of this body are found within the competition body and, therefore, it is not limited from the stage.

[58] It should be acknowledged that these "crews" do not function in the same sense of the urban street crews of the '80s and '90s. Instead these are highly organized and codified groups who spend significant amounts of time working on group choreography, staging and performance closely considering stage presentation similarly to Western concert dance practices.

[59] Competition corporations Danceamerica and International Dance Challenge highlight this notion with a scripted speech given at each event that states that outcomes are the result of "a certain set of judges watching a certain set of dancers on a certain day". This phrase is also used on some of the companies' merchandise material.

[60] This risk is often exacerbated by the fact that the dancer(s) performing are, in essence, customers of the competition corporation. Therefore any external mistake—including music/ sound, stage quality, etc—is often experienced as a lack of customer service and is expected to be rectified or accounted for in benefit for these customers.

[61] Foster, Susan Leigh C. "Dancing Bodies." *Meaning in Motion New Cultural Studies of Dance (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*. Ed. Jane C. Desmond. New York: Duke UP, 1997. 235-58. Print.

[62] Fraleigh, Sondra. *Dancing Identity Metaphysics in Motion*. New York: University of Pittsburgh, 2004. p 122. Print.

[63] Fraleigh, 124, 2004.

[64] Fraleigh, 7, 2004.

[65] Lefebvre, Henri. *Rhythmanalysis Space, Time and Everyday Life*. New York: Continuum International Group, 2004. Print.

[66] Goodall, Jane. "Transferred Agencies: Performance and the Fear of Automatism." Theater Journal 49.4 (1997). p 451. Print.

[67] Kracauer, Siegfried. "The Mass Ornament." *New German Critique*, No. 5 (Spring, 1975). p. 68. Print

[68] Foster, Susan Leigh. *Reading Dancing Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*. New York: University of California, 1988. p xvii. Print.

[69] This last requirement is often in place at many competitions to ensure the swift and efficient transition from one dance to another. Because programs are closely determined on a timed schedule of dances additional time, particularly that not accounted for, could put the competition event behind schedule.

[70] Stearns, Marshall Winslow. *Jazz Dance the Story of American Vernacular Dance*. New York: Da Capo, 1994. p xvi. Print.

[71] Stearns, p. xvii-xviii, 1994.

[72] Although equally complex and compelling discussions about hip hop dance, which has also evolved quickly, have arguably overtaken jazz they have only been present in this forum for less than thirty years while jazz has been in discussion for considerably longer.

[73] Patrick, K.C. "So What's American? What's Jazz." *Dance Magazine.* Aug. 2003: 4. Print.

[74] Beginning with the African traditions that fed into minstrelsy and vaudeville acts, continuing through the Irish influences acquired through a direct relationship to tap, as well as the work of Katherine Dunham and others whose movement practices are heavily influenced by non-American practices, the movement influences of jazz dance extend beyond the United States. Regardless, the development of the practice occurred within dance and performing arts practices primarily in the United States.

[75] Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance Dance and Other Contexts*. Westport: Praeger Paperback, 1998. p 14. Print.

[76] Gottschild, 17, 1998.

[77] Gottschild, 17, 1998.

[78] Robinson, Danielle. "'Oh, You Black Bottom!' Appropriation, Authenticity, and Opportunity in the Jazz Dance Teaching of the 1920s New York." *Dance Research Journal*. 38.1/2 (2006): 19-42. p. 25. Print.

[79] Begun in 1990 by Gus Giordano, the Jazz Dance World Congress is an annual event that has taken place in the United States as well as internationally. The five day event

consists of master classes, company performances as well as competitions for amateur dancers. According to its website JDWC "celebrat[es] the uniquely American art form of jazz dance." (jazzdanceworldcongress.org)

[80] Although Vellucci is suggesting that jazz dance was first found on the concert stage in the mid 1950s she does not define what this particular concert stage was. Specifically, Vellucci does not mention the forms of jazz found on other stages such as vaudeville, cabarets and Broadway shows such as Zeigfeld's Follies.

[81] Vellucci, Michelle. "Call it Post-Jazz." *Dance Magazine*. Aug. 2004: 38-43. Print.

[82] Foster, Susan Leigh. *Reading Dancing Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*. New York: University of California, 1988. Print.

[83] Foster, 188, 1988.

[84] Foster, 226, 1988.

[85] Stearns, p. xvii-xviii, 1994

[86] Vellucci, 2004.

[87] Vellucci, 2004.

[88] Vellucci, 2004.

[89] I am choosing to include this word as a modifier since many "outdated" versions of jazz can be found. Not all studios, choreographers and dancers constantly stay up to date on recent movement trends. Primarily for reasons of accessibility, these subjects continue to perform previous versions of jazz. However, these dances are rarely, if ever, successful at competition.

[90] Straus, Rachel "And All That Jazz" *Dance Spirit*, Jan 2008, Vol. 12 Issue 1: p 80-82. Print.

[91] Foster, xvii, 1988.

[92] Vellucci, 2004.

[93] Lee, Carol. *Ballet in Western Culture A History of Its Origins and Evolution*. New York: Routledge, 2002. p. 324. Print.

[94] Lee, 325, 2002.

[95] Lee, 326, 2002.

[96] Non-competition jazz also relies on these skills; however, competition jazz centralizes these skills within the aesthetic.

[97] There are dance studios in the United States where the instructors focus on abdominal strength as well as use of the spine that resembles both ballet as well as modern techniques. However, the majority of intensive competition based studios in the country do not produce dancers' whose skill focus on these aspects of dance training. What does appear to be the focus is performance style as well as acrobatic tricks, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

[98] The Federation of Dance Competition is a non-profit organization that attempts to function as a governing body for individual dance competition corporations. The system for ranking studios is based only upon those studios which participate in associated competition events. Therefore, FDC titles given to studios are based on a limited set of factors.

[99] Garofoli, Wendy. "The Lyrical Debate." *Dance.com*. Dance.com, Oct. 2008. Web. 1 Dec. 2009.

[100] Garofoli, 2008.

[101] Garofoli, 2008.

[102] Garofoli, 2008.

[103] Garofoli, 2008.

[104] Garofoli, 2008.

[105] Certainly the highly committed competition dancer pays more than the cost of a ticket to the ballet. However, as a financial expense that can be designated as a child's extracurricular activity rather than a leisure activity, such as the ballet, competition gets a larger participant base. Additionally, the tours made by competition corporations annually throughout the United States typically reach more cities than those of major modern and ballet companies making competition a more geographically accessible site for audiences.

[106] Garofoli, 2008.

[107] Garofoli, 2008.

[108] DeFrantz, Thomas. “The Black Beat Made Visible: Hip Hop Dance and Body Power.” *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance*. Ed. André Lepecki. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 2004. p 67. Print.

[109] DeFrantz, 67, 2004.

[110] DeFrantz, 71, 2004.

[111] DeFrantz, 72, 2004.

[112] DeFrantz, 74, 2004.

[113] DeFrantz, 76, 2004.

[114] DeFrantz, 77, 2004.

[115] DeFrantz, 76, 2004.

[116] Koritz, Amy. “Dancing the Orient for England: Maud Allan’s The Vision of Salome.” *Meaning in Motion New Cultural Studies of Dance (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*. Ed. Jane C. Desmond. New York: Duke UP, 1997. 133. Print.

[117] Koritz, 138, 1997.

[118] Koritz, 140, 1997.

[119] Koritz, 140, 1997.

[120] Koritz, 141, 1997.

[121] Srinivasan, Priya. "The Bodies Beneath the Smoke or What's Behind the Cigarette Poster: Unearthing Kinesthetic Connections in American Dance History." *Discourses in Dance*, 2007: Vol.4.1: 21-22. Print.

[122] Gottschild, 1998.

[123] DeFrantz, 67, 2004.

[124] DeFrantz, 77, 2004.

[125] Making the determination of whether these portrayals are empowering or not is a complex one effected by the socio-economic situations of the individual bodies. And,

ultimately, in the case of the hip hop music video dancer, can not be determined simply by a reading of performance and requires a further ethnographic study. However, the competition body is referencing *only* the reading of these performances in her representation of this dancing body.

[126] I refer to this as semi-private due to the fact that competitions are public events that are rarely attended by outsiders, creating a level of privatization. It could be argued that the young age of the competition body results in a different, even more highly, sexualized reading of the body. However a full ethnography would have to be enacted in order to understand such a possibility. Drawing on the general Puritan beliefs which often inform the experience of the middle- and upper-class American, it can be assumed that practices viewed as sexual would not be as heavily supported as the practice of dance competitions.

[127] Foster, Susan Leigh C. "Dancing Bodies." *Meaning in Motion New Cultural Studies of Dance (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*. Ed. Jane C. Desmond. New York: Duke UP, 1997. 255. Print.

[128] Foster, 255, 1997.

[129] Foster, 255, 1997.

[130] Foster, 255, 1997.

[131] Foster, 256, 1997.

[132] Foster, 237-8, 1997.

[133] Martin, Randy. “The Composite Body: Hip-Hop Aerobics and the Multicultural Nation.” *SportCult*. Ed. Randy Martin & Tobey Miller. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. p 119. Print.

[134] Martin, 118-9, 1999.

[135] Martin, 119, 1999.

[136] While I am suggesting, for simplicity, that the competition body plays an active role in these choices, most, if not all, are dictated for her both the teaching and choreographing bodies, which ultimately determine these elements for the competition body in both group and solo dances.

[137] Desmond, Jane C. "Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies." *Meaning in Motion New Cultural Studies of Dance (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*. New York: Duke UP, 1997. p. 35. Print.

[138] Desmond, 38, 1997.

[139] Desmond, 39, 1997.

[140] Desmond, 49, 1997.

Creating Spectacle: Mediated Competition in the United States

Created by the producers of the pop music reality show *American Idol: The Search for a Superstar*, the first reality dance show, *So You Think You Can Dance*, has brought dance, in many forms, to the stage of media consciousness. Underneath the excitement, the entertainment and the sexiness of the show exists a production wrought with aesthetic contradictions that, when analyzed, reveals an evolution of dance and media cultures within a capitalist system where leisure and excess merge to create a system of spectacle. *So You Think You Can Dance* makes an overt attempt, particularly in its fourth season, to legitimize dance as a form of communication and art as well as physical skill worthy of a greater cultural status than it is currently endowed with in the United States. However, in an effort to establish dance as a necessary cultural form, this show alters, recontextualizes and conflates dancing bodies, dance genres, dance language in order to make the show's images accessible for a wide media audience. What results is not a legitimization of a pre-existing form of dance but, instead, a popularization of a new practice of dance, a carefully constructed bricolage of Euro-American dance that serves to empower already dominant bodies. Such empowerment occurs through the careful construction of dancing bodies into particular identities while engaging viewing bodies in a complacent practice that is simultaneously an enactment of choice.

In several ways *So You Think You Can Dance (SYTYCD)* acts a bridge for the competition body from amateur corporate competition performances to more visible sites of performance. *SYTYCD* functions as an exaggerated, though modified, version of the

corporate dance competition as it presents it as an ideal dancing body capable of representing popular culture.[141] Both *SYTYCD* and corporate competitions rely on competition in order to make dance accessible and engaging for audiences. Rather than simply presenting dance in a concert or exhibition, both of these structures use a competitive structure in order to heighten the spectacle and excitement of the dance. Moreover, both of these sites of competition require dancers to be skilled in a diverse range of dance genres in order to win and gain recognition. As a result, the competition body is very often one of the most successful bodies found on the show. While dancers trained strictly in ballroom styles, hip hop, ballet or other forms have limited success on the show, many of the show's top ranking dancers over its first five seasons have had experience and success as competition bodies.[142] Not surprisingly then, there is an embedded relationship between corporate competitions and *SYTYCD* in which both are continuously drawing upon each other. Throughout this chapter the cyclical relationship of corporate competitions and *SYTYCD*, fueled by a mutual use of the competition body, becomes evident.

Although *So You Think You Can Dance* could be analytically approached through a variety of methods, this chapter will examine it from the experience of the viewer, a role highlighted by *SYTYCD*. As a television show it is necessary for *SYTYCD* to closely consider the experience of the viewer. However, as a show which relies on an *interactive* audience whose votes affect the tenure of dancers on the show, the audience must be acknowledged and addressed for their role in the progression of each season's contestants. Over the now six seasons of the show there have been many types of bodies

on the show and a variety of experiences, all of which have been carefully shaped as a result of alterations made to the structure of the show, for the audience's benefit and in response to their reading of performances, over the course of the series. Ultimately, the audience has been the driving force behind the creation and development of *SYTYCD* as a site of dance competition. This chapter considers *SYTYCD* as an illustrator of dance competitions examining its framework developed in specific consideration for its audience. Moreover, as an amplification of corporate competitions, the show elucidates the cultural affects, implications and effects of dance competitions in the United States.

SYTYCD provides audiences with a distinct frame through which to view the dance performances it produces. In particular, the show is careful to construct methods for educating viewers/readers/voters in order to create a collective experience, regardless of an individual's previous experience viewing/reading/adjudicating dance performance. In his text *Television, Audience, and Cultural Studies*, David Morely addresses the role of the audience within television production suggesting that the act of viewing is not an individual and separated passive experience but a collective one in which audience members, as consumers, *actively* construct the presented media. In particular, Morely addresses viewing practices as an active process of decoding, wherein power lies within the consumer and, more complexly, the consumer is also a producer in that he is producing meaning, making viewing a rhetorical activity.[143] In the case of an audience incorporated reality show such as *SYTYCD* this meaning production is even more active and apparent as voting audiences play a significant role in the outcome of the competition. In considering how meaning is read and produced, Morely outlines "two

distinct types of constraints on the production of meaning:" 1. "the internal structures and mechanisms" of the program that encourage or limit certain readings and 2. the "cultural background of the reader… which has to be studied sociologically."[144] Although a sociological study could be approached using the many blogs, chat rooms and other sites that record public responses, this chapter focuses on the former of these two constraints in order to examine how the audience consuming and producing the material is influenced by the frameworks and limits established by the show's structure.

In order to begin addressing the viewer's experience, this chapter examines the structures of the show that play a significant role in shaping and controlling this experience. While there are several structures that work to maintain control, including the sociological experience of audiences, film and editing techniques as well as other media and television based tactics involved in television programming, this chapter directly addresses one in particular: the language established and used by the show and its participants in reference to dance and dancing bodies. Specifically, this chapter uses the show's fourth season, which drew a clear juxtaposition between traditional dancing bodies—those trained in a studio—and non-traditional bodies—including those trained in non-normative spaces (i.e. urban), as a point of centrality. This contrast was created as the result of several elements, some of which were alterations made over the course of the first three seasons and solidified in the fourth, such as labels of dancers, while others were new elements introduced in this season, including new genres of dance. For this reason, all of the structures addressed in this chapter begin at the fourth season and look both to previous and more recent seasons for points of comparison.

I use this chapter to examine several moments in which the producers and judges attribute certain labels and lexicons to dancing bodies. As dancers audition with solos the genre initially associated with their body becomes the *label* from which their character is built upon throughout the show. The instances in which these bodily labels are juxtaposed with the genres in which a dancer is performing becoming crucial moments in which a viewer learns to read the show's dancing bodies. For example, the notion of a hip hop dancer having to perform a smooth waltz becomes fodder for discussion as the judges critique performances, giving audiences a place from which to begin evaluating a dancer on their own. In this chapter I address several results of these labels' usage. First, it will consider how the structure and language of the show construct and produce knowledge for a viewing audience unfamiliar with reading dancing bodies. This section will also begin to address the way in which *SYTYCD* highlights the competition body. Following this discussion of the creation and evolution of popular labels found on the show, the resulting language used by the judges will be addressed. Paying particular attention to two specific bodies—those labeled "contemporary" and "hip hop"—this section examines how the labels attributed to certain bodies informs the response of the judges, which, ultimately affects the voting audiences' reaction. The racial marking of dance movement, genres and bodies through the language choices of the judges will be addressed as a method produced by the show for reading its dancing bodies. Lastly, I analyze how the language that constructs these dancing bodies relies on spectacle, through the structure of competition as well as by racially marking bodies, to present dance to a broad American audience. Overall, this chapter seeks to examine the

American production of *SYTYCD* as a site that produces and creates not only dance but also language for reading dance, in both corporate competitions as well as broader sites of dance production. In what follows, this language, established as a tool for reading dance, constructs particular dancing bodies whose political identities maintain, rather than disrupt, social assumptions and expectations of normative socio-cultural experiences in the United States.

Knowledge Production: Dance as Televised Competition

As a vehicle that has and continues to bring dance to millions of American viewers, as well as international audiences through the various national incarnations such as *SYTYCD Canada* and *SYTYCD Malaysia*, among others, the show can be credited with increasing the accessibility of dance by bringing different dance styles into homes nationally and internationally. *SYTYCD* is one of several recent pop culture phenomenons that have removed the limitations that are often present for dance audiences. By introducing dance through network television it has removed the financial costs generally associated with viewing much of American concert dance. Rather than having to purchase a ticket, dance is accessible with the click of a button on the television set, a staple in American households. Also, by putting dance within a competitive structure it becomes easier for audiences to engage with the experience and process. Although the show has no storyline or plot, as a daytime drama or sitcom has, the producers create characters from the judges, choreographers and dancers. By integrating these characters within a competitive structure a plotline is established, which gives audience members an ability to become emotionally and mentally invested in the show,

retaining viewers from week to week, even after a person's preferred dancer is eliminated. Additionally, in an era of reality television, the structure of competition creates a sport-like atmosphere which American audiences can easily understand. *SYTYCD* has managed to successfully create a structure of dance performance that readily connects audiences across the United States as viewers and participants. What follows is a theoretical approach to the intersection of dance competitions with reality television and the structures that sculpt viewing practices.

Because of the interactive role of audience members, crucial to the structure of *So You Think You Can Dance* is the edification of the audience through the show's structure and framework designed for viewers. Designed to 'find' "America's Favorite Dancer," *SYTYCD* auditions thousands of dancers, narrowing it down to twenty who compete for audience votes. With viewers voting to determine the winner of each season it is important that audience members learn how to read dance so they vote according to the show's values and ideologies thereby producing winning dancers that represent the show and maintain its legitimacy and popularity. If the show does not 'educate' its voters then it risks the winning dancer being less than skilled as a dancer, decreasing the authenticity of *SYTYCD* as a producer of notable. Therefore, the show uses language and labels that directly molds the edification of viewers throughout the season. This language created and used by the show's producers and judges tailors the experiences of both the dancing and viewing bodies. The show establishes rhetoric in direct consideration of its audience, which ultimately influences the experience of the dancers as it functions as an instructional tool for the audience.

In his text *Reading Television,* John Fiske writes about the BBC ballroom dance competition *Come Dancing*. Although it is a differently structured program and only presents ballroom dance, Fiske's observations and theories regarding dance on television are still relevant in regards to the various dance shows found in current television programming. Primary to his discussion is the suggestion that dance on television functions to manage "the tensions inherent in our social structure and activity."[145] In particular, he discusses two sets of codes necessary for accurately reading televised dance: 1. "Sport as ritualized social conflict" and 2. "Dance as ritualized social coherence."[146] As a variation of *Come Dancing*, *SYTYCD* certainly incorporates both of these ideas as it uses competition and conflict to bring an audience together under the same practice of viewing dance. Moreover, it uses "code of sport" such as "signs of comparison and evaluation of performance" while also uniting bodies through similar and shared performances.[147] *SYTYCD*'s incorporation of dance into the structures of reality television *and* competition allows space for a new and broader audience to become readers of dance as the show manipulates already established social experiences for application to dance.

The format of *SYTYCD* establishes a specific structure of dance the closely considers what the viewer needs to become, and remain, interested in the reality show. Specifically, the show works to create tension and conflict both for dancers as individuals and between contestants. The initial stage of the show is a series of auditions in locations across the United States. Typically dancers audition with a brief solo, though occasionally groups audition together. The only exceptions are ballroom dancers who

often audition in partners. After a short audition of prepared or improvised choreography, those dancers whose audition segment makes it past the editing room are asked to leave, "sent directly to Vegas" with the presentation of a plane ticket, or told to stay for the choreography section from where they are either presented a plane ticket or eliminated.[148] The importance of getting a "ticket to Vegas" is illustrated by the reactions of contestants, many of them running to hug the judges, others screaming and/ or crying. Hearing the pivotal phrase "you're going to Vegas" not only affects the dancers' experiences but also indicates to viewers which dancers to become invested in since this is the first indication that a dancer may remain throughout the course of the show. Like that of any reality competition or game show, this weighted phrase holds the power to alter the lives of individuals, eliciting a response from all participating bodies, regardless of the answer.

While the sixth season noticeably deviated, the first five seasons used these auditions largely to present the "bad" auditions. Whether it was dancers falling, getting injured or simply being harshly criticized by the judges, the dancers in these auditions were often used for the entertainment value of their failures. Judges Nigel Lythgoe, Mary Murphy and a rotating third seat, usually occupied by one of the show's more popular choreographers, comment, both praise and mock different dancers during the auditions.[149] Although the audition phase works to introduce viewers to participants, it also assists in giving viewers a point of comparison in order to gauge the talent and use-value of dancing bodies. This ability becomes necessary as viewers begin voting in final stage of the show.

The dancers that make it to "Vegas Week" continue through multiple waves of auditions over the course of several days. Each wave is defined by a different style of dance—hip hop, ballroom, contemporary, Broadway, etc— and a different choreographer in order to gauge which dancers are able to successfully traverse the multitude of dance styles that they will have to perform during the competition portion of the show. Because Vegas Week is not about ranking dancers against each other, I consider it still an audition process. The dancers are evaluated on their own skill sets in order to determine whether each has the physical capabilities and audience appeal necessary for a successful season. In fact, in Season 2, producer and judge Nigel Lythgoe makes sure to remind the dancers that if he does not feel they are capable of performing on the show he "will overrule everyone at this [judges] table, [he] will not have [them] on the show."[150] At the end of Vegas Week, once the judges and Lythgoe have made their decisions, twenty dancers are chosen to continue on as finalists, the audition portion ends and the competition begins.

With the Top 20 dancers being pre-selected by the judges and with Lythgoe's approval, the interactive audience's options are pre-determined by the show's judges and producers as the competition portion of the show begins.[151] Much like the corporate competition there is a broad range of genres used as dancers, in heterosexual couplings, pick genres out of a hat that can include hip hop, krumping, *Paso Doble*, quickstep, contemporary, jazz, Broadway, and *cha cha*, among others.[152] Because there is such a vast range of possibilities for dance genres, from various sites of origin including concert/ stage forms, social forms, urban forms and many that span between two or more of these possible sites, there are many different codes and contexts, in the words of Susan Foster,

which must be provided for the audience for their accurate viewing/reading/evaluating of each style. Because the competition portion of the show relies on the viewing audience's interaction, whose votes determine the bottom three couples, from which the judges eliminate one female and one male (later these votes eliminate dancers directly), situating each dance and dancer within these codes is vital in presenting the dance. Just as important as the pre-determination of the dancers is the judge's establishment of the codes for each of the various genres of dance to ensure that the dance performances are adequately framed for the audience, specifying and limiting their reading of and understanding of these dance genres.

Despite the range, there is one element that the show situates as a constant in the codes and contexts of all its dance genres. In Season 1 Lythgoe notes that "it is unfair to ask [the viewing audience] to understand the technicalities of dance. They want to be entertained."[153] In this statement, Lythgoe establishes the limits within which he expects the audience to be knowledgeable. While making clear his own concerns about allowing an uninformed audience to determine the results, he is simultaneously assuring the American viewing audience that it is okay to not understand the complexities of what they are watching. Moreover, Lythgoe is situating the audience's lack of understanding in order to locate the necessity of the judges' commentaries and opinions. He is indicating the judges' position in the power structure of the show wherein the viewing audience is expected to account for the judges' reviews in their voting process.

Always maintaining the heteronormative structure of male/female partnerships, dancers perform one or more duets each week, from which the audience votes. In the

first portion of the competition phase, the audience votes on couples, determining the "bottom 3 couples." The three men and three women from these couplings then perform solos in "their style," after which the judges determine which male and which female are eliminated. In later episodes, the audience votes directly determine eliminations. At this point the audience votes on individual dancers, rather than couples, and the male and female with the lowest votes leave the program. While the producers and judges are constantly structuring the show to suggest that the audience vote for the most successfully diverse dancer, from the first moment of the audition these dancers are labeled as being trained in one of these specific styles. The audience is expected to vote on "America's Favorite Dancer," a distinction the judges make clear from most "talented" or "personable." However, labeling dancers with one style of dance and then having them perform such a broad range means that audience opinions on who the "favorite" is rapidly changes as different dancers successfully or unsuccessfully perform different style each week.

As each contestant auditions he/she becomes labeled with a title dependent upon the solo of his/her audition. These labels also become attached to a particular "perceived body," which informs the dancer's work on the show.[154] In her article "Dancing Bodies", Susan Foster identifies the "perceived and tangible" as one of three bodies, along with the "ideal" and "demonstrative," that helps to define and describe specific dance techniques. The perceived body is the physical body the dancer observes in reflection of his/ her self. Composed of "skeletal, muscular, and nervous systems and any fat tissue of the biological body," the perceived is what is physically present.[155] Modifying Foster's term,

I suggest that the *SYTYCD* contestant's perceived body is the one presented to and conceived by the audience *in relation* to the label initially attributed to the dancer. While the individual dancer/ contestant may envision a different perceived body, the one offered to the interactive audience is the most important to his/her overall role on the show. For example, the hip hop dancer is expected to be able to execute tricks on his hands and head on the floor but not be able to point his toes, while the ballroom dancer is expected be able to stay upright and move her feet quickly but not perform ballet based jumps. As dancers are labeled the assumptions about what their body is capable of becomes defined.

A contestant's perceived body suggests her training background, which is necessary in determining how successful she is on the show. For example, the dancer labeled "ballroom" is given a perceived body trained by Euro-American social dance forms but not concert or "urban" dance forms.[156] The assumption is that she can perform partnered movements and footwork with skill but that traditional (i.e. ballet) upper body carriage found in lyrical and contemporary or the quick isolations and "funky" attitude of hip hop will not be easily adapted by the ballroom dancing body. Therefore, if she is asked to perform a genre beyond her label and performs well, beyond the skills of her perceived body, she is praised for her ability to do the unexpected.[157] In the context of *SYTYCD*, the perceived body of dancers is established by the individual labels used and is continually clarified as each dancing body executes different, or unfamiliar, genres.

The depth of these labels carries each dancer throughout the competition until s/he is voted off or wins. Without identifying these labels as merely *specialties* the label becomes the primary mode for identifying and defining the dancer. Over the course of

the first four seasons not only did labels become more prominent in describing contestants, the labels attached to dancing bodies have been modified. During the first season many dancers were described by more than one genre (Kamilah Barrett was labeled as a "hip hop/ jazz" dancer and Craig DeRosa and Melody Lacayanga were considered "lyrical/ gymnastics"), and some dancers had differing labels, such as Ashlé Dawson who was identified as a "primitive jazz" dancer at her first audition and "lyrical" on her Top 16 debut.[158] However, as the show develops over the first four seasons these labels have become more defined and there is no hybridity.

Not only does the each stage of the show work to frame and control the viewer's experience, but so does the creation and use of particular labels and genres. While a dancer's label assists in presenting her body and character to the audience, it also helps relate her body to other dancers and situate it within other genres. When this labeling shifted away from hybrid labeling the show's desire to create strict, one-dimensional labels for its dancing bodies became clear. Ultimately, each of these labels and genres is made familiar for the audience based upon the rhetorical response of the judges to the performance of dancers, the specifics of which are discussed further in this chapter.

From Lyrical to Contemporary: Recontextualizing the Competition Body

The use of labels on *SYTYCD* has been visibly refined over the course of the early seasons as the show became carefully crafted in response to both the dancing bodies and viewing bodies. The most noticeable has been a shift from the term "lyrical" to "contemporary." Prominent during the first season, "lyrical" was used to label five of the

Top 16 dancers and accounted for eight of the fifty-one duets included in the competition. At this time, contemporary was not used at all as a label or genre. However, by Season 4 it was used as a single label attached to eleven of the Top 20 dancers and ten of the eighty-three duets, while lyrical was only used in reference to two dances (and always as "lyrical jazz") and no contestants.[159] Now the most prominent label and genre on the show (by Season 5 it was appearing every week in a choreographed duet), "contemporary" did not become a label until Season 2. Throughout Season 1, bodies that would later be termed *contemporary* dancers were known as *lyrical* dancers. The most well known under the title lyrical were Season 1 runner up Melody Lacayanga and Season 1 winner Nick Lazzarini while Season 2 runner up Travis Wall, Season 3 runner up Danny Tidwell, winner Sabra Johnson, and Season 4 top female dancer Katee Shean were labeled as contemporary dancers.[160] Most likely in an attempt to validate the show's production of dance, the evolution from lyrical to contemporary marks a particular shift away from a corporate competition stage towards more traditional Euro-American concert dance production. In part, the result of a fissure between competition and concert dance, competition is not in the scope of professional dance let alone associated with the high art practices of concert dance. Moving towards concert terminology shifts *SYTYCD* away from competition, an often invalidated structure of dance within concert structures.

Illustrating the direct relationship between corporate competitions and *SYTYCD*, the use of "lyrical" on the show is the only use of the term in a professional setting.[161] Created and used by competitions and dance studios, professional "lyrical" dance companies do not exist. Instead, dancers that the show labels "lyrical" would likely be

found in jazz or modern dance companies. Evidence of this is found in instances such as Evolution Dance Company directed by Mark Meismer, a well known convention teacher and competition judge. Dancers in Meismer's company include Season 1 contestants Craig Derosa, Lacayanga, Season 2's Wall, and *SYTYCD* choreographer Mandy Moore. Another example, Odyssey Dance Theater, has included contemporary dancers Ben Susak (Season 2), Thayne Jasperson, Matt Dorame (both Season 4) and Brandon Bryant (Season 6) on its company roster. This particular company, which doesn't define itself by a particular style of dance, is marked by repertory frequently choreographed to popular music, including a recurring Halloween performance of Michael Jackson's "Thriller", and its versatile dancers. However, neither these companies nor the commercial dance industry use the term lyrical, despite the use of the genre in these sites of dance. As a result, the term "lyrical" remains only in the amateur site of corporate competitions and dance studios, with the exception of its use in *SYTYCD*.

In contrast to lyrical, contemporary holds a long standing role in Western concert dance and has become well defined through several sites related to professional concert dance. Dance scholarship in the late twentieth century defines contemporary dance as a genre emerging after the era of postmodern dance. Choreographers such as Deborah Hay, Merce Cunningham and George Balanchine are commonly regarded as "contemporary" American choreographers. In her 1997 text *Choreographing Difference*, Ann Cooper Albright defines contemporary dances as "the experimental dance that has taken place over the past decade or so. Although it is rooted in Euro-American modern and postmodern dance, much of this work takes on the hybridity of contemporary culture,

at once deconstructionist and visionary."[162] She specifically defines the term in order to designate contemporary choreography away from the postmodern genre. The notions of experimentalism and hybridity pointed out by Albright are a significant part of the term contemporary in regards to Western concert dance. Experimentalism accounts for choreographic choices such as Cunningham's practice of chance while hybridity acknowledges the assortment of movement techniques and aesthetics as presented by choreographers such as Balanchine.

Though it carries a slightly different meaning in Europe—London's prestigious Sadler's Wells defines European contemporary dance as "a catch-all term for the mélange of modern and post-modern dance forms that developed during the 20th century as a reaction to the strict styling of classical ballet"—the idea of choreographic experimentation is still embedded in the term's definition.[163] Similar to American contemporary dance, the European notion of experimentation lies in the dance form's role as a counter aesthetic to the traditions of ballet. Sadler's Wells highlights the company Nederlands Dans Theater as well as the choreographer Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker as current examples of contemporary dance and also includes dancers and choreographers that incorporate cross cultural dance practices. Although I have only discussed two of many different definitions for "contemporary" dance, both suggest similar definitions for the term. Ultimately, both the American and European versions of contemporary dance are expected to experiment with dance, pushing the boundaries and assumptions of dance, while foregrounding highly technically trained dancing bodies.

The first time contemporary was used on *SYTYCD* was in reference to a dance, not a dancer. The ninth episode of the series' premiere season presented the show's first "contemporary" piece, choreographed by Mia Michaels as well as the "lyrical" choreography of Tovaris Wilson. Wilson's lyrical choreography uses arabesques, attitude positions and pirouettes in addition to jumps and standard lifts of the female by the male which accentuate extended lines and stretched feet. Moreover, throughout the minute long performance the legato movement is characterized by the frequent placement of the shoulders over the hips. Not only does Wilson utilize ballet vocabulary, with little variation or modification to movements and positions, he also maintains the upright nature of ballet wherein even floor work facilitates little shift away from the vertical safety of the body. In contrast to Wilson's duet is Mia Michaels' percussive contemporary choreography that morphs formal ballet positions and movements significantly. Attitudes are performed with flexed rather than stretched feet while jumps are most often in bent leg positions. Michaels also makes use of a cane as a prop that becomes a part of both dancers' movements as well as a central connection in the performers' relationship. The exact and thematic use of hand and finger gestures in Michaels' piece is also distinct from Wilson's use of traditional ballet hand positions. Moreover, while Wilson's piece contained a romantic relationship between the dancers, the characters produced through Michaels' choreography relate to each other in a utilitarian manner. In many ways Wilson's choreographic aesthetic maintains that of early lyrical while Michaels' work is akin to more recent trends in the lyrical aesthetic found on corporate competition stages.

If the works of Wilson and Michaels had been categorized under the same genre, the viewing audience would have difficulty reading these dances and, ultimately, evaluating the dancers. If these dances had not been introduced in separate categories the interactive role of audience members would have been made more difficult. By introducing differing categories and frameworks for these genres audiences were able to read these dances with no confusion about the codes and contexts for each dance. Michael's piece is not adjudicated negatively for its use of flexed feet and manipulated ballet technique. Moreover, the differing relationship between the dancers in each piece is also more readily accepted as valid. Audiences are able to comfortably distinguish between the aesthetic and technical differences between the two pieces, allowing both sets of dancers to be judged within the individual requirements of each dance.

Interestingly, after its inclusion in Season 1, "contemporary" begins to classify many different dances with aesthetics like Wilson *and* Michaels. As the seasons continue, the line between lyrical and contemporary is blurred as the aesthetic and technique choices that originally differentiated Wilson and Michael's pieces become visible in dances all labeled as contemporary. This merging of genres into a single term, one that recontextualizes these performances within traditional concert dance, complicates the rhetoric of the show even more. Originally making a distinction for its viewing audience, the show combined these two styles, extending the colloquial understanding of "contemporary" dance. Lyrical does not reappear again as a label until Season 4 and then in only two episodes in reference to choreography, not dancers, while contemporary is used heavily in reference to dancers and dances.

Concert contemporary seeks to subvert previous notions of dance and communication within artistic practices. It is not uncommon for the choreographic practices to enable post-modern sensibilities such as a lack of or non-linear story line or music choices wherein the music is secondary to other elements in the dance composition, in addition to aesthetic choices. However, a result of the merging of the two genres, contemporary within the context of *SYTYCD* resembles competition lyrical rather than previous Western notions of contemporary dance. The use of popular music, such as John Mayer's "Dreaming with a Broken Heart" or Duffy's "Mercy," almost always drives the movement of the dance. That is to say, the choreographic choices typically have music or lyric cues and draw directly from the story and quality of music; rather than using the music to supplement the choreography, music drives the composition. Props and sets are used more often in contemporary pieces than other dance styles found on the show. For the purpose of audience accessibility, the context of every dance is revealed through the choreographer and/ or dancers' discussion during the introductory montage.[164] These montages reinforce the linear plot lines and clear characterizations present in the choreography, which rarely use post-modern choreographic practices that risk inaccessibility. In Season 2's twelfth episode Lythgoe addresses this lack of modern and post-modern choreographic choices when he says, "Let's be honest, we're not here to make avant-garde choreography. We're here to entertain America." In this statement Lythgoe distinguishes entertainment as different from avant-garde or experimental work and makes clear the role the show seeks to hold. This desire to maintain the status quo both for the purpose of accessibility as well as

popularity directly resembles corporate competition, in which non-normative dance and dancing bodies are not valued or successful. In both sites there is an assumption that dancers and choreographers will remain in a neutral territory, careful to not foster transgressive issues in their performance and choreography.

In contrast to American and European concert contemporary forms, *SYTYCD* has established a new version of contemporary dance. While both American and European contemporary dance arise out of the integration of ballet, modern and post-modern dance, *SYTYCD* contemporary is a variation of lyrical and jazz dance, particularly that found at competition. Although lyrical has been used as a dance genre on rare occasions since its prominence on the first season, it has never again been used to label a contestant on the show. This is not because "lyrical" dancers no longer audition for the show but because similar dancing bodies are now labeled as "contemporary."

Although these dancers are labeled by a single genre, what both lyrical and contemporary dancers have in common is a competition background. For example, while Top Female Katee Shean was arguably the Season 4 version of Lacayanga, complete with competition history and petite, lean body, there are many examples of dancers, such as Season 4's Kherington Payne and Jessica King, Season 3's Lauren Gottlieb and winner Sabra Johnson, who, in Season 1, would have been labeled "lyrical" but were, instead, "contemporary."[165] While some of these dancers, such as recent Season 5 winner Jeannine Mason, are clearly competition bodies, others, like Danny Tidwell, have notable experience with competition.[166] In shying away from a term that directly references competition and foregrounding a label appropriated from traditional concert dance, the

show's producers not only disengage these bodies from their competition background but also work to situate them within a more visible, professional dance community. While it is not uncommon for these dancers to have a professional background prior to the show (as one example, Johnson was a featured dancer in the film *High School Musical*), these professional experiences are in a commercial dance venue and not a 'high art' dance venue such as a modern or ballet company.[167]

By invisiblizing the competition training of these dancers, *SYTYCD* creates a *perceived body* for the competition body that more closely resembles a professional modern dancer rather than the competition dancer that they are.[168] In disguising the competition body, the versatile training of these bodies is also hidden, making the success of the "contemporary" dancer appear more impressive to the audience. While the structure of *SYTYCD* promotes a versatile dancer, it aims to suggest that *any* dancer could achieve the level of skill and diversity. Judges often discuss the desire to see dancers "grow" over the course of the show. However, competition bodies, because of their trained adaptability, are already prepared to approach many of the styles found on the show; many of these "contemporary" dancers are already familiar with jazz, Broadway, hip hop and other styles, giving them the skills needed for this growth. Moreover, they are trained and prepared to make themselves a commodity dancing on stage. These contestants are accustomed to the structure of competition and the related performance qualities necessary for gaining the attention of judges and audiences. As a competition body they are familiar with constantly working to exceed the physical limits of their body and emotional and/or theatrical presentation in an effort to attain an elevated social status

and increased social capital. The labor of their dancing body is always already constructed for consumption.

By not acknowledging the competition training of these contestants, their actual perceived body is detached, as is their site of origin and training, which is often regarded as a less than legitimate dance stage by high art and dance scholarship. As a site of dance which has a significantly different flow of capital, use of bodies and structure of performance and development, competition functions in relation to, but distinct from, traditional concert dance practices. However, *SYTYCD* establishes an illusion surrounding its "contemporary" dancers which affords its viewing audience the ability to feel exposed and more closely involved with artistic dance practices that audience members may normally limited from. Ultimately, by disarticulating these "contemporary" dancers from corporate competitions and resituating them as representations of Euro-American concert dance they provide audiences with a raised sense of social status as the language used to describe these dancers suggests 'high art' dance. In altering the perceived body of the "contemporary" dancer, *SYTYCD* allows its viewers the semblance of a privileged space in which they are not only members but also part of the body which determines the success of the dancers it views.

World Dance: Using the White Dancer to Perform the "Other"

SYTYCD uses the competition body in order to bridge a gap between 'low art' and 'high art' spaces. In making highly visible and accessible a new version of the contemporary dancer, *SYTYCD* merges aspects and assumptions of the perceived body of traditional concert dance with that of the competition body. The show manages to not

only elevate the popularity and visibility of the competition body but also the readability. Although it disguises it as a concert body, the choreography and performance of the "contemporary" dancer closely resembles that of the competition body while directly diverging from the standard practices of modern, post-modern and contemporary concert dance.

In an effort to "entertain America" the show's contemporary dancers are exploited for their physical capabilities. In part because the contemporary dancer/competition body is already well-versed in many dance styles, the judges most often acknowledging those skills which the dancers entered the competition with rather than what is achieved through their growth on the show, a common point of discussion for the show's other contestants. For example, throughout the first season the judges' comments that followed Lacayanga until the end of the show revolved around her legs, particularly her high and strong extension that allowed her the ability to create long lines with her legs. Though the comments given to Lazzarini did not have the same consistency, regular in his performance were various jumps and acrobatic tricks which displayed both his acrobatic as well as ballet training. During his tenure on the show Travis Walls was often compared to Lazzarini. Additionally, both dancers frequently executed multiple turns and various turn sequences with a clarity that requires a bodily alignment found in ballet and current American jazz dance, specifically competition jazz. These technical capacities become a significant characteristic for contemporary dancers throughout each season. The training background which develops these skills also becomes an early indicator for judges regarding a dancer's ability to perform another style. For example, in

Season 2 Mary Murphy comments that she expected contestant Aleksandra Wojda to execute her waltz performance stronger based on her contemporary training. In this regard, a dancer's label creates assumptions and expectations of ability in other genres based on the relationship of their label to the genre they are asked to perform.

The skills for which contemporary dancers most often gain acclaim by the judges are not attained during their time on the show. Instead, these abilities are part of the skill set for which they were chosen—their ability to perform multiple dance forms with seeming easy and skill. What results from the judges' focus on this skill is an ethereal characterization of these dancing bodies, as they appear to always accomplish what is asked of them. Moreover, the acrobatic flexibility and strength of these dancers has them performing skills that viewers read as super-human. Much like the competition body on the competition stage, the contemporary dancer's ability to perform extraordinary skills characterizes his/her performance as sublime. The performances of these competition bodies along with the lack of recognition for the accompanied training create a modern sense of the ethereal ballerina. Much like the Romantic ballerina, such as Marie Taglioni whose advancements of ballet port de bras or pointe work, along with technology including lighting and the use of suspension to give the illusion of "defying gravity," the lyrical/ contemporary dancer becomes instilled with an ability to defy physical limitations.[169] These dancers not only are asked to "fly" during jumps, their facility to adapt to multiple styles because of their training affords them frequent praise from the judges and, in many cases, their technical skills keep them in the competition through judges' eliminations. [170] More notably, these dancers are also successful when audiences

begin to vote to directly eliminate dancers. Once the Top 10 is determined and dancers are voted on as individuals, solos are performed immediately prior to audiences receiving the attributed phone number allowing this image to be most closely attached to the act of voting. Tracing previous seasons of the show reveals the success of contemporary dancers as the Top 4 for each of the first five seasons contained *at least* two lyrical/ contemporary dancers, in comparison to hip hop dancers who did not make it to the Top 4 until Season 4. Looking at the most successful dancers on each season of the show reveals the overwhelming triumph of competition bodies, under the label of contemporary, on the show.

The direct parallel of these bodies to ballet begins to suggest the Euro-American racial construction of these dancing bodies. In working to equate its "contemporary" dancers with traditional Euro-American concert dancers the show ultimately associates these dancers with the normative racial construction and identity that has dominated high art spaces for so many years. Ballet stands as the iconic Euro-American form of dance. In particular, authors such as Thomas DeFrantz and Brenda Dixon Gottschild locate the Euro-American aesthetics of the form while also identifying contemporary Africanist developments in the work of Alvin Ailey and Balanchine respectively. For example, in her text *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance* Gottschild identifies *polycentrism* as an Africanist quality. This idea of "two or more centers… operat[ing] simultaneously… runs counter to academic European aesthetics, where the ideal is to initiate movement from one locus."[171] Specifically, Gottschild situates this locus as "the nobly lifted, upper center of the aligned torso, well above the pelvis." The upright lift of

the body, which is central to traditional ballet and is evident in the bodily alignment of *SYTYCD's* contemporary, often becomes the physical framework for a Euro-American racial construction in dance as it found in many traditional forms including ballroom and other concert dance genres. For example, drawing on ballet, lyrical, which adapts into this notion of contemporary, is configured around the idea of dance as a commodity and as a site for the emergence of additional capital. Lyrical even utilizes a particular evolution of jazz dance that, in the words of Gottschild invisiblizes "the African American part of the equation… when jazz dance is described as an American folk dance."[172] While the training behind competition bodies that become "contemporary" dancers certainly embeds these Euro-American characteristics in their bodies, the false notion of these dancers as 'concert' bodies also enforces this understanding and reading by audiences. More specifically, the use of a concert term in relation to these contestants removes the complex training of these bodies and simplifies it so that they are read as *only* trained in traditional Euro-American concert dance practices. This framing suggests a false relationship to high art practices and negates the direct relationship to popular culture practices. This fictitious context for these bodies results in an audience that unexpectedly relates to bodies that it is assumed to be detached from.

The dance practices that are so highly valued on *SYTYCD* become easily discernible in the fourth season as a racial construction when the show begins to incorporate non-traditional and even non-Western dance forms as a possible performance genre for its contestants. Season 4 presented two notable dances both of which have been referred to in later seasons. Premiering in Season 4's epsidoes "Top 12 Perform,"

Bollywood is now a familiar genre on the show. Choreographed by Nakul Dev Mahajan, the resident Bollywood choreographer, and performed by Joshua Allen and Katee Shean, this genre's first dance gained such acclaim that it was recently referred to as a point of evaluation in response to a Bollywood performance by Season 6 contestants Mollee Gray and Nathan Trasoras in the twelfth episode. Often used as a model for other dancers performing Bollywood, its *SYTYCD* premiere, hailed for its entertainment value and excitement, it quickly became understood by the audience as 'world dance'. None of the three judges, Nigel Lythgoe, Mary Murphy and Mia Michaels, discussed the technicalities of the dance. While it was discussed as an Indian "cultural" dance form, there was never any mention of the classical Indian dance forms that shape Bollywood dance. Rather than being able to define the specific hand positions, the judges simply discussed the athleticism, the synchronicity of the dancer's performance and its relationship to hip hop, always relating this "world dance" form to Western, rather than Eastern, movement practices from which it emerged.

Similarly, the Season 4 premiere of Youri Nelzine's Trepak choreography, preformed by Stephen "Twitch" Boss and Joshua Allen in Episode 22, was met with enthusiasm. However, the reappearance of Nelzine's work in Season 5 as winner Jeanine Mason and favorite Phillip Chbeeb performed "Russian folk dance" was such a clear disappointment for the judges it become obvious that it was simply the sheer athleticism of the Trepak that was well received. Stating that Mason and Chbeeb were stricken with an unfortunate choice by the producers, Lythgoe made it clear that he felt it wasn't the dancers' skills that might hinder them that week but the dance, which he felt was not

carefully chosen for the show and its audience. The contrast of these two Russian dance performances suggests that the show is not looking for skillful "world dance" forms but rather it is looking for unique forms can be translated for Euro-American audiences while remaining exotic for non-Euro-American dance practices.

Interestingly, in the show's premiere episode, a dancer who, after making it through to the choreography round, was cut after learning a jazz routine from one of the show's choreographers, Carrie Ann Inaba, was filmed referring to the dance style as "typical European white people dancing." This particular dancer identified and performed as a bellydancer and, according to the show's editing and voiceover, this lack of "versatility" was her downfall on the show. After stating that this style is not her area of expertise and that "her brain doesn't work that way" she continues on to say that with this structure the show is "just going to end up with a bunch of white people who have lots of money and have taken lots of dance classes."[173] As the show develops and "contemporary" dancers and dances become not only predominant in the show's structure, this dancer's statement becomes an even clearer reality. While it is a misnomer to consider these dancers "concert" performers, as competition bodies their traditions of training and performance still arise from distinctly Euro-American structures of capital and performance. The prevalent Euro-American racial construction was visible in the show's first seasons based upon the dance forms utilized. (For example, the choreography section of the first wave of auditions is typically jazz or contemporary choreography.) However, the moment in which the show's producers introduced non-Western dance forms into the competition, this construction became starkly clear as a result of both the

dancers' familiarity with the forms as well as the judges' responses and ability to critique these performances.

The Black Dancer: Hip Hop as the Other

Moments such as the inclusion of Bollywood and Russian dance forms create a tension between dancers and dances that are the result of traditional Euro-American dance practices and those that are not. During its premiere Lythgoe mentions that he has tried for several years to get Bollywood on the show after having been impressed by a dancer who auditioned with the style. However, the show is yet to see the advancement of a Bollywood dancer, or one of any "world dance" form, into the Top 20.[174] Even though the show's producers have expanded the available performance genres for its contestants, it has continued to only include contestants from select genres. Only accepting dancers who fall under the following categories, ballroom, contemporary or hip hop, the show often contrasts dancers with "formal training" with those without. Although it looks to exploit and exotify non-Western dance genres, it creates the "other" out of the dancer whose perceived body has the least "training": the hip hop dancer.

As the only season to produce a hip hop dancer as the winner, the construction of Joshua Allen's perceived body in Season 4 revealed a particular tension between "traditional" dancers and non-traditional dancers.[175] Throughout the competition Allen was constantly praised by the judges for his ability to master each of the forms he was asked to perform despite being "untrained." In Episode 10 Lythgoe commented on Allen's "natural" Samba ability; meanwhile Allen was rarely, if ever, critiqued by the judges. In his Broadway performance during "The Top 18 Perform," Lythgoe

commended Allen's performance not merely because he felt it was a strong performance but in contrast to his label of "hip hop," specifically Lythgoe describes Allen as a popper, a sub-genre of hip hop that requires quick contractions of various muscle groups to create a specific movement aesthetic. As the show progresses the judges continue to admire Allen's work while often repeating the claim that he is "untrained."

The inference that the show's hip hop dancers are "untrained" is established in the first season. In this season Jamile McGee was the only hip hop dancer to make it into the Top 4 (the other three dancers were labeled as lyrical dancers). In an early episode Mia Michaels said to him, "You bring authenticity to this competition, that's the real deal" and later she tells him to not "over train."[176] These comments are just the beginning of a lexicon that surrounds hip hop dancers on the show. Despite the fact that many of the show's hip hop choreographers teach in professional dance studios such as Millennium Dance Complex, Debbie Allen Dance Academy and other sites of formal dance education, it is assumed that the show's hip hop dancers lack formal training experience. In one episode Michaels positively describes krumping as "dirty", "raw" and "ugly," words that continue to be used in regards to hip hop and related styles.[177] Later Lythgoe states that hip hop choreography is "from the streets".[178] These comments discount the work of these choreographers in traditional Euro-American spaces of dance education as well as the experience of the show's choreographers in privileged sites of dance production including music videos and films.

This lexicon suggests that the hip hop presented on the show is the consequence of dance trained and choreographed in urban spaces similar to that of the genre's origin.

Having originated in the Bronx during the 1970s, hip hop has been a part of mainstream culture for over two decades. Although it was the production of a marginalized culture of disenfranchised African American and Puerto Rican youth, it has long been a part of popular culture, creating many variations of hip hop since its origin. Hip hop is now a dance practice that represents a range of dance from marginalized, urban bodies to commercialized, affluent ones. There are hip hop crews across the country comprised of formally educated youth representing specific colleges and universities who compete and perform on various concert stages. There also exist communities of hip hop dancers who have *only* danced in urban, street sites. Meanwhile there are choreographers such as Rennie Harris whose hip hop work is found largely in 'high art' spaces. From concert dance, to music videos, to commercials, to street corners, hip hop exists in various locations and various bodies both nationally and internationally. The sites available for hip hop extend far beyond the marginalized communities it was in during the 1970s.

However, presenting hip hop without acknowledgment of the current diversity in the genre limits the frame of hip hop on the show. As a part of popular culture that is appropriated for its ability to indicate a transgressive identity, hip hop is a racially marked cultural identity. *SYTYCD* draws upon this marking of hip hop as African American when judges discuss hip hop dancers such as Allen. As bodies whose dominance is reflected in both their role of power as well as affluent, phenotypically white bodies, the show's judges (and producers) exploit the marginalized and racially marked practice of hip hop. Although Lythgoe, Murphy and others are not looking to sell its American audience a commodity, they commodify the identity of dancers such as

Allen in order to make it consumable for audiences. In particular, they use hip hop to suggest an oppressed or underprivileged body, to create a character suitable for television, which draws upon stereotypical portrayals of African American men.

The notion that Allen was "untrained" not only suggested that he had never experienced other dance forms but also minimized the extent of his physical labor. Although Allen *did* have prior experience with other forms of dance including modern, ballet and jazz, the producers portrayed it as no less than miraculous when he successfully traverses different dance forms.[179] Even if Allen had not trained in dance forms other than hip hop to consider him "untrained" is a false representation of his physical experience which informs his work on the show. The notion of training used by the show suggests that only a formal studio experience constitutes "training." Presenting hip hop dancers as "untrained" implies that they do not work intensively to achieve their physical talents and skills. It insinuates that hip hop dancers, who often rehearse extensively in urban spaces which do not resemble traditional privatized spaces, simply inexplicably produce skilled dance movement. In doing so, the judges and producers ignore the actual labor behind these "non-traditional" dancing bodies. This characterization establishes a tension between hip hop dancers and the traditionally trained bodies of contemporary and ballroom dancers. This tension distinguishes between the formal Euro-American training of traditional bodies and the non-traditional work of hip hop bodies, invisibilizing the labor of non-traditional bodies.

This tension creates frames and codes for reading hip hop bodies that ensure their continued repression. Even the brief suggestion that Allen is "untrained" plays into a

stereotypical representation known as Sambo. Made popular by the minstrel shows of the mid 19th century, this particular characterization of African American males depicts them as lazy and buffoonish, incapable of acquired skill. Moreover, the normative role of privilege for the African American male based upon physical talent, in which talent is assumed to be an inborn gift rather than achieved through extensive labor, is also at play in this characterization of the hip hop dancer. This construction of Allen's perceived body results in a colonial gaze. That is to say, by falsifying Allen's training and simplifying the labor of his body to a "natural" talent the audience has no choice but read his body with the same gaze identified in colonial theory. In his text *Appropriating Blackness*, Patrick E. Johnson, in a discussion of the work of Patricia Williams, writes, "The position of the voyeur's 'zoom lens' is necessarily predicated on his or her power and privilege."[180] And in the case of *SYTYCD*'s audience, its power is limited to that provided to them by the framing of dancers through the structure of the show. Johnson discusses the role of performance as "a vehicle through which the Other is seen and not seen."[181] Specifically, he writes that "Black performance… becomes the site at which people and behavior are construed as 'spectacles of primitivism' to justify the colonial and racist gaze."[182] In constructing a dancer like as Allen as "untrained" and not acknowledging the intensity of the labor of his body through which he has achieved his skills as a dancer, Allen is being demarcated from traditional dancing bodies. While the contemporary body is understood as "formally" and "technically" trained, which implies extensive physical labor, the hip hop dancer is coded as the "other" and situated as a colonized body in its need to train in "formal" dance forms. Moreover, it is those hip hop

dancers that conform easily and quickly to these traditional styles that are the most successful on the show.

Maintaining racist productions of the body, the gaze constructed by language used on the show situates the hip hop dancer as the "other." Specifically utilizing these bodies for the history behind the genre and training that separates them from traditional Euro-American dancing bodies, the ways in which hip hop bodies are central to the creation of current traditional Euro-American productions are disregarded. As a common mode of production in popular culture, hip hop is no longer situated on the margins and is highlighted by many commercial outlets, often used in capitalist modes of production such as advertising. Hip hop has a complex relationship with both financial and culture capital that assures its centrality in American culture. Although they have arguably gained status as a traditional dancing body, *SYTYCD* still returns to archaic perceptions of hip hop bodies in order to develop and present a character that represents marginalized bodies. Using a particular lexicon in reference to these bodies, the show's judges and producers simplistically frame dancers labeled "hip hop," which draws upon socially embedded stereotypes of these racially marked bodies.

Creating Spectacle from Spectacle

In order to evolve dance's role as capital and as a vehicle for other forms of capital, *SYTYCD* uses language to falsify the training history of bodies it presents. The judges and producers attach labels and qualifiers to particular dancing bodies and this lexicon shapes the frame in which these bodies are presented to the interactive voting audience. As a result, the spectacle of the dance performance is intensified. Most often

associated with the formal performance setting of high art, dance in the United States is always already a spectacle. However, the inclusion of the practice in a structure of competition heightens this spectacle significantly by associating dance with sport practices and competitive behavior.

In his text *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord defines spectacle as "a social relation between people that is mediated by images."[183] He concludes his first chapter stating that "the spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point that is becomes images."[184] As a bricologe of many different images of commodities, dancing bodies on *SYTYCD* become commodities and spectacle as they integrate many other spectacles. Relying on the spectacle of the competition body and the spectacle of race, among others, SYTYCD incorporates many already socially embedded commodity fetishes in order to construct a new desired commodity. These bodies as commodities become representative of capital and, as they are quantified through competition, create a social relation between viewers, between dancers and between dancers and viewers. According to Debord, "the spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has succeeded in totally colonizing social life."[185] These dancing bodies gain broad celebrity status in American culture and a more specified celebrity status in a particular community of competitive dance. Whether it is the addition of Season 4's Chealsie Hightower to the roster of resident ballroom dancers on ABC's *Dancing With the Stars*, Korteni Lind (Season 4) teaching for Dance Olympus, Katee Sheen (Season 4) modeling for Capezio or Blake McGrath (Season 1) appearing in MTV's *Dance Life* (2007) or choreographing for *SYTYCD Canada*, these dancing bodies through increased credibility and visibility as a result of the show, become commodities

because of their unique spectacle. There are many ways in which *SYTYCD* draws out the spectacle of dance in order to make it an accessible commodity of its own. The most notable of these is the lexicon framing certain dancing bodies, extending particular racial constructions in order to maintain dominant structures of race.

The juxtaposition of the "contemporary" dancer and the "hip hop" dancer creates a binary relationship that allows each to inform the other. The "rawness" of the hip hop dancer becomes more visible for the audience as the "training" of the contemporary dancer is highlighted and discussed. In her text *Unmarked*, Peggy Phelan seeks to "mark the limit of the image in the political field of the sexual and racial other."[186] Using theorists such as Butler, Lacan and Derrida, Phelan continues to utilize and query the side of the binary that has no apparent value when not associated with its "opposite," particularly the establishment of the self and other. And in the juxtaposition of the contemporary dancer and the hip hop dancer, the hip hop dancer as unmarked is visible as the language used to describe him is always in reference to the contemporary dancer, whose own language stands on its own. It is within the conception of the self/other binary that she writes on the difference between seeing and gazing where, for Phelan, "the gaze guarantees the failure of self-seeing."[187] Moreover, she identifies "the desire to see the self" via the exploited representations of the other.[188] While Phelan is specifically taking a psychoanalytic approach to this binary, there is both a psychoanalytic and tangible result of this relationship as it plays out on *SYTYCD*. The dancers on *SYTYCD* are both defined in reference to the gaze of audience members who turn them into the "other" as well as their own gaze through which they, as an audience member, accept the

objectification of the other competitors. In their own choice to participate in the act of labeling of their bodies, they are also amenable to and, therefore, accountable for the exploitation of their peers as well as themselves as these labels act as lenses from which to gaze upon these bodies. These labels, deeply embedded with this self/other relationship dictate the success of dancing bodies on the show as they shape and define the labor of these bodies.

Although Phelan's work is most well-known for her contributions to feminist theory, she also addresses the self/other binary in regards to race, the most prominent version visible on *SYTYCD*. The opposing characterization of hip hop and contemporary dancers illustrates Phelan's theorization of identity, which is "perceptible only through a relation to an other."[189] Drawing upon a standard racial binary of white/black and Euro-American/African-American, these labels, as framing methods for the audience, are "the production and reproduction of visibility are part of the labor of the reproduction of capitalism."[190] These labels are utilized because they are sellable, consumable identities. The simplicity with which both these dancing bodies are characterized draws upon the standard impoverished, urban identity attributed to African American bodies and the affluent, suburban identity of Caucasian bodies. Although these identities create an ease for audiences reading the associated bodies, it is their ability to function within a system of capital that allows them to be successful and believable frames through which to present the dancing bodies on *SYTYCD*. The relationship of these identities to production of capital increases their role as spectacle.

These bodies as spectacle rely on their ability to materialize race. Similar to Anna Scott's theorization of her own body as spectacle in a bloco afro rehearsal, *SYTYCD*'s contestants become contextualized by their "racial capability."[191] Using the dance style with which the dancers audition, racial configurations are placed on each dancing body. The standard relationship of Caucasian bodies as contemporary dancers and African American bodies as hip hop dancers, as reflected across the Top 4 dancers of each season, is upheld in all instances with the exception of Katee Shean and Melody Lacayanga, who both appear to be of Asian descent, though it is never made clear, and Brandon Bryant, who is the first dark skinned contemporary dancer. Although Tidwell phenotypically appears to have African American heritage, he is quickly associated with Travis Wall and adoptive mother Denise Wall, both appearing distinctly Caucasian, which allows him to "pass" regardless of his skin tone. The show's dancers become marked for their "racial capability" to perform according to the archetypes already established for their associated labels. The framing for these bodies is created through a use of language which retains a particular paradigm of race that has an extended history in American culture. This language which defines these bodies constructs and maintains them as spectacle by ensuring that they mold into systems of discipline and racial discourse that are already in place.

In her opening chapter of her text *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*, Robyn Wiegman addresses "the visible economies that accompany… the 'logic' of race."[192] In tracing of the "articulation of race" as "a complicated and historically contingent production" she addresses Foucault's concept of panopticism as a "technology

of race."[193] She writes: "the disciplinary power of race… must be read as implicated in both specular and panoptic regimes."[194] Foucault becomes applicable in a discussion of this dance platform not because of the physical violence that occurs but because of the physical disciplining that occurs for all bodies in all roles. Although by choice, all bodies are disciplined through Foucauldian practices into understanding the physical body through a particular means of control enacted by regimes intent on sustain dominance. The bodies of dancers are attributed a differing sets of codes, which function to limit and survey these bodies based upon the dance form through which they are labeled. Even though a dancer such as Allen is not being forcibly tortured, he is turned into spectacle as his labor is both underestimated and underscored; he is also being kept from the possibility of Euro-American sensibilities and training. Meanwhile, the labor of the contemporary dancer is also shifted as her training is resituated through a play on language. The structures through which both these dancing bodies train and perform is re-framed in order to exacerbate the spectacle of their performance. The re-contextualization of these bodies is largely in benefit for the acting panopticon, the viewing audience. Weigman aptly describes the Ku Klux Klan as "a lasting demonstration of the power of the eyes that watch, that rarely had to offer up their own name."[195] Lacking the violence of the KKK, the audience, working as a single body of the populace, determines the fate and, ultimately, value of these dancers without ever having to give reasons for their choices. Maintaining control over the show's Top 10 dancers, in particular, the voting audience remains an unseen force that these dancers must constantly respond to.

The language used to frame the dancers on *SYTYCD* suggests a false construction of these dancing bodies. The show disciplines its audience to read certain bodies in a particular way in order to create readable and familiar characters that an audience would respond well to. Rather than creating complex, distinct identities, the audience learns to read identities through labels of dance. In assigning a single dance genre to each body the show's dancers become situated alongside particular racial constructions. The knowledge produced through this framework compels the voting audience to understand these bodies within these constructions and not for the actual complexity and labor of the bodies on the screen. The show works to create paradigms of dancing bodies/identities that are easily understood and relatable for a general viewing audience. In doing so, *SYTYCD* creates and maintains stereotypes and uses specular regimes to extend the spectacle of dance, as it is experienced on this particular American stage.

According to Debord, "spectators are linked solely by their one-way relationship to the very centre that keeps them isolated from each other."[196] It is the constructed relationships between dancers and between dancers and audience members that are the spectacle of *SYTYCD*. In his follow up text *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, Debord writes of "media excess."[197] He states: "the spectacle would be merely the excess of the media, whose nature, unquestionably good since it facilities communications, is sometimes driven to extremes."[198] The unwavering value of *SYTYCD* is its ability to bring dance to millions of viewers with great ease of access. However, as it does so it utilizes simplistic constructions of dance bodies/identities that rely on a relationship of comparison in which the labor of certain bodies is masked or

muted. Rather than displaying the complex dancing bodies that are actually present, *SYTYCD* uses language to present one-dimensional dancing identities that are extreme stereotypes based upon particular dance forms and styles.

Originating in film studies, gaze theory has been complicated by several dance theorists as the concept of kinesthesia has been accounted for in the spectator's viewing experience. In her essay "Female Dancer and the Male Gaze: Feminist Critiques of Early Modern Dance" Susan Manning expands the work of many of these theorists, such as Roger Copeland, Janet Wolff, Jane Desmond and Ann Daly, as she addresses early modern dance. Much like the theorization of *SYTYCD* presented in this project, Manning suggests that modern dance projects "essentialized notions of identity."[199] However, she also points to the "double move of subverting the voyeuristic gaze" present in modern dance.[200] Drawing directly from Ann Daly's work in the essay "Dance History and Feminist Theory: Reconsidering Isadora Duncan and the Male Gaze," Manning positions kinesthesia as having the ability to "dismantle" the "voyeuristic gaze".[201] In regards to the female audience of early modern dance, both Daly and Manning believe that the response triggered by proprioception shifts the masculine gaze. Likely kinesthesia is at play for portions of *SYTYCD*'s audience, particularly those trained in competition or other forms visible on the show. However, for much of the show's audience there is no familiarity with the movements performed, instead these movements are seen as spectacular feats unfamiliar to the average body. It is the intention of the "representational frames" of the show to highlight this unfamiliarity in order to ensure the place of these bodies as spectacle. As a result, any kinesthetic

response is off-set in order to centralize the spectacle, which is made possible through voyeuristic gaze, and subsequently highlight the essentialized identities of the performers and performances.

As a highly accessible site of dance, the spectacle created by *SYTYCD* is not only a reproduction of visible economies but also gets reproduced as such. Since it began producing its particular version of "contemporary" dance, many competitions have begun to include it in rules and categorizations. This has been a necessary addition to the structure of corporate competitions as the dancing bodies which produce contemporary on the show are highly visible manifestations of the competition body. Moreover, the dancing bodies on *SYTYCD*, including those of all labels, become *demonstrative bodies*.[202] With each season future seasons become dependent upon all the dances, bodies and rhetoric that came before it. The show's popularity in its first season informed the level of talent that auditioned in later seasons. Successful bodies become prototypes for other dancers who audition while unsuccessful bodies become the body that instruct what not to perform.[203] This is no more evident than the number of former contestants who return in later seasons either to assist choreographers or to choreograph.[204] The bodies of these dancers become demonstrative bodies for many other dancers, both those that audition for the show and those that attempt to reproduce the likeness or performance of a dancer from *SYTYCD* on the corporate competition stage.

Although it is directly informed by corporate competitions and positions the competition body as the most successful body, *SYTYCD* also informs corporate

competitions and other aspects of American economy. The cyclical relationship between *SYTYCD* and corporate competitions is largely the result of *SYTYCD*'s role in American culture. The show has established itself as a site of dance production central to current productions of dance in the United States because of its function in the production of knowledge. The structures which the show uses, including the methods for determining "America's Favorite Dancer," labels used in reference to dancing bodies and the lexicon used to discuss these bodies, not only create a suitable viewing audience for the show but also train these viewers how to read other dance. In an attempt to "entertain" American and with the hope of bringing dance to the masses, *SYTYCD* frames dancing bodies in order to create a spectacle highly accessible for its viewing audience. It shifts already existing structures of dance, including the competition body and contexts of both traditional and non-traditional concert bodies, in order to create this spectacle. While the show has developed in response to a viewing audience that needs clear instruction in order to approach its own role in the show properly, it has done so by establishing a limiting framework through which the audience could function. However, because of the active role of the audience in which they function as both consumers and producers, aspects of the show have emerged beyond the show. For example, a clearly new form of contemporary dance has begun to materialize on the competition stage and in other sites of dance, complicating the current usage of the word in dance scholarship and concert dance communities.

Most importantly, however, is the show's role in the manufacturing of the mass popularity of the competition body. By foregrounding it as the ideal winning body and

situating as the most desirable, *SYTYCD* has brought the competition body into mainstream popular culture. Not withstanding some discrepancies and irregularities, *SYTYCD* has created a viewing audience capable of reading this particular dancing body. As a bricolage of American popular and leisure culture, the competition body easily adapts to a role as an image within American popular culture. Moreover, as a versatile dancing body, the competition body is well prepared to function as a vehicle for the knowledge *SYTYCD* seeks to produce through its interactive viewing audience.

Endnotes

[141] Although I mean to reference Susan Foster's article "Dancing Bodies" here, I also use a generic understanding of this phrase in which the competition body is simply the most preferred dancing body.

[142] Season 6 was in its early episodes at the time of this writing.

[143] Morley, David. *Television, Audience, and Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1992. p. 76. Print.

[144] Morely, 75, 1992.

[145] Fiske, John. *Reading Television*. New York: Routledge, 2003. p. 101. Print.

[146] Fiske, 102-3, 2003.

[147] Fiske, 103, 2003.

[148] During the first season the second wave of auditions were held in Hollywood. Las Vegas was introduced in Season 2. In addition, during the first season all dancers that made it through were asked to stay for choreography before being sent to Hollywood. Additionally, there were a limited number of spots, fifty, for all auditions. The number of dancers sent through in later seasons has never been disclosed. What is significant about this change is that, in later seasons, dancers whose initial audition is impressive enough, regardless of their ability to perform various styles, are sent through without experiencing other choreographic styles. Therefore, dancers who in the first season would be cut at the first audition are making it to later rounds. Moreover, the lag time between the city auditions and Vegas Week gives these dancers the opportunity to at least briefly train in additional dance forms.

[149] A dancer in his younger years, Lythgoe is the producer and co-creator of So You Think You Can Dance. A successful ballroom dancer, Mary Murphy is a judge and choreographer on the show.

[150] "Las Vegas Callbacks." *So You Think You Can Dance*. Fox: 6/2006. Television.

[151] The first season only sent 16 through to the competition.

[152] Although it is not excavated in its full capacity within this chapter it is important to note that these dances occur in heterosexual couplings. Unlike the corporate competition, which is either solos or groups, and most rarely heterosexually paired duets, the competition of *SYTYCD* is primarily based around such duets. This is one of the most

dramatic alterations from the standard structure of corporate competitions. In making this change, *SYTYCD* is able to draw upon normative gender relationships in order to avoid potentially transgressive reads of dances performed in same sex couplings.

[153] "Episode #1.7." *So You Think You Can Dance*. Fox: 11/30/2006. Television.

[154] Foster, Susan Leigh C. "Dancing Bodies." *Meaning in Motion New Cultural Studies of Dance (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*. Ed. Jane C. Desmond. New York: Duke UP, 1997. 236-41. Print.

[155] Foster, 237, 1997.

[156] I would argue that the "urban" forms utilized in *So You Think You Can Dance* are in fact concert forms as well. In this argument it is imperative to understand concert forms as moving beyond the stage into mediated spaces as well as concert forms evolve in the mediated age.

[157] This was the case with Season 4's Katee Shean in her hip hop performance, during "Top 20 Perform," for which judge Dan Karaty commended her on her ability to "hang" with hip hop dancer and partner Joshua Allen.

[158] It is interesting to note the use of the word "primitive" here as Dawson is not only Caucasian but her original solo audition, though clearly influenced by African dance, was most distinctly a jazz solo. However, because she performed to percussive music, rather than a traditional popular music choice, she was labeled as "primitive". In distinguishing Dawson, who was very similar in performance and training to fellow contestants Melody Lacayanga, Craig DeRosa and Nick Lazzarini, in this manner, the show's lack of preparation for diversity within individual dance genres is clear.

[159] The increase in the number of dancers and the dramatic increase in the number of choreographed routines is a result of the show's ratings that resulted in increase in episode production.

[160] During the announcement of Season 4's winner Shean was eliminated but surprised with a $50,000 cash prize as the female receiving the highest number of votes. This was the first and, so far, only time that any dancer other than the winner was awarded a prize.

[161] The use of the adjective "professional" on *So You Think You Can Dance* could be debated as the winner is the only one receiving financial compensation for his/ her labor. However, the stipends and expenses covered by the show allow this space to be considered professional, particularly in comparison to the amateur experience of the corporate competition.

[162] Albright, Ann Cooper. *Choreographing Difference*. Hanover: University of New England Press 1997, p 191. Print.

[163] Winship, Lyndsey. "Sadler's Wells Theatre - More about European Contemporary Dance." Sadler's Wells Theatre - London's Dance House. Web. 1 Nov. 2009.

[164]Most of the couple dances at the competition have a short montage that documents the rehearsal process. Video footage of rehearsals as well as interviews are edited together to create this montage. For example, in the twelfth episode of the fourth season, "Top 14 Perform," Mia Michaels & Joshua Allen discuss the story behind her choreography for "Hometown Glory." Michaels says "this whole thing is about two people on their path, on their journey, and they are just focused selfishly on their own life". Meanwhile in the twelfth episode of the second season, "Episode #12.2," the *Copellia* inspired story choreographed by Brian Friedman and performed to Fall Out Boy's "Dance Dance" makes its story line evident through costume and choreography. Even without Friedman's brief discussion during the montage, the opening of the dance displays contestant Ashlee Nino as a doll complete with hair bows and curls and Dmitry Chaplin as the dollmaster with top hat and cane who brings Nino's character to life.

[165] Online results from Showstopper's 2002 San Mateo regional competition list Melody Lacayanga as the 1st Overall Soloist in the 15 & Over category. Though it is not the target audience, it is common for high school dance teams to attend these types of competitions; Shean's high school dance team is one such group.

[166] Mason has an extensive background in competition, having won many solo and group titles at many corporate competition events. And although Tidwell was an extremely skilled and popular dancer on the show he first gained notoriety as Season 2 runner up, Travis Wall's adopted brother. Mother, Denise Wall is nationally known for her strong competition studio, Denise Wall's Dance Energy, which has been featured in several industry magazines including the cover of the October 2008 issue of *Dance Teacher*.

[167] Season 6 contestant Molly Gray was also a dancer in the *High School Musical* trilogy.

[168] Foster, Susan Leigh C. "Dancing Bodies." *Meaning in Motion New Cultural Studies of Dance (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*. Ed. Jane C. Desmond. New York: Duke UP, 1997. 235-58. Print.

[169] Lee, Carol. *Ballet in Western Culture A History of Its Origins and Evolution*. New York: Routledge, 2002. 141. Print.

[170] In "Episode #3.8" choreographer Mandy Moore in her contemporary piece "I'll Stand by You" literally asks contemporary dancer Sabra Johnson to fly through the air out of a lift with partner Dominic Sandoval.

[171] Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance Dance and Other Contexts*. Westport: Praeger Paperback, 1998. p 4. Print.

[172] Gottschild, 49, 1998.

[173] "Auditions #1 and #2: New York and Chicago." *So You Think You Can Dance*. Fox: 07/20/2005. Television.

[174] Recently, in Season 6, three tap dancers were chosen for the Top 20. Having been built up throughout the audition process, the audience was made well aware that no tap dancers had ever been chosen for the show. While none of these three dancers made it into the Top 10, the inclusion of them in the Top 20 is arguably the closest the show has gotten to including a "world dancer".

[175] At the time of this writing Season 6 crowned Russell Ferguson, a krumper, as the newest winner. His experience on the show as not unlike Allen's as discussed in this chapter.

[176] "Episode #1.5." *So You Think You Can Dance*. Fox: 08/17/2005. Television.
"Episode #1.11." *So You Think You Can Dance*. Fox: 09/28/2005. Television.

[177] "Episode #1.8." *So You Think You Can Dance*. Fox: 09/7/2005. Television.

[178] "Episode #3.9." *So You Think You Can Dance*. Fox: 6/21/2007. Television.

[179] Michener, Janet. "*SYTYCD* Winner Joshua Allen on the Day After", *Voice of Dance*, August 8, 2008 [www.voiceofdance.com]

[180] Johnson, E. Patrick Johnson. *Appropriating Blackness.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003. p 8. Print.

[181]Johnson, 7, 2003.

[182]Johnson, 7, 2003.

[183]Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. London: Rebel Press. p. 7.

[184]Debord, 17.

[185]Debord, 21.

[186] Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1993. p 2. Print.

[187] Phelan, 15, 1993.

[188] Phelan, 16, 1993.

[189] Phelan, 13, 1993.

[190]Phelan, 11, 1993.

[191] Scott, Anna B. "Spectacle and Dancing Bodies that Matter" in Jane Desmond, ed., Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997. p. 264. Print.

[192] Wiegman, Robyn. American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995. p. 22. Print.

[193] Wiegman, 24, 1995.

[194] Wiegman, 39, 1995.

[195] Wiegman, 40, 1995.

[196] Debord, 16.

[197] Debord, Guy. *Comments on Society of the Spectacle*. London: Verso. 1988. p. 6.

[198] Debord, 7, 1988.

[199] Manning, Susan. "Female Dancer and the Male Gaze: Feminist Critiques of Early Modern Dance" in Jane Desmond, ed., *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997, 154.

[200] Manning, 154.

[201] Manning 163-4.

[202] Foster, 1997.

[203] There are instances of bodies that are not successful within the rubric of the show but are given value by the judges that grant them a certain position as a demonstrative body. This is most often the case with hip hop dancers, such as Robert Muraine and Phillip

Chbeeb. While Chbeeb eventually became a Top 20 contestant in Season 4, both he and Muraine, though they didn't make it through Vegas Week, were brought on during Season 3 as exhibition performers during an elimination episode.

[204] Artem Chigvinsev (Season 1) assisted Mary Murphy during Season 2's samba audition during "Vegas Week" while Dmitry Chaplin (Season 2) assisted her in Season 3. Season 3 also showed Benji Schwimmer (winner, Season 2) assisted by Heidi Groskreutz (Season 2) choreograph a West Coast Swing routine and Dmitry Chaplin, also assisted by Groskreutz, choreograph a samba routine for Season 3 contestants. In Season 4 Travis Walls was the choreographer at the onsite auditions for the "choreography" section while Schwimmer returns with his sister and Season 3 contestant Lacey Schwimmer to choreograph another West Coast Swing routine. Season 3 contestants and dance partners Anay Garnis and Pasha Kovalev also returned in Season 4 as cha-cha choreographers while Chaplin reappears as a choreographer for Argentine tango.

Competition as a Technology of the State

The first chapter of this project addressed the structural shapes of corporate competition. It looked at the internal assemblage of this site of dance, explaining the unique details of this performance space. Additionally, this chapter looked at the larger social structures and conventions that situate corporate competition as a viable and desired dance experience in the United States. Meanwhile, the second chapter looked closely at the particular dancing body created through corporate competitions, contrasting it with other dancing bodies found in the United States. This chapter also traced the history and development of dance forms as they are used by the competition body, describing a specific shift in the performance of these techniques. And, finally, the third chapter looked at one of the effects of competition as it is manifested in rhetoric established by the reality show, *So You Think You Can Dance*. This chapter concluded with a theorization of the show's use of the spectacles of race and the dancing body in order to create another spectacle unique to a 21st century media culture, the commodified bodies of the show's contestants.

Each of these chapters has approached the topic of this project looking at the very apparent issues of corporate competition as they relate to media and cultural studies and dance studies. I see these as the immediate and tangible effects of this particular dance site as they shape and shift larger American cultural experiences (and even those abroad as both corporate competition and its television versions move beyond the borders of the United States). Moreover, these chapters contain the information that I believe is the most important for scholars in theorizing this dance practice, viewers participating both

passive and actively, and dancers who participate. These are the real and contextual pieces of information that are the heartbeat of the continued success of this dance practice. However, this chapter takes a noticeable departure from the previous three as I more abstractly explore the effects of the experience and structure of corporate competitions in regards to political theory and State formation. It may seem that the commodified and seemingly exploited competition body could not be less involved with political structures and issues of the State. However, as she dances another version of "Popular" from *Wicked: The Musical*, she is, in fact, akin to the prison guard or lawmaker. Already containing cultural studies and dance studies, this chapter brings into the discussion political theory in order to unearth the role of competition and the competition body in the maintenance of white patriarchical dominance in the United States.

In its merging of the work in each of the previous chapters, this one may, at first, feel like a conclusion to the project as a whole. However, I have chosen to address this as a distinct chapter because the issues within it do not *conclude* the thoughts in the previous chapters. Instead, these ideas extend all of the other theoretical work within this project as competition is paralleled with the prison system.

Turning to one of the final ideas in the previous chapter, I start here not with a political theorist, but with social theorist Guy Debord, and his work on spectacle. In his text *Comments on Society of the Spectacle* Debord adds, clarifies and recontextualizes his ideas from his earlier text *Society of the Spectacle*. Having originally suggested two types of spectacular power, concentrated and diffused, Debord includes a third, integrated

spectacle. In his first text Debord defines *concentrated* spectacles as those "primarily associated with bureaucratic capitalism" that may be "a technique for reinforcing state power in more backward mixed economies or even adopted by advanced capitalism during certain moments of crisis."[205] He contrasts this dictatorial form of spectacle with the diffused. "Associated with commodity abundance, with the undisturbed development of modern capitalism," Debord argues of the difficulty of "consumption of the whole" due to fragmentation of the commodity experience.[206] It is within this fragmentation that the *diffused* spectacle exists. In his follow up text, Debord places Russia and Germany in connection with the concentrated spectacle and the United States in relation to the diffused form. In this same text he suggests that the integrated spectacle is the manifestation of spectacle in a globalized world, which merges both concentrated and diffused forms.[207]

According to Debord, "The spectacle has spread itself to the point where it now permeates all reality."[208] He alludes to modern shift in the power of the nation-state and state sovereignty when he writes, "the controlling centre has now become occult."[209] He also writes, "on the diffused side, the spectacle has never before put its mark to such a degree on almost the full range of socially produced behaviour and objects."[210] In his discussion of the integrated spectacle Debord is accounting for social and political changes due to globalization. This shift is the coalescence of the political regime with the socio-economic commodity regime. What follows is an examination of competition as a site of the integrated spectacle. Drawing up the preceding work in the project, this chapter looks at how competition extends the ideological practice of the State as it

merges State systems within a social site of leisure. Specifically, it looks at how competition draws upon the spectacles of race and gender to create the competition body, which fits easily into dominant culture because of its role as spectacle. Moreover, this chapter examines how the practice of corporate dance competitions creates a system that maintains hegemony through its disciplining of bodies.

The Ideological Practice of Competition

Relying on a Foucauldian training of body, competition disciplines bodies within a Euro-American configuration. These bodies participate in the regimented disciplining of their own bodies as they willingly agree to become physically shaped by images of the integrated spectacle. Not simply a movement practice, the training of the competition body is determined by trends in consumer culture visible in media and popular culture. The disciplining of this body is a reflection of the disciplining of consumer bodies. While Michel Foucault, in his text *Discipline and Punish*, begins with a discussion of disciplining bodies through the threat of prison and spectacle of punishment he also turns to social sites and structures that work to police bodies. In the chapter "Docile Bodies" Foucault examines various institutions—schools, hospitals, etc—where the body is trained and conditioned for the maintenance of the State. He writes, "the classical age discovered the body as object and target of power" where "the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds becomes skillful and increases its forces" is the most useful and ideal body for the purposes of the State.[211] Although it does not utilize the spectacle of punishment, the body of the consumer in the modern age is conditioned to respond with a desire for products. As discussed in Chapter 1, Matt Taibbi, in his book

The Great Derangement, addresses this consumer response in regards to a subject's role as citizen.[212] Foucault makes clear that the success of the training, particularly that not experienced as punishment, results from repetition. As a "new mechanism of power… a body manipulated by authority, rather than imbued with animal spirits" can be recognized as such through its movement behavior.[213] The repetitious nature of the *dressage* not only embeds particular movement into the body but also eliminates the possibility of new movement being created by that individual body.[214] This ensures that the docile body, because of its deep physical training, will not revolt against the structures of power that have trained this body and use it to disseminate training to other bodies. While the consumer is taught to understand himself through a relationship to products, the competition body, as well as the competition participant, is conditioned to read and understand dancing bodies through consumer representations as well.

In his text Foucault discusses the docile body as one that is incarcerated in a variety of spaces—prison, educational structures, social structures, etc. He draws connections between locations of clear imprisonment and others that are viewed as inherent parts of societal structures, sites of privilege rather than of imprisonment. Corporate dance competitions function as one of these sites of privilege that still manages to discipline and incarcerate bodies. A structure that seeks a highly trained body, competition encourages the competition body towards intense repetition to achieve a high level of physical skill. Moreover, this repetition is intended to produce a specific aesthetic and training that fits into the mold already in use at competition. The training of the competition dancer ensures that she is reproducing particular strategies through her

own docile body. The competition dancer does not attempt to subvert or transgress against any larger system of power.[215] The competition dancer is a particular docile body reproducing an aesthetic designed by a power structure led by capital and consumer images indicative of her socio-cultural experience.

Similar to Foucault, Althusser, in his article "Ideology and Ideological State Appartuses," suggests the importance of the ritualized behavior of the human subject as it works to materialize ideology. He suggests that the performance of the body is constantly reproducing ideology. Using Foucault's terminology, Althusser highlights the practices that are enacted *upon* the body to create a docile body as well as those enacted *by* the docile body. Writing of the subject as "the constitutive category of all ideology," Althusser suggests that ideology, which is part of an imaginary constructed by participating subjects, creates the subject out of the individual through the act of *interpellation*.[216] As he theorizes it, interpellation requires a system of categorization agreed upon by subjects as well as a specific act wherein a subject acknowledges his/her own position within that structure through an act of another subject. Althusser, in his statement "the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing," imbricates ideology and the subject in a mutually dependent relationship where one does not exist without the other and both create each other, even through the act of opposition.[217]

In the case of the competition dancer, ideology is materialized in the practice of the competition as well as the technique training that prepares the body for the competition performance. And interpellation happens in the moment of judging when a

dance or dancer is deemed a "platinum winner" or "fifth place finalist," for example. Though not associated with the State, the judging panel and competition corporation are instilled with the same authority as that of the State Apparatus that Althusser discusses. While it does not carry the same risk for imprisonment as the "police hailing: 'Hey, you there!,'" there is a bodily incarceration that begins and continues for every dancer witnessing that moment of interpellation and, in some instances, even for those not witnessing it but may find themselves affected by it later.[218] And in their participation in the experience of hailing the competition body, the viewer also becomes invested in the ideology of the practice.

In agreeing to participate in the structure of competition, these subjects, competition bodies in particular, consent to being determined by the systems that instruct and influence competition. This agreement is most often through a transfer of capital wherein the participant pays directly to a competition corporation and/or an indirect expense necessary for the opportunity to participate in the competition.[219] In this moment the competition participant illustrates her own already existent imbrication within the structures of capital that will dictate her experience of competition. And every time the competition body is disappointed with her placement or screams from excitement as she wins an award, she is consenting to the titles bestowed upon her and other competition bodies, agreeing to both the hierarchy of competition subjects as well as that established by the ranking of dancers and dances. Not only does the competition body labor to become an ideal object of power structures, the reader of competition is also trained to become an object of these same structures. Through their participation in the practice,

viewers are supporting the production of the competition body and the practice itself. Even if a participant disagrees with a cost, a regulation or an outcome, the act of participating already places them in the reflection of the practice of competitions, always defining each subject in relation to competition. While they may not be a military or other political force, the competition body and other participants uphold certain ideals of a larger dominating structure. Similar docile bodies pervade throughout Western culture in various sites, upholding and recreating strategies of the State as social institutions which appear to function separately from the State. However, once placed within the appropriate context, the systems through which a practice such as competition functions, their greater role within State production becomes apparent.

Every time a dancer is hailed as successful or unsuccessful within the apparatus of the competition, it sets a precedent for future competition aesthetics. Because the goal of the competition dancer is to win, the successful dancer is noted in the minds of those who saw her performance and all other dancers attempt to emulate the successful one in future competitions. In this regard the power instilled in the *demonstrative body*, discussed earlier in this text, extends beyond bodies at the site of physical training.[220] More accurately, the training process continues through the act of performance to the awards presentation, the moment of interpellation, which hails bodies through the act of comparison. This results in the competition body being able to locate her success within the apparatus. With the comparison of other dancing bodies and the adjudication of her own, she is able to discipline herself accordingly when she returns to training her body. This concept returns to Foucault's work and his theorization of the panopticon.[221] Built

into this particular structure of dance education is the competition body that manipulates herself to fit the rubric of failure and success that has been presented to her. Even in rehearsal the competition body performs as if judges are watching, as she becomes her own judge, emulating the power structure that constructs her.

Although competition and the work of the competition body are far from a State regulatory structure, as a social apparatus it manages to sustain the work of apparatuses which police for the benefit of the State. Using Gramsci's definition of State as "not only the apparatus of government, but also the 'private' apparatus of 'hegemony' or civil society," Eva Cherniavsky writes, "the limits of the state's pedagogical success are signaled in the continued existence of the state itself—and indeed, in the state's absorption, or colonization, of civil society."[222] Aligning herself with Arjun Appardurai, she states: "what we may be witnessing today is the separation of nationalism's incorporative functions from the operations of the state."[223] The result of processes of globalization that maneuver bodies and nationalist practices through porous borders as well as de-center the sovereign powers, Cherniavsky's idea is in direct relation, although not identical, to Debord idea of integrated spectacle. Cherniavsky suggests that non-State apparatuses maintain hegemony through their ability to signal nationalist functions, reproducing pedagogy established by State apparatuses. In this regard private organizations and systems, through a reflection of State practices, can be understood as part of hegemony which (re)create structures and limitations of the State. The structure of competition and the competition body in particular uses spectacle in order to achieve a representation of the State. This spectacle allows the work and bodies produced on the

competition stage to be read within the same contexts as American consumer culture. As a result, the ideology embedded within these images is the reproduction of something already familiar to participants and allows for easy accessibility to the ideology presented.

While Chapter 1 parsed out those systems that construct the practice of competition and simultaneously established its role as a practice defined by its Americanness, this final chapter expands the relationship of competition to the nation in which it resides, the United States.[224] This section has addressed the way in which the ideology of competition embeds its participants embeds its participants within State practices. Crucial in understanding the relationship of competition to State practices is the way competition both disciplines bodies and interpellates subjects. Moreover, the power of this disciplining and interpellation lies in the creation of spectacle, as discussed in Chapter 3, through the prominence of particular bodies and the invisiblizing of others in the practice of competition. As a result, what follows in this chapter identifies corporate competition—both the practice and the body it creates—as a structure that specifically supports the endeavor of white nation building. Returning to theorizations found in earlier chapters of the competition body and its use of techniques and styles, this chapter addresses the broad role of competition as a site that creates and promotes a particular Euro-American subject and identity in order to ensure the preservation of a racial hegemony.

The Racial Project of Competition

In order to begin addressing the State practices embedded in corporate competitions and the competition body I turn to the work of Omi and Winant in their text *Racial Formation in the United States*. As they examine theoretical paradigms of race from different academic fields, these authors acknowledge what they believe are both the accuracies and inaccuracies of each of these paradigms as they formulate their own theorization regarding race in the United States during the last half of the 20th century. In their fourth chapter, "Racial Formation," Omi and Winant look at the historical significance of race for American individuals as well as civilization. Defining *race* as "a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies," they posit race as "an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle" and *racial formation* as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed," a process which links structure and representation.[225] Omi and Winant's approach towards racial formation reveals the role of sovereignty and law in regards to racial projects within the United States and the formation of bodies through repressive technologies. The ideological materialization of racial formation, they define *racial project* as "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines."[226] Defining the historical political structure of the United States as racial dictatorship, "against which all other US politics must be measured," Omi and Winant write of three "consequences" that still pervade

American social structures: (1) the American identity has come to be defined as "white," (2) it has created the "color line" to be a "fundamental division in U.S. society," and (3) it has "consolidated the oppositional racial consciousness and organization."[227] That is to say, it is the historicity of racial politics in the U.S that has created current social structures, which construct bodies and subjects in a hierarchical relationship.

In their following chapter, Omi and Winant look extensively at the historical changes in U.S. racial law and the "trajectory of racial politics" in order to excavate the role of the state in "social relations."[228] Considering "the U.S. racial order as an 'unstable equilibrium,'" they conclude this chapter by examining the process of the "disrupted" "unstable equilibrium," the historical moments where the current racial order is challenged by oppressed groups.[229] Including the institutional policies of absorption and insulation, the moment of crisis initiated by racial movements result in a change to the racial order. Because these moments of crisis are often distinguishable as large movements by masses of bodies, there are discernible forces of State power that create the movement as well as attempt to control its transgressive behavior. These moments begin with a particular impetus, resulting in a change, a process through which technologies of dominance can be located. However, there are many moments of *un*disrupted unstable equilibrium that also reveal the same technologies of racial dominance through a controlling and policing of bodies. Examinations of these sites of stasis also reveal structures of sovereignty embedded in culture.

In their work Omi and Winant are concerned with the shifts and changes in racial politics and ideology as well as racism in political structures in the United States.

However, in what follows, I will examine a social site, a particular racial project, where these politics and ideologies are maintained in a stasis, rather than considering a site of resistance or crisis. As a site of privilege and excess, the racial project found on the dance competition stage quietly and covertly reproduces structures of the State under the guise of popular and leisure culture. The systems which dictate competition, the structures through which competition presents dance and dancing bodies as well as trains viewers to read dance in the United States, all work in support of dominant bodies. Training of bodies and the language used to describe, define and label these bodies are part of this statecraft which maintains Euro-American colonial dominance.

There are a variety of terms and categorical methods that most corporate dance competitions rely upon. These terms range from the labeling of genres to the titles award to competitors. The most obviously State oriented are terms such as "regional," for local events, and "national," to describe an individual corporations culminating competition for the season (in some instances corporations hold more than one "national" event) which is composed of "regional" winners. With titles such as "Miss Dance of America" and "National Winner," competition corporations evoke a sense of nationalism wherein the dance and/or dancer appear to represent the nation-state of the United States.[230] Moreover, this terminology embeds the State and, ultimately, statecraft into the dance competition by constructing the suggestion that there is a connection between the dancer and her successful relationship with the State, as if she a representation of a larger populace. There is a simultaneous falsity and truth in this relationship of the competition dance(r) to the nation. The falseness of this relationship lies in the fact that the

competition is not a nationally associated organization but, instead, a private corporation with no national governing body or relationship to a greater whole composed of various states or regions. However, despite this, a "national" title instilled by a dance competition has a deeply embedded association with social performance of nationalism as there is a cultural capital associated with the label, which allows the dancer to emerge with a greater sense of value with in the larger population.

In a discussion of language, Giorgio Agamben writes about those dialects that lack "state dignity" but "almost always assume an immediately political significance."[231] What he points to here is the political relevance of language that is not part of the governmental structures but affects government nonetheless. Not unlike argot and other jargons Agamben refers to, the language of the competition assumes political significance in its ability to affect the social movements of people and communities. Rather than having a direct connection to official State structures, these dialects gain political control as a communal connection that establishes groups working within and beyond law. Earlier in his text Agamben states that the power of speech comes from the fact that "we are always already many," meaning that the power of language results from the fact that many people speak and understand it.[232] Similarly, corporate competition titles are phrased so that even those unfamiliar with competition can read the social capital and value bestowed unto the associated dancing body.[233] These titles are accessible to a broader population and describe a grandiose achievement and national association. In his text *On Populist Reason*, Laclau discusses the significance of rhetoric as "the anatomy of the ideological world."[234] According to Laclau "what matters is the determination of the

discursive sequences through which a social force or movement carries out its overall political performance."[235] What he makes clear is the significance of language and rhetoric in the construction of social movements, which affect State structures. Therefore, the competition's use of words such as "national" holds greater significance in the larger ideological structure that this particular cultural practice is embedded in. By falsifying a connection to the State, the competition is creating the connection because its participants view the titles and terminology as having a national significance. The allusion of a state association through the use of specific words is one of many ways in which dance competitions can be located within an ideological structure created by State practices.

Moving beyond the literal connections between competition titles and nationalism, the Euro-American construction of competition points to the "white" identity Omi and Winant attach to the United States. The isolation created by the category "ethnic/ folkloric" is the most evident moment in which competition attempts to construct a white identity. This category juxtaposes all "Othered" forms against non-American forms. While one competition, International Dance Challenge, defines the category as a dance relating to a "particular ethnic group, including but not limited to national dance," many others specify dances such as Hawaiian, Spanish, Polka, Flamenco, Irish Step Dancing.[236] The only style including in these lists that is not a Euro-American form is African. (However, even African is frequently practiced across the United States and has gained a traditional place in many dance practices.) Every other dance form on the above list, because of its geographic origins, is categorized as

Euro-American by the archive of dance scholarship. However, they all distinctly differ from other competition genres in that they are not a part of popular culture and always signal non-normative culture as they represent a specific national identity other than "American." It is a notable choice to isolate these types of dances into a single category rather than placing them in other related genres. For example, African may fit more appropriately in jazz or Irish Step Dance into tap, as these forms influence these competition genres, rather than being grouped together with such a wide possibility for variety in which African and Irish Step Dance could compete against each other. At competition, Euro-American forms that do not achieve a high level of popularity are still considered "ethnic" as they signal a culture other than traditional white American. Therefore, dances that are white European, Polka, Flamenco, or American, Hawaiian, are classified as ethnic because they lack both the white *and* American label; these dances gesture to a concentrated spectacle as they represent cultural and national experiences. Meanwhile dances that could be also argued to be ethnic because of their historical trajectory in the United States, such as jazz or lyrical, are not viewed as such because they remain part of popular culture and connected to a normative white American identity. Meanwhile, a category such as hip hop, which signifies a *non-white* American body, is treated as normative because, in its complex role in popular culture, the minority body is commofidied and incorporated into a white identity. These dance forms, particularly the latter, fall within Debord's diffused spectacle because of their relationship to capital practices. The delineation of certain categories and the categorization of "ethnic" dances as a single genre point to the construction of a white *American* identity

on the competition stage. However, the existent State and nationalist values in those "non-ethnic" forms situate them as instances of integrated spectacle as they promote State authority through media and consumer images and ideologies.

The use and definition of "ethnic"/ "folkloric" on the competition stage suggests that the white identity is understood as "unmarked." In her text *Modern Dance, Negro Dance*, Susan Manning discusses the way whiteness became unmarked after the Cold War "while blackness became equated with culturally marked bodies."[237] Throughout this discussion in her final chapter Manning contrasts the work of white choreographer Martha Graham with that of African-American choreographer Alvin Ailey, the relationship of which is complicated by the work of choreographer José Limón, who is able to shift between "inhabit[ing] a culturally marked body" and "a universal or unmarked body."[238] Competition dance draws on a similar binary of racial marking with the establishment of a category for all dances that signify nationality. While such national dances are viewed as non-normative, genres such as jazz, lyrical and ballet, each of which could be argued to be a national or cultural form, appear, for competition participants, to *not* signal nationalism, despite each form's extensive history in regards to American history. Not utilized by the State as part of a national identity, each of the primary competition genres nonetheless signals a particular national identity depending on the framework through which they are presented. In the instance of competition, the framework situates anything that represents culture to be considered "ethnic" while, simultaneously, American culture goes unrecognized as such. Therefore, white is anything that is read to not contain culture or apparent nationalism.[239]

In allowing white American dance genres to be unmarked while all others are relegated to a single genre, competition works towards the racial formation of a white nation-state. More importantly, this racial formation is supported as viewers are taught to read dance within the framework of whiteness. This is no more apparent than when Russian folk dance is introduced into *So You Think You Can Dance*. This moment in Season 5, as discussed in the previous chapter, reveals the expectation, assumption and clarification that Americanness must exist in these dances in order for the audience to be capable of reading them. After a performance of Russian folk dance, producer and judge Nigel Lythgoe took responsibility for what he believed was likely going to be a low vote week for contestants Jeannine Mason and Phillip Chbeeb. Suggesting that vodka would be necessary to enjoy the performance, Lythgoe continued to demean the dance not on the basis of the dancers' performance or the choreography but on the dance practice itself.[240] And later in the season when Jeannine Mason is asked what she feels was her biggest "mistake" on the show, rather than pointing to a failure of herself or even another subject, she states that randomly choosing "Russian Folk dance" as a performance style was the greatest error she experience on the show.[241] Not the first "ethnic" style competed on *SYTYCD*, Bollywood was first seen in Season 4 and performed in every subsequent season. However, Bollywood, much like hip hop, has been exotified and, consequently, incorporated into popular American culture. Both hip hop and Bollywood mark the exotic "Other" clearly enough that the understanding of each form as a commodity and representation of culture within popular culture is already embedded in the American viewer's consciousness. In contrast, Russian dance is not marked in a

popular culture sphere and, therefore, is not readable for *SYTYCD*'s audience. Although hip hop and Bollywood are marked as "other," the signifiers for both forms are still tangible for an audience. However, competition bodies and viewers are not prepared to read dances outside of popular and familiar American culture.

In a site such as *So You Think You Can Dance*, which is developed parallel to corporate competition and as a supplement to the lifespan of the competition body, the racial project is, in part, the result of already established practices within the prominent dancing body. Although a show such as *SYTYCD* could and occasionally does appear to diversify the dancing bodies that it promotes, as discussed in the previous chapter, it ultimately promotes the competition body as the central dancing body. As a result, the most familiar dancing body is one composed of popular American dance traditions, both original and appropriated. Considering the tracing of the competition body as approached in the second chapter of this text, there is an evident attempt to stabilize the "unstable equilibrium" of race as discussed by Omi and Winant.

It is apparent that the appropriation and consequential development of particular forms work towards a practice of white nation building as "Othered" bodies are silenced and/or removed. Most significant is the appropriation of forms such as jazz and hip hop, both of which have been removed from their original sites and bodies of performance and been transferred to more affluent and dominant bodies. Each signifying different moments in African-American history, jazz and hip hop started as vernacular forms, gaining popularity and, ultimately, a places as a marketable commodity. The most recent of these forms, the dance practice of hip hop, is not only a sellable item but also a method

of identity branding. However, the highly visible versions of these previously marginalized dance practices are adaptations, which include elements of traditional Euro-American dance practices. As discussed in the second chapter, elements such as the use of an upright torso in hip hop or increased ballet technique in jazz composition point to the appropriation of these forms by other bodies. The transmission of these forms and others are significant as they move from marginalized and/ or transgressive bodies unto safe, normative bodies, shifting the reading of the movement and its relationship to State practices. Part of Debord's "media excess,"[242] both televised and corporate competitions endorse the competition body's appropriated version of these forms rather than the original transgressive bodies. The presentation of these previously and potentially transgressive dance forms is only successful, acceptable and readable when presented on normative bodies. Because only after the filtering process of appropriation is complete are these forms no longer a destabilizing threat to State structures.

Gay Hop: A Case Study of the Racial Project of Competition

Although there are many instances of whitening and appropriation on the competition stage, for this discussion I have chosen a particularly rich moment that not only addresses race but is also in dialogue with complex notions of sexuality. A development of hip hop, there is a unique and not uncommon style of hip hop, gay hop. In its communities of origin, the gay hop body is a dancing body unto itself. However, the following discussion addresses its appropriation by the competition body, resulting in it is use as a dance style and movement aesthetic. Without conducting a complete ethnography it is difficult to discern the moment at which the competition body

subsumed the gay hop body as it is not something discussed or documented but, rather, simply a trend visible amongst competition bodies. Therefore, in order to construct this discussion I have begun with my own area of familiarity, the competition body, and worked backwards in order to unearth its relationship to the gay hop body. What follows acknowledges the historicity of gay hop and its cultural implications as well as its physicality and aesthetic, reading these elements within the competition body and on the competition stage. This discussion not only addresses the complexity of gay hop on the competition stage but also illustrates how the structure of competition and this act of appropriation work to sustain hegemonic structures through the quashing of potentially subversive bodies and movement forms through their integration into popular practice.

Combining two movement aesthetics—voguing and hip hop—associated with two different cultures—homosexual and urban African American and Latino—that, in the normative social structure of the United States are both oppressed minorities, gay hop has been adapted for the competition stage in a way that clearly illustrates the appropriation and alteration of transgressive forms for use in popular culture. Well documented in the film *Paris is Burning* (1991), voguing is characterized by "model walks" which animate the physical action of displaying the female physique. Performed by biological males the style is hyper-feminine and distinctly queer as femininity is made spectacle through movement.[243] In gay hop, queer performance is juxtaposed with the traditionally homophobic culture of hip hop. While there are queer hip hop communities, popular and mainstream hip hop often produces images and lyrics which portray homosexuality in derogatory terms. Hip hop, like voguing, is a predominately male community; however,

it is characterized by masculinity. Since its incropraotion into mainstream culture in the early to mid 1980s, hip hop is consistently used as spectacle of race and movement. Discussed in the second chapter of this project, hip hop has been commodified by popular American (and global) culture as an advertising strategy and marketing tool. Seen in adds for fast food restaurants, electronics and many other products, hip hop is regularly exploited for its spectacle. In a shift of the spectacle of both voguing and hip hop, it's presented on the competition stage by primarily young, white females whose appropriation of the work creates an entirely new spectacle as they merge their abilities as competition bodies with gay hop.

Most recognizable by the carriage of shoulders, gay hop fits easily on the competition body since both styles utilize an upright spine that deviates from the classical Western dance use of the back as they access excess curvature of the torso and spine. This curvature in the cervical and upper thoracic spine is complimented with the shoulders pinched back so that a neutral body position results in the arms slightly behind the torso. This is in contrast to classical training where the shoulders expand outward from the spine as the arms hang directly side, if not slightly in front, of the torso. Referencing voguing's effeminate gestures, the arm position of gay hop remains fixed, which causes the movement to appear predominately from the elbow joint. This causes the sternum to reach forward, leading the movement of the body, while the tail bone is held back, exaggerating the curvature of the spine. However, in gay hop the body performs the grounded dynamic movement of hip hop. The house and break-dancing styles found in hip hop are present in the choreography of gay hop on the competition

stage as well as the body isolations of popping and locking, which also accentuate femininity physicality.

The resistive strategies employed by these bodies before entering the competition stage, are stipulated by the body performing (i.e. a male body performing arguably feminine traits, or a black body performing a new sense of visibility) and visible through the phenotypes of the bodies, such as race or gender. When these performances of resistance are articulated on the competition body these movements become normative. And this normativity is the very moment wherein the matrix of dominance—the political, social and economic structures of hegemony—restructures its tactics to subvert opposition. The complexity of this idea is born from the theories of two authors. According to Patrick E. Johnson:

> [B]lackness offers a way to rethink performance theory by forcing it to ground itself in praxis, especially within the context of a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, homophobic society. Although useful in deconstructing essentialist notions of selfhood, performance must also provide a space for meaningful resistance of oppressive systems.[244]

Though this idea is not predicated on the notion that the performing body must be Black, the significance of this passage is both the characteristics of the oppressive structures as well as the necessity of the performing body acting out resistance. Johnson clearly identifies how performing Blackness functions as a tool of resistance. And the most necessary part of this act is what choices this resistive body makes in order to differentiate itself from other methods of resistance and how bodies come to display and enact their own culture of resistance within and against the Nation-State. Similarly, this concern for how the resistive body defines itself against the Nation-State also appears in the work of Judith Butler's who writes:

> [D]rag as a site… which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes.[245]

Gay hop on the competition stage alters the way the gay hop body is implicated in these "regimes of power." Because the historical and cultural references of gay hop are lost within the context of the competition, the audience can no longer find the necessary markers of subversion. It is no longer on a Black body and it is no longer queer since the competition body is inherently constructed to be neither of these identities. Therefore, gay hop performed on the competition stage cannot be resistive.

This loss of resistance is also the result of the audience's viewing practices. Thomas DeFrantz emphasizes the significance of the audience's observation in the construction of the identity through social dance practice.[246] Here I would like to emphasize the same role of the audience in regards to a dance practice more often viewed as a concert form, because of its placement on a proscenium stage. Since the competition audience does not see the gay hop body as resistive, and can not see it as so because the body that is performing it is the normative body, gay hop losses its subversive power. Therefore, gay hop performance is simply reiterating the normative ideals of the structures of power that construction competition culture. By having a white, heterosexual female body perform gay hop the resistive motions are no longer visible. And the performance of the body reflects hegemonic ideals of normative behavior, rather than transgressive ones.

Utilizing many of the same physical attributes trained into the competition body, gay hop not only transforms easily on the competition body but also onto the competition stage as well. The intersection of two transgressive cultures, gay hop manifested on the

competition body shifts its resistive power while increasing its accessibility. By removing it from both queer and minority bodies, the act of appropriating this movement form and its simultaneous adaptation for the competition stage not only "whitens" it but also attempts to stabilize the "unstable equilibrium" of the racial order as discussed by Omi and Winant. Forms such as voguing, hip hop and gay hop are accepted on the competition stage for their exoticism rather than resistive functions. The style of gay hop is used closely in conjunction with popular culture and, most importantly, on female bodies. Therefore, the feminine performance, which is resistive when performed by biologically male bodies, becomes normalized on female bodies. Similarly, the urban, minority identity is also removed once the movement is placed on young, white female bodies. It is also important to consider that these young, white bodies are being choreographed on and directed into their performance forms. Although these dancing bodies still exist as individual subjects, they also shouldn't be seen as completely autonomous since the controlling mechanisms which create them are materialized into socially understood authority figures. It is through a process of appropriation and recreation by bodies of authority onto other bodies that the transgressive ability of forms such as gay hop are lost and stasis is created where resistance once existed. Once placed on a controlled and controllable body like the young, white female body, these forms become safe and integrated into a system of normative culture which sustains, rather than defies, the State's expected and preferred performance of bodies based on classifications such as gender, race and sexuality.

The role of the young, white female body is of particular significance in the removal and erasure of resistance. Although she is directly addressing the white female body in film, Cherniavsky argues that the value of the female film star contrasts that of the woman. She writes "[w]here the woman realizes value as private acquisition (through her removal from circulation), the value of the film star… derives from her ongoing circulation in the form of the commodity-image."[247] Similarly, the competition body also acquires her value through the ability to perform as much as possible as often as possible. In her chapter "White Women in the Age of Their Mechanical Reproduction", Cherniavsky draws upon the work of Anne McClintock who, she writes, "underscores the centrality of women's participation, as symbols if not as agents, in the spectacular reproduction of nationalized social values."[248] Both McClintock and Cherniavsky suggest that sites of "normative consumer culture" are a part of nationalist production.[249] Cherniavsky specifically points to the representation and circulation of the woman in the Hollywood film industry. She discusses the "fetishized white female body" as it "proliferates visions of ecstatic consumption."[250] Cherniavsky describes this as "shimmering white bodies… intimate with the commodities that surround them, caressing and caressed by the clothes, the interiors, the cars, and the other American products that fill the images of classic Hollywood cinema."[251] She sees this as "the extravagant whitening of the female star" which creates a "white feminine 'glow' or radiance as a visual norm."[252] Beginning to achieve a greater national and international circulation, the competition body is literally shiny under the lights of the stage as her costume is covered in rhinestones and her body in glitter. Using similar tactics, the

competition body also glows as her whiteness is exacerbated. Moreover, as she presents and exaggerates popular culture, the competition body is a commodity-image selling fashion, lifestyle and an identity that promotes a disciplined American subject. Unlike Cherniavsky's mediated image, the competition body does all this work as a live body. As a result, the labor endured in order achieve such consumption exceeds that of the mediated body who is mechanically reproduced.

In her text *Resisting State Violence*, Joy James' first chapter, "Erasing the Spectacle of Racialized State Violence," critiques Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* for his lack of acknowledgment for variation in politics that shape differing bodies. In doing so she writes,

> [N]onobservance and nonconformity are often understood as biologically determined… Because some bodies fail to conform physiologically, different bodies are expected and are therefore required to behave differently under state or police gaze. Greater obedience is demanded from those whose physical difference marks them as aberrational, offensive, or threatening. Conversely, some bodies appear more docile than others because of their conformity in appearance to idealized models of class, color and sex; their bodies are allowed greater leeway to be self-policed or policed without physical force.[253]

The transfer of forms from "nonconformed" bodies onto a body such as the young, white female body illustrates the notion that certain bodies are more easily policed without physical force. Lacking a marker of difference and upheld as normative and, therefore, safe, the competition body is able to embody "physical characteristics that are racialized" without needing additional policing.[254] Moreover, James' theorization accounts for the ability of competition bodies that phenotypically differ from the young, white female body to function as such. Racially marked bodies can and do become competition bodies. However, these particular dancing subjects become unmarked as they

successfully perform within the competition system and become read as normative competition bodies. That is to say, when bodies move beyond the spectacle created by their phenotypical characteristics and into one created by integrated spectacle they become part of mainstream hegemony. In this situation, the ability of these bodies to conform and erase any potentially racializing characteristics affords them a similar space of self-policing. I qualify this as "similar" and not identical because these bodies, as a result of their pre-determined biological characteristics, depending on the movement style (for example, an African-American competition body performing a distinctly African-inspired jazz dance), could become marked and policed once again. Although James is correct that "bodies matter differently in racialized systems," in the case of the competition body, this racialized system is dependent upon movement as well as biological characteristics.[255] The competition body is the means through which particular non-normative bodies, such as the gay hop body, are subsumed into normative practices through appropriation and their resistance is silenced. And it is also the ability to be constructed into a competition body that allows subjects to participate in the erasure of their own racial, cultural and sexual markers. Similarly, this also gives the space for certain bodies, through their performance as competition bodies, to exist beyond stereotypical markers and through the adaptation of signifiers of normativity. In this regard, competition as an apparatus of State practice requires, and also limits, the potential for conformity.

Competition as a Carceral Technology

The racial project of white nation building structured by corporate dance competitions functions through the physical training of dancing bodies as well as the disciplining of viewing bodies, leading to an incarceration of all bodies. Although this is not an imprisonment within walls, this particular racial project works to discipline all bodies as well as disempower many bodies while constantly instilling power within a very specific subset of bodies, none of which can be found performing on the competition stage. While competition appears to be a multicultural dance site, in which a broad range of bodies, cultures, races, and economic classes can perform, it ultimately takes a colonial approach as dominant bodies appropriate and exoticize "Othered" forms. What appears as diversity functions, in fact, as neo-colonialization as the spectacle of body and movement is commodified to create a single spectacle that supports hegemony. In forms such as jazz, hip hop and gay hop, a muting of both history and culture occurs when the normative body of the young, white female appropriates these forms at the site of competition. The framework of competition, as discussed in the second chapter, in which regulatory limitations disassociate competition entries from many choreographic and artistic choices, also works to erase or reposition socio-historical context necessary for reading dance and dancing bodies. Competition creates limitations, largely through rhetoric and language, which encourage bodies to conform to a particular ideology of dance performance and subject formation. These same limitations also use non-corporeal punishment to dissuade subjects from working in opposition of this ideology.

Even though corporeal disciplining of competition is found primarily in the physical training of competition bodies, there still exists an incarceration of all participants and subjects through the corporate competition structure. The word incarceration, most commonly associated with imprisonment, appears far from the privileged site of dance competitions. However, authors such as Dylan Rodríguez theorize incarceration of the body as not only the subject in prison but also the manner in which the prison regime "prioritizes the disintegration of… bodies, with profound effects on their communities of origin and (political) identification."[256] Rodríguez expands the idea of an incarcerated body to any body that is being altered and destroyed by the prison regime. Incarceration is not bound by walls, but instead is defined by the ways that power is being enacted upon it. Meanwhile, Ruth Gilmore addresses those communities restructured and divided by the introduction of prisons. The bodies of these communities become incarcerated and confined geographically, politically and economically in ways that make the introduction of the prison into the community inevitable and unavoidable.[257] Similarly, João H. Costa Vargas, in his text *Catching Hell in the City of Angels*, demonstrates how political, social and economic structures incarcerate the bodies of his neighbors in various ways, some literal and others methaphorically.[258] These authors look not just at bodies within prison walls but also others affected by the prison regime through a matrix of dominance.

Some bodies are effective, according to the standards set by the centers of power, by participating in the matrix through gaining control and power. Other bodies, those discussed by Rodríguez, Gilmore and Vargas, are effective by submitting to their

incarceration. And, in some cases, bodies are effective in their resistance. Visible on the competition stage are the moments in which resistive actions, as a threat to the matrix, become integrated into the larger system void of resistance. For example, gay hop on the competition stage modifies a transgressive body in a "safe" body. No longer addressing the multiple areas of potential transgression—race, gender, sexuality, etc.—competition turns gay hop performance into a tool of the patriarchal, white heterosexual normative culture by presenting the female body as a commodified femininity. This leads to an objectification of the competition body that works within the matrix to ensure the inability of either body performing at the site of competition to be resistive.

In the introduction to the anthology *Warfare in the American Homeland*, Joy James articulates a process of appropriation and loss of resistance when she writes, "the most civil and surgical of violations, those that leave no mark on the physical body, would be erasure or dismemberment through mimetic performance that discredits the legacies of the 'household'—their resistance."[259] She continues on to say that "[w]hen the 'household' of the disappeared—poor communities, prisoners, queers, red/ black/ brown peoples, women, children—reappears and dictates its own narrative, in its own voice, with its own unmitigated desires… this is war."[260] What James' theory suggests is that by keeping what she refers to as the "household" disempowered, the State is able to avoid warfare within itself. And the "war" she is referring to resembles Omi and Winant's "disrupted 'unstable equilibrium". Related to Tomas DeFrantz's "actionable assertions" which get "stalled" as hip hop movement transmits from black to white dancers, James' "mimetic performances" sustain the disappearance and silencing of

'households' or resistive communities.[261] The competition body is just one of many that keep the "household" from reappearing and threatening war. Her appropriated performance is part of a process in which resistive acts are incorporated into mainstream culture and, as a result, become no longer resistive. In doing so the competition body contains possible resistance, avoiding potential "war" incited by any "household", and defends a stasis of dominance. The power of the State relies on these bodies to constantly appropriate bodily practices from bodies that may break this stasis.

Movement and aesthetic appropriation by the competition body erase the history of bodies of origin as competition attempts to alter any socio-historical references into self-referential ones. As competition continues to build upon itself, "outside" references become incorporated into the practice so that later incarnations and reproductions are in reference to the "inside" productions. The silencing of original marginalized bodies via the removal of physical identifications works to construct new referents within the competition culture. Rather than acknowledging the history of an appropriated body, competition culture treats it as always already part of competition culture, never recognizing its previous transgressivity. This is visible in the development of forms such as hip hop or gay hop, which are continuously altered in order to accommodate the most current ability of the competition body, rather than recent developments in the original form, as well as the vague language which defines particular genres in the rules and regulations and allows for extensive variation. These bodies then become reproduced from images found on the competition stage, not from the bodies of origin. However, the

representations created by this body are not as self-referential as they appear; they are simply masked in an effort to achieve a balanced normative culture.

There is a particular training of bodies, both dancing and reading, that is necessary in order for this self-referential appearance to exist. This training ensures that dancing bodies are engrained with the desire to achieve success as a competition body and that reading bodies continue to desire the competition body as winner. All competition participants must be and are incorporated into this training for the continuation of the practice and ideology as well as its work in support of the State apparatus. In her text James addresses the necessary disciplining of both the jailed and the jailer. She states "…everyone is 'incarcerated' in some sense, and captivity and violation are carceral shared experience."[262] The competition illustrates this as all participating bodies become incarcerated in one way or another. It is not the competition body that contains the power of erasure present at competition. And it is not even the competition corporation itself. Nor is it those participants that read the competition body, constructing its meaning and resonance. There exists no identifiable bodily subject of power. Because it is not directly a State Apparatus there is no visible site of power as one would find in a monarchy or other political structure. Instead, competition is the culmination and intersection of many related systems—including capital and socio-cultural experiences—that all rely on or are influenced by State structures.

Its incarceration of bodies situates competition as a technology of the State. In his text *Forced Passages*, Dylan Rodrígez conceptualizes statecraft through the incarceration of bodies and prison system in the United States. He writes:

> The production of the prison regime composes a statecraft of intimidation, invasion, and infliction, as the institutional identity of the prison pivots on the state's rendering of captured bodies as infinitely fungible objects, available for whimsical and gratuitous productions of bodily and physic violence, while presumed always already 'dangerous' and criminally disobedient.[263]

I would like to position the site of competition as another version of this production of statecraft albeit lacking the intended violence. Although participants are never viewed as "dangerous," there is a "capturing" of bodies through appropriation. And there is a subsequent "rendering" of bodies as the competition body is constructed into an ideal, docile constituent of the State. As a production of statecraft, the site of competition works as a State technology more discretely and covertly than the prison regime. The disciplining of bodies is worked into the structure of competition so that bodies agree and choose to be policed. Moreover, as bodies and subjects are incorporated into the practice of competition this policing becomes desired through a system of rewards, rather than punishments. That is to say, while the penal system functions by threat, competition encourages a particular success determined largely by its foundational systems. While the prison regime exists as a spectacle within culture, competition is integrated into culture so that its spectacle is naturalized and normalized. Despite the stark differences between the two sites, both competition and prison function as a technology of the State as they manipulate individual bodies into a single, identical body which supports hegemony.

The political role of corporate dance competitions is not as a solitary institution but as part of a system of capital and popular culture within a broader context of the United States. The racial project of competition as a site that upholds the authority of the

white body through control of all bodies and subjects is the result of its relationship to the systems, discussed in the first chapter, which help inform and construct competition. The disciplining of bodies that assists in the erasure of resistance and maintains dominant bodies is largely supported by the sport structure of competition which directly encourages the increased training of the body according to already established ideologies. Meanwhile, the notion of fame incorporated into dance competitions supports the position of the competition body as a commodity-image. Lastly, it is the capitalist system, which the practice of competition emerges out of, that reinforces both the competitive and celebrity aspects of dance competitions. Use value of the competition body, achieved through increased skill and reflected in celebrity status, is determined by the conventional nature of this dancing body as it conforms to dominant structures. These systems play a significant role in establishing the racial project of corporate competitions as they not only help create the structure of competition and the resulting racial project but also situate competition within the project of white nation building which characterizes normative American culture.

In order to accurately position the competition body, competition as a site of dance, as well as the systems that structure it, I am concluding this chapter with the work of Denise Ferreira da Silva. Although the competition body is constructed primarily by competition and competition is structured through the amalgamation of several central systems in American culture, the issue of control and power over bodies exists in an even more significant location. In her text *Toward a Global Idea of Race* da Silva complicates the ability to conceptualize race in a manner which extends to any ideological practice.

She suggests that the analytics of race cannot be adequately theorized because all theorizations rely on the tools and language of the very structures that construct historical and current racial ideology. Closely related to Gayatri Spivak's article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and similar to the work of Giorgio Agamben, particularly his text *Means Without an End*, da Silva questions how the "Other" can and does exist within normative ideology. However, she develops concepts which allow a particularly dense and complex approach making her work unique. da Silva suggests two types of subjects, the "transparent 'I'" who is defined by his "post-Enlightenment European thought" and "affectable 'I'", "the scientific construction of non-European minds," the "Other".[264] Tracking the history of Enlightenment and modern culture, da Silva points to the conditions through which the racial structure of European as superior and all others as inferior emerged. What is significant about these conditions is the way they developed a dichotomy between the transparent "I" and the affectable "I" wherein the affectable "I" is always and only understood through the language and ideology of the transparent "I". This theorization means that the affectable "I" lacks the ability to mobilize away from his affectability without effectively becoming a transparent "I" because of constraints on the conditions of possibility that create the ideological structure.

As the competition is shaped by other systems and as the competition shapes subjects, the transparent "I" is created in great numbers while the affectable "I", when present, is never read or understood within the appropriate context for that subject. Even as the affectable "I" materializes through any genre, whether it is gay hop or Russian folk dance, it is read, not for what it brings to the stage but for what it does not, the traditional

Americanness that it lacks. In instances in which the dance style is appropriated, the affectable "I" is replaced with the body of a transparent "I". And it is in this creation of the transparent "I" that the corporate dance competition acts as a technology of the matrix of dominance. It creates and trains bodies and persons to behave with the system of the Nation-State rather than against it, within a verbal and physical rhetoric that directly supports the State. It does not foster acts of resistance and, in fact, serves to mute these very resistances out.

A loss of resistance is established within the practice of dance competition. Returning to a poignant image used by Rodríguez, there is a "bodily disintegration" visible at competition and through the competition body. Distinctive qualities and characteristics are removed as movement practices are adapted for the competition stage. And, as a result of the role of competition within popular culture, these adaptations then begin to circulate in larger sites of dance and cultural performance. The competition body is built as on top and in the voids created by other disintegrating bodies. Constructed out of the remaining parts of non-normative and non-dominant bodies the competition body is the visible materialization of statecraft. Filtered through a myriad of physical and ideological systems and structures the competition body is a development of the State and the practice of dance competitions is the technology that produced her.

The intent of this chapter has been to establish the role of competition, and the competition body, as a representation of a much greater regime of power in which all subjects are constituents. Although the spectacle at work is not the concentrated spectacle which Foucault describes in the opening of his text *Discipline and Punish*, the

training and incarceration of bodies through an integrated spectacle is apparent as State powers begin to function within sites of leisure and social experience. The theorizations in this chapter are not only applicable to the practice of competition, and comparable theories can be constructed in regards to many other similar capitalist and competition practices in the United States. The purpose of these ideas is not to suggest competition as something uniquely different but, rather, to situate competition as the normative practice that it is. More specifically, the work in this chapter reveals how the spectacle of competition is derived from spectacle found in American culture. Often seen on the margins of dance and beyond normal cultural practice, dance competitions and the competition body are not only a manifestation of Americanness but also of the State. In this way, the bodies produced through this practice are instilled with a much greater weight than if they were merely seen as outside culture. This dissertation, culminating in this chapter, has centralized competition within dance practice as well as cultural production in the United States. The significance of the competition body is apparent in her ability to embody State practices and sustain dominant bodies in position of authority and power through the use of spectacle in the 21st century media age. Moreover, in her role of erasing and silencing other bodies, the competition body enacts the State's dominance over subversive bodies that stand to disrupt the status quo. While she is constantly manipulating dance techniques and styles for the competition stage, the need to do this within this structure of dance illustrates the way in which the practice of competition uses its role as a site of extracurricular amateur activity in order to support the hegemony of the State.

Endnotes

[205] Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle* translated by Ken Knabb. Rebel Press, 2004. p 31.

[206] Debord, 32, 2004.

[207] Debord, *Comments on Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Malcom Imrie. Verso, 1990. p 8.

[208] Debord, 9, 1990

[209] Debord, 9, 1990.

[210] Debrod, 9, 1990.

[211] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish the Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage, 1995. p. 136. Print.

[212] Taibbi, Matt. *The Great Derangement*. Random House, Inc., 2008. p 5. Print.

[213] Foucault, 155, 1995.

[214] Lefebvre, Henri. *Rhythmanalysis Space, Time and Everyday Life (Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers)*. New York: Continuum International Group, 2004. Print.

[215] Any transgression that may exists are generally very minute and are usually on the part of the choreographer or dance teacher. Ultimately, the competition body is one that is produced entirely by others. This is not to disregard the labor of the competition body but to highlight the significance of authority figures in the construction of this body.

[216] Althusser, Louis. "Ideological State Apparatus" from *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture A Reader* edited by John Storey. Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2006. p. 343.

[217] Althusser, 345, 2006.

[218] Althusser, 345, 2006.

[219] An example of direct payment would be a dancer and their parent who pays an entry fee for the dancer to compete. Because many competitions don't charge admission, an indirect payment would be transportation costs or other expenses required for the subject to reach and enter the site of the competition.

[220] Foster, Susan Leigh C. "Dancing Bodies." *Meaning in Motion New Cultural Studies of Dance (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*. Ed. Jane C. Desmond. New York: Duke UP, 1997. 235-58. Print.

[221] Foucault, 195-230, 1995.

[222] Cherniavsky, Eva. *Incorporations: Race, Nation and the Body Politics of Capital.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. p. 27. Print.

[223] Cherniavsky, 25, 2006.

[224] It should be noted that corporate dance competitions are being popular internationally including in New Zealand, Italy and Spain. While these competitions have unique elements, they are modeled after those found in the United States and, in some instances, are directly affiliated with popular US competitions.

[225] Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge, 1994. p. 55-6. Print.

[226] Omi & Winant, 56, 1994.

[227] Omi & Winant, 66, 1994.

[228] Omi & Winant, 83-4, 1994.

[229] Omi & Winant, 84,1994.

[230] These titles are attributed by Dance Masters of America and Danceamerica, respectively.

[231] Agamben, Giorgio. *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics (Theory out of Bounds)*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. p. 68. Print

[232] Agamben, 10, 2000.

[233] Holt, Tony. "Mighty dancer: 15-year-old Taylor Storey is a national winner." *Tampa Tribune* 12/21/2009, Hernando Edition. Web.
"Dance company excels at national competition." North County Times, 7/23/2006. Web.

[234] Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. New York: Verso, 2005. p. 13. Print.

[235] Laclau, 13, 2005.

[236] "2010 Official International Dance Challenge Regional Competition Rules." International Dance Challenge. International Dance Challenge, Web. 1 Dec 2009.
"2010 Showstopper Regional Rules and Regulations." Showstopper Online. 2010. Showstopper, Web. 11 Feb 2010.
"2010 Access Broadway Brochure." Access Broadway. Access Broadway, Web. 1 Dec 2009.
"Move Tour 2010 Rules & Regulations." Move Productions Online. Move, Web. 1 Dec 2009.

[237] Manning, Susan. *Modern Dance, Negro Dance*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. p 180.

[238] Manning, 193.

[239] The only genre that may fall outside this theorization is hip hop as its role is to signal a black body. However, despite the identity attached to it, I argue that both its role in popular culture as well as its "whitening" on the competition stage, it also signals a white identity, albeit more complex.

[240] "Top 12 Perform." *So You Think You Can Dance*. Fox: 8/7/2009. Television.

[241] "Top 4 Perform." *So You Think You Can Dance*. Fox:5/8/2009. Television

[242] debord media excess

[243] *Paris is Burning*. Dir. Jennie Livingston. Perf. Pepper LeBeija, Dorian Corey, Anji Xtravaganza, and Willi Ninja. Miramax Films, 1991. DVD.

[244] Johnson, E. Patrick Johnson. *Appropriating Blackness*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003. Print. p. 9. Print

[245] Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993. p. 125. Print.

[246] DeFrantz, Thomas. "The Black Beat Made Visible: Hip Hop Dance and Body Power." *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance*. Ed. André Lepecki. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 2004. p. 70. Print.

[247] Cherniavsky, 104, 2006.

[248] Cherniavsky, 102, 2006.

[249] Cherniavsky, 102, 2006.

[250] Cherniavsky, 103, 2006.

[251]Cherniavsky, 103, 2006.

[252] Cherniavsky, 107, 2006.

[253] James, Joy. *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender, and Race in US Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996. p, 25-6. Print.

[254] James, 25, 1996.

[255] James, 34, 1996.

[256] Rodriguez, Dylan. *Forced Passages Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime*. New York: Univ Of Minnesota, 2006. p. 71. Print.

[257] Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

[258] Vargas, Joao H. Costa. *Catching Hell In The City Of Angels Life And Meanings Of Blackness In South Central Los Angeles (Critical American Studies)*. New York: Univ Of Minnesota, 2006. Print.

[259] James, Joy. *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and Prison in a Penal Democracy*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. p. 9. Print.

[260] James, 9, 2007.

[261] DeFrantz, 76, 2004.

[262] James, 5, 2007.

[263] Rodriguez, 149, 2006.

[264] Da Silva, Denise Ferreira. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. xv-xvi. Print.

Conclusion: Moving On From Here

In the introduction to her influential text *Choreographing History*, Susan Foster advocates for the inclusion of the body in history and critical theory. She articulates her notion of *bodily writing* so as to clarify the ability of the body to enact rather than to be merely enacted upon. In her introduction Foster gives authority to the body when she writes,

> The sense of presence conveyed by a body in motion, the idiosyncrasies of a given physique, the smallest inclination of the head or gesture of the hand—all form part of a corporeal discourse whose power and intelligibility elude translation into words.[265]

Foster makes a very strong case for the work and need for dance studies in this statement as well as the imperative for scholarship that addresses bodily discourse. Throughout this project I have addressed the body with the very unidirectional focus that Foster intended to eradicate in 1995. This has been a conscious and strategic choice on my part in order to lay the groundwork for a much more complicate project that considers the role and evolution of competitive dance globally.

This project does not disagree with or counter Foster's call to alter academia in favor of a more well-rounded approach to research that includes the remnants and artifacts housed only by the body. In fact, it is Foster's work that made way for a project such as this to even be considered as a valid site of study. Regardless, this project has almost entirely dismissed Foster's course of action as the writing of bodies within this project has been marginalized and the structures of power have been placed in the foreground. This has been done not because the bodies of corporate competition have nothing to say or write but because, for this incarnation of this project, I wanted to bring

forth the structure of competition in order to demystify it. I also focused this project in order to align it within the archive of dance scholarship not by establishing it as identical to other sites of dance but by situating it within their historicity.

One of only a few texts that explores the competitive world of any dance form I hope it has laid the foundational work for future projects that investigate the corporeal discourse of bodies in competitive dance. Because of the limitations that result for sites of competition as well as unique social structures that are part of and are evident in competition, I believe it is necessary to adjust the reading, analysis and archiving of dance found in these structures rather than simply relying on those rubrics that have already been developed for concert and/or social dance.

This dissertation began to adjust these models by first considering the unique structure of corporate competitions. The first chapter of this project deconstructed the rules and structures of competition in order to understand those aspects which frame dance and the dancing body on the competition stage. While the rules, regulations and classifications shape the development and presentation of dance at competition, it is those structures that inspire and influence the practice of competition that contextualize this practice within larger cultural and social production.

The second chapter, which focused on the construction of the competition body, worked to highlight the various histories embedded in this body. Specifically, I considered the manipulations made to these forms, which makes the competition body a new dancing body unto itself. Drawing directly upon the work of Susan Foster, I

deconstructed the layers within the body most closely considering how it is trained by and for the structure of competition.

Having clearly defined the competition body in the previous chapter, the third considers the more immediate and tangible representations of the competition body with cultural and social stages by considering its role on the reality show *So You Think You Can Dance*. In particular, this chapter examined how the structure of the show draws upon constructions of race in the United States in order to impose racialized identities on to its dancing bodies. Primary consideration is given to the language and lexicon used on the show in order to establish the framework through which dancing bodies become viewed, read and understood by American audiences. In doing so, I hope to have elucidated current conceptualizations of the dancing body by generalized audiences.

The final chapter in this dissertation expands upon the ideas in the first chapter, which consider competition within the American experience, and expands this premise by including those theories of the body established in the middle two chapters. In this chapter I applied political theory in order to situate competition not only as an American practice but also as one that preserves the State by disciplining bodies according to the same hegemonic structures that have always been a part of the country's white nation building. My case study of gay hop at competition addresses the complex ways in which competition continues popular culture's appropriation of aesthetics and practices of marginalized or exotic bodies. It also describes how the young, white female body, because of its ability to remove subversion from gay hop movement, is used for this appropriation. In this discussion I have attempted to situate competition as a technology

of the State in order to position it within a larger understanding of American cultural production.

Many of the structures that write upon the bodies of competition have been addressed in this project. From political and social to popular culture and dance practice, those elements that construct both competition as well as the competition body have been explored in detail throughout this project. In focusing the project this way I have tried to illustrate a unique fact about corporate competition dance, the age of the dancers. Mostly under the age of 18 these dancers are students who, as a result of their place within in many power relationships existent in the lives of children in the United States, are constructed by power more than constructing it. It is rare for the age of the dancing body to be considered within scholarship on dance forms. However, I see this as an important element that adds greatly to the complexity of these dancers as moving bodies off the competition stage who face a distinctive set of experiences.[266] This, in part, helped guide the structure of this project as well as the apparent neglect of the bodily writing of competition bodies and other participants of competition.

I believe that the first step to creating more accurate understanding of competition dance within American systems as well the archive of dance and academic scholarship is to deconstruct the structures that develop it, particularly those that contextualize and write upon the dancing body. However, in choosing this tactic I am aware that not only have I effectively muted the competition body I have mute my own dancing body. Having spent the most formative years of my dance training in and around competitions I consider myself a competition body. Based on the material I have written and theorized

in this project I have situate myself as nothing more than a conduit of superior powers, a body whose *dressage* has left her as nothing more than passive vehicle.[267] As a result, it appears that I left myself as nothing more than a writing body, a tool used to archive history. As a scholarly and dancing body I know this is not an accurate or complete description of my moving body. This is where I believe this project leaves of and calls for a second part in the process of placing competitive dance within the cannon of dance scholarship. The next step is to address the ways in which the competition body contests or manipulates the structures that construct it and garners its own authority.

Recently I was briefly introduced to the world of competitive line dancing in Iceland. Based upon travel guides, with the only country bar in the nation, Skagaströnd is known for its love of country music. Also famous for being the home of the "Icelandic Cowboy", Hallbjorn Hjartarson, it is not surprising that line dancing is a past time in Skagaströnd. During a short visit to Skagaströnd, a town of approximately 500, on the northern coast I watched a rehearsal of seven women who were preparing for a national competition in Reykjavík. I was invited to attend this two-hour rehearsal by a friend of mine who, during a brief artist residency in the town, had joined the group. During this rehearsal I watched these women review and practice their group line dance; the music they had chosen sounded to be a mixture of techno and traditional Irish sounds and members of the group choreographed the steps they performed.

As they practiced in a small room in a former fishery turned artist studio it was obvious that these women were operating on their own terms. Certainly they were acting within certain aspects of popular culture, as they became a part of the unique

phenomenon of country western music and dance in Iceland. However, as they adapted music, which is not always and from what I heard rarely country music, and movement, rehearsing in a variety of clothing ranging from jeans and cowboy boots to sneakers and Adidas gym pants, they were creating an aesthetic and a dance practice of their own.

Similarly, within a particular set of limitations and structures provided by corporate competitions the competition body and the competition participant place their own fingerprint on the aesthetic of competition. This can be the result of the action of one individual. For example, I know of a teacher who choreographed a competition dance that made use of dancers tap dancing on a water-covered tarp. Although he is not the first or only person to use this tactic, his was the first such occurrence at this particular competition. The following year the company instated rule that forbid the use of liquids on the stage. Having not officially confirmed the correlation between these two incidents, my familiarity with the rules and regulations of the competition corporation at which this specific incident occurred tells me that it is most likely that one affected the other.

While the above example describes a moment in which a bodily writing resulted in the implementation of new limitations on all bodies, some interactions result in the creation of new capabilities for competition bodies. Ultimately, both the competition and the dance studio are businesses that rely on the return business of their clientele. Both organizations benefit from the disciplining of its customers to ensure the stability of the business and both organizations benefit from adapting to the needs and desires of their customers accordingly to ensure long-term fiscal relationships. Neither the dance studio

nor the dance competition would succeed if they strictly limited and disciplined bodies to accommodate a particular set of rules. As a result the expectations of the dancing body as consumer must be met by the dance studio and competition. The alterations made in response to these consumers become the imprint of these bodily writings on the practice of dance competitions.

Some of these imprints were indirectly addressed in this dissertation in respect to their relationship to popular culture. For example, hip hop and, more recently, krumping, are found as acceptable forms on the competition stage. The emergence of these original styles at this site of dance are not the result of dancers or choreographers being forcibly trained to perform these styles. But, rather, they are the result of choices made by a collective of bodies across the country, making them accepted across the industry of dance competitions. However, this discussion is much more complex than merely being the affect of certain bodily actions. This example is among many instances wherein the bodily writing of the competition participant is the result of its relationship with popular culture and the structures embedded within it. An exploration of this complex relationship begins to illustrate how the subjectivity of the competition body always exists within the structures through which competition exists. That is not to say that the competition body does not have its own subjectivity, but merely to complicate this dancing body's ability to affect the context in which it exists. While she pushes the boundaries of the dance forms that she utilizes, the structures that create her social and cultural conditions create constraints for her subjectivity.

Returning to the Icelandic competitive line dancers I am struck by how packaging dance in a competitive structure is available for a diverse range of dance styles and across many borders. Found in formal sites such as ballroom dancing and social settings like the hip-hop battle, competitive dance is not a new practice. Moreover, it is not unique to any one form or culture of dance. For example, Irish step dancing is a well-established competitive dance practice while Indian dance competitions are beginning to be established, even in the United States.[268] The ability of this particular structure of dance to permeate across many border and boundaries is interesting to consider within an archive of dance that most typically privileges and addresses dance as an artistic and/ or cultural production. That is not to say that dance as competition cannot or does not contain artistic and cultural representations. In fact, much of this project has been to explore the ways in which corporate competition reflects and produces culture in the United States. Rather, I advocate for the inclusion of this particular structure because of its ability to encapsulate many complex aspects of culture.

I also believe that in our current global world, the usage of competitive dance allows for a mobility of culture—American and other—that foregrounds dance in a global market. Whether it is the Barcelona Dance Awards, the organization of which is closely resembles American corporate competitions, including the use of multiple genres and similar definitions, or the Indian Dance Competition, which seeks to find the next "Indian Dance Idol" from its Maryland base, this structure of dance not only gives dancers and audiences easily accessible sites of performance but also allows dance to move from a metropolis to the suburban landscape. Because of its ability to define and

quantify dance, it can transmit or re-locate dance across many boundaries as it frames dance as an exportable cultural commodity. More significantly, the easily translatable experience of sport practice often engages a variety of participants. Even with the limitations placed on dance and dancers by competition the power of competition to bring dance to a greater number of people should not be underestimated. As more people become familiar with dance through competitive experiences the details and contexts of these sites will become all the more relevant for dance scholarship and cultural studies alike. Moreover, it will become increasingly more crucial that the participants of competitive dance forms begin to understand the contexts in which their bodies are constructed and on what social and cultural productions they write themselves.

Endnotes

[265] Foster, Susan Leigh. "Choreographing History" from *Choreographing History*. Indiana University Press, 1995. p 9

[266] Here I am thinking of many things that characterize the experience of school-aged children in the United States including recent shifts in educational experiences, such as heightened security and testing measures, access to various global mediated learning tools, as well as an increase in this demographics role as a consumer.

[267] Lefebvre, Henri. *Rhythmanalysis Space, Time and Everyday Life* (Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers). New York: Continuum International Group, 2004.

[268] In addition to competitions with India there are organizations in the United States, such as Indian Dance Competition, which offer regional events for multiple age categories specifically for Indian dance forms.

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