UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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# Choreographic Disruption:

# Theorizing Mixed-Race in American Postmodern Dance

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in Culture and Performance

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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This thesis explores a theoretical conceptualization of the term “mixed-race” in American postmodern dance, transforming the dominant understanding of “mixed-race” as an identity classification into an analytic framework. Relative to other artistic fields, there are few examples of dances by mixed-race-identified U.S.-based choreographers and limited scholarship on choreographic representations of mixed-race bodies, identities, or experiences. Given this apparent absence of mixed-race content, I propose an unmooring of “mixed-race dance” from mixed-race choreographers, dancers, or overt interests in mixed-race themes, to instead theorize mixed-race as an analytic for dance studies that can elucidate the construction, operation, and regulation of race within a dance overall. The mixed-race analytic highlights moments of what I call “racial disruption” — images of race that seem unexpected or even incompatible within

the dominant logics of race in postmodern dance — to interrogate the hegemonic models of spectatorship implicit in perceiving and deciphering race in dance.

The thesis of Miya Rose Nakatsuru Shaffer is approved.

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## Introduction: Where is Mixed-Race in Dance Studies?

In the Summer of 2018, I set out to discover the field of "mixed-race dance," a relatively unexplored critical territory at the intersection of dance scholarship and critical mixed-race studies.[1] I had familiarized myself with some of the existing writing on race, identity, representation, and the dancing body, reading Yutian Wong's discussion of Asian American dance in *Choreographing Asian America* (2010), Jane Desmond's edited volume *Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies* (1993), and Ann Cooper Albright's monograph *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance* (1997).[2] Inspired by these authors, I sought to extend some of their questions to contemporary American choreographers who identified as mixed-race: how did mixed-race choreographers express their identities in dance? What choreographic strategies might they use to perform mixed-race onstage? How were these choreographies of mixed-race experience in dialogue with dominant representations of mixed-race people in contemporary American popular culture?

After a couple of weeks of research, I did not have much to report. Although I conducted archival research and extensive Internet searching, I discovered that there were not, apparently, many dances about mixed-race identity; there were few self-identified mixed-race choreographers, working in the United States from the 1990s-present, who claimed their identifications publicly and who created dances about their experience of embodying multiple racial backgrounds.[3] When I conducted interviews with the few choreographers who did match

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[1] My study explored only English-language scholarship in the field of dance studies. My assessment that this is a "relatively unexplored" area of research concerns only English-language research; there are potentially other sources written in other languages about this topic but I do not have the skills to explore them.

[2] These are, of course, just some titles that explore the topic of dance and identity. I have listed them here to clarify part of the scholarly framework from which I embarked on my dance and mixed-race studies project.

[3] The five choreographers discussed in this paper (Sandra Chatterjee, Nana Dakin, Sara Esser, Shyamala Moorty, and Lionel Popkin) comprise the group of choreographers I discovered in my earlier project. They are also the

the criteria I was looking for (U.S.-based, a mixed-race background, dances about identity and ethnic heritage), I found that the majority were no longer interested in mixed-race themes. Although dances about mixed-race identity had been a concern of theirs at one point, the exploration of this theme was typically limited to just one dance in their larger choreographic repertoire.[4] Most of these choreographers had since abandoned their interest in exploring their mixed-race heritage for other inquiries.

Scholarship on "mixed-race dance" was similarly limited. There were very few articles written about choreographic expressions of mixed-race identity and, to my knowledge, no full-length studies of the subject.[5] In contrast to this, there was an abundance of scholarship on representations of mixed-race in other artistic mediums such as literature, theatre, and visual arts. Michele Elam's *The Souls of Mixed-Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millennium* (2011), provided an in-depth analysis of twenty-first century mixed-race representation in literature, from Aaron McGruder's comics series *The Boondocks* to Danzy Senna's novels. Cathy Irwin and Sean Metzger had explored the field of mixed-race theatre in analyzing theatrical productions about mixed-race identities by multiracial artists.[6] Laura Kina and Wei Ming Dariotis's *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed-Race Asian American Art* (2013) offered an extensive survey of visual art by contemporary multiracial Asian American artists. Dance, however, was

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choreographers with whom I conducted interviews. I discuss their work in this thesis largely due to the fact that I had access to them and to video recordings of their work.

[4] Typically, these dances would be choreographed during the artist's undergraduate degree or shortly thereafter. The connection between identitarian themes and early choreographic exploration is a topic for another paper.

[5] A notable article is Sandra Chatterjee and Shyamala Moorty's "BiDentities, Not Binaries" (*Mots Pluriel*, 2003). A discussion of their choreography follows in Chapter Two.

[6] Cathy Irwin and Sean Metzger, "Keeping Up Appearances: Ethnic Alien-Nation in Female Solo Performance," in *Mixing It Up: Multiracial Subjects,* ed. Sansan Kwan and Kenneth Speirs (University of Texas Press, 2004).

missing from all of these scholarly conversations: despite extensive treatment in other fields, a similar exploration of mixed-race in dance was nowhere to be found.

This interest in mixed-race themes in literary, theatrical, and visual arts scholarship was coupled with a parallel investment in American popular culture. Throughout my research, it became abundantly clear that images of mixed-race people were overwhelmingly present in twenty-first century popular films, television shows, advertisements, and digital media. I found several Instagram accounts dedicated to showcasing "mixed-race beauty," proudly displaying user-submitted photographs of multiracial people accompanied by lists of the model's different ethnicities. Mixed-race people and interracial couples appeared in countless television commercials, selling everything from car insurance to cell phone plans. Mixed-race seemed to be everywhere in U.S. society, hyper-visible in popular culture, the arts, and some areas of scholarship; where, then, was mixed-race in dance? Where was the same artistic and scholarly investment in exploring mixed-race identity in choreography or the mixed-race dancing body? How could mixed-race be overwhelmingly present in other aesthetic media yet seemingly absent from dance and dance studies?[7]

This thesis addresses this apparent absence. Rather than interpret the lack of scholarship about mixed-race and dance as a sign of its impossibility, this thesis asks, what might constitute "mixed-race dance" to begin with? Is it limited only to dances by mixed-race choreographers who explore their multiple racial backgrounds? Does it refer only to dances that explicitly represent mixed-race identity in a perceivable, legible way — and how is this determined? Did "mixed-race dance" even require the presence of mixed-race people (choreographers, dancers) or

[7] Although mixed-race in dance is an under-researched field, it is worth noting that there is existing scholarship on the topic of mixed-race performance. Tavia Nyong'o's *The Amalgamation Waltz* (2009) explores the topic of mixed-race performance from the era of American slavery to a present-day U.S. context. See Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

mixed-race themes? Given the apparent lack of scholarship, especially in comparison to that of other artistic fields, I question whether the same understanding of “mixed-race” and its representation in literature, theatre, and visual media is suitable for studies of dance. Does the notion of “mixed-race” in choreographic form differ from those of other aesthetic fields and, if so, might it require an alternative understanding of “mixed-race”?

In this thesis, I argue for a re-conceptualization of the term “mixed-race,” theorizing an alternative definition for application to dance studies. In contrast to understanding mixed-race through representations of multiracial people or thematic explorations of mixed-race identities (as the fields of literature, theatre, and visual art do), I aim to theorize mixed-race as an analytic: a position of perceiving from which analyses of dance can take shape. Like queer analysis, which, as David Halperin articulates, is an interpretive framework that is “at odds with the normal, the legitimate,” the mixed-race analytic offers of an analytical positionality that reads against the dominant ways through which race is constructed, operated, and regulated in my principal site of inquiry, American postmodern dance.[8] Rather than analyze the representations of mixed-race embodiment, identity, and life experience within a given dance, the analytic seeks to read the dance *as mixed-race*, not limited to the presence of mixed-race choreographers or explicit dedication to mixed-race themes.

In order to theorize mixed-race as an analytic, this thesis aims to unmoor the assumed equivalence of mixed-race from identity classifications and instead explore the historic symbolic function of mixed-race in the United States. Mixed-race is most frequently understood as a racial

[8] David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 62. My discussion of American postmodern dance (the working definition, the artists included in this field) will continue throughout the rest of this introduction. A detailed exploration of the definitions and histories of postmodern dance are beyond the scope of this thesis; I will, however, provide a brief summary of the “postmodern” and discuss some of its primary aesthetic codes.

identity: a way of expressing one's alignment with multiple racial categories and asserting that one's sense of self is deeply tied to the experience of embodying more than one race, as constructed within a given social system. The dominant understanding of "mixed-race identity" as an empowering self-definition developed during and after the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, which, as Natalie Masuoka states, promoted "the belief that racial minorities and other marginalized groups should have authority over the meanings attached to their identity".[9] This same historical moment also witnessed the legalization of interracial marriage: following *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), a U.S. Supreme Court decision that terminated all remaining anti-miscegenation laws, mixed-race gained visibility as a legal and, as a result of the media attention given to *Loving*, a highly publicized existence.[10]

These political changes initiated what Maria P.P. Root terms the "biracial baby boom" of the 1970s onwards, accompanied by a newfound societal investment in understanding mixed-race realities as a complex existence: how did this increasingly visible (and now legal) population develop and express their identities?[11] This question, central to dominant discourse about mixed-race people, was also at the heart of the multiracial activist movement, active between the 1980s and the early 2000s. Groups like the Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans (AMEA) insisted that identifying as "mixed-race," as opposed to choosing one race over another,

[9] Natalie Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 16.

[10] Loving v. Virginia was brought forth by Mildred Loving, an African American woman, and her white husband, Richard Loving. The couple had been sentenced to a year in prison for their marriage, which violated the state of Virginia's Racial Integrity Act of 1924 and its anti-miscegenation laws. They appealed, bringing the case before the United States Supreme Court, where it was decided that all remaining state laws banning interracial marriage would be terminated.

[11] Maria P.P Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America* (Sage Publications, 1992).

was essential to a mixed-race politics.[12] For Carlos Fernandez of the AMEA, the opportunity to identify as mixed-race also had to exist at the institutional level: the official U.S. Census, with its obligation to select only one race, did not acknowledge mixed-race identities and forced multiracial people to endure “the awkward, irrational, and for many of us, the offensive task of selecting a 'race' or 'ethnicity' which does not truly identify us”.[13] The 2000 Census, with its option to select multiple races, represented a growing acknowledgement of “mixed-race”: although not specifically a multiracial identification, this new option was, for Fernandez and others, an opportunity to assert a mixed-race sense of self.[14]

Amidst the growing institutional recognition of mixed-race identities, scholars in the field of critical mixed-race studies have emphasized identity recognition as the pinnacle of achievement for mixed-race politics, whereby the assertion of a complex multiracial identity in the public sphere undoes the damage of the history of stereotype in U.S. popular culture. From mixed-race characters in nineteenth-century novels to contemporary media advertisements featuring interracial families, popular culture in the United States has demonstrated a fascination with the mixed-race person yet has typically depicted mixed-race experience in reductive terms. Mixed-race people have been represented as tragic figures, hopelessly unable to reconcile their different racial backgrounds and assimilate into dominantly monoracial society. Mixed-race

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[12] Cynthia Nakashima and Maria P.P Root, “Voices From the Movement: Approaches to Multiraciality,” in *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* (Sage Publications, 1996).

[13] US Congress, House Subcommittee on Census, Statistics and Postal Personnel Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, *Hearings on the Review of Federal Measurement of Race and Ethnicity,* testimony by Carlos Fernandez, June 30, 1993, quoted in Masuoka 10.

[14] The 2015 Pew Research Center Report, “Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse, and Growing in Number” lists the following five racial categories as Census-recognized: white, black of African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. The development of these categories has been an ever-changing process. As will be discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, the current categorization of races differs dramatically from early versions of the Census, which recognized only “white,” “black,” and “other” as racial groups.

people have also been conceptualized as racial saviours, meant to rescue the nation from the violence of racial stratification and usher it into post-racial harmony. For many scholars, these stereotypes limit the mixed-race subject's ability to self-define; the opportunity to claim a complex mixed-race identity therefore represents a refusal and even dissolution of this stereotypical history.

This thesis does not intend to dispute the significance of identity formation to mixed-race people. It does not intend to reject the notion that "mixed-race" is an identity that many people align themselves with; I have often self-identified as a mixed-race person (of Japanese and Ashkenazi Jewish heritage) in the past. This thesis, however, asks how the concept of "mixed-race" might exist beyond an exclusive equivalence with identity: could "mixed-race" function like the queer analytic, for instance, and offer an interpretive framework that is not solely premised on deciphering representations of identity? To consider this question, I return to the history of mixed-race stereotype in U.S. popular culture: with a centuries-long legacy of representation across different media (literature, film, advertising), these stereotypes attest to the persistent concern with the mixed-race figure from dominant U.S. society. In my theorization of a mixed-race analytic, stereotypes elucidate the larger ideological function of the mixed-race concept; interpreting these images provides insight into how the idea of mixed-race is, in fact, a commentary of the societal theorizing of race in general.

The mixed-race analytic therefore argues for a renewed interest in studying the symbolic cultural power that mixed-race stereotypes possess: in contrast to the belief that enunciations of complex mixed-race identity can resolve the legacy of stereotype, this thesis insists that this problematic history cannot be separated out or erased. Rather, this history demonstrates that mixed-race is a powerfully disruptive force; in embodying multiple racial categories that have

traditionally been understood as distinct and discrete in a U.S. context, the mixed-race body disrupts the separation and categorization of racial groups that has been fundamental to the structuring of U.S. society. If, for example, society is organized with the "white" race at the top of the hierarchy and the "black" race at the bottom, then the mixed-race person who embodies both black and white racial groups disrupts this organization and related assumptions about racial essentialisms associated with each.

This thesis extrapolates on the power of mixed-race stereotypes to theorize mixed-race as an analytic of disruption, an interpretation that seeks surprising, unexpected, or even incompatible images of race within the context of postmodern dance. When applied to a dance, the mixed-race analytic identifies and highlights moments of what I call "racial disruption": combinations of different racial imagery (racialized bodies, costuming, constructions of race put forth in the accompanying program notes) that seem, within the world of American postmodern dance, different, inconsistent, or perhaps conflicting. Examples of these images could include different representations of the body (how is the body costumed? What movement aesthetics is the body performing — can these be traced to differently racialized or cultural styles?[15] What do the dancing bodies look like?); thematic concepts (do the program notes discuss race as a theme and, if so, in what terms? How does the choreographic action onstage reflect the thematic explanation in the program — or does it not?); or the *mise-en-scene* (does the music gesture to an image of race or culture? Do the props? The set designs?). Do these images individually depict a specific understanding of race and, when in combination with each other, disrupt the conventional imagining of race in postmodern dance?

[15] Throughout this thesis, I will not offer definitions of "race" and "culture" and will often, in fact, use these terms together. I am very interested in developing this thesis to include an interrogation of the difference between the "cross-cultural" and the "mixed-race"; for this project, however, I cannot adequately address the complex relationship of these concepts.

Recognizing racial disruption first requires, of course, an understanding of the dominant construction of race in American postmodern dance. Although definitions of postmodern dance are varied and often debated, this thesis engages with Sally Banes's understanding of the postmodern, as articulated in her book *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (1987).[16] For Banes, postmodern dance emerges as a "revolutionary" break from the American modern dance tradition: in the 1960s and 1970s, operating in New York and, initially, the performance venue of Judson Memorial Church, choreographers such as Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, and Meredith Monk experimented with movement aesthetics and philosophical principles that rejected the expressionistic and individualistic values of modern dance.[17] Postmodern dance instead embraced the formalist properties of movement, highlighted the "natural movement" of the body (walking, running) rather than virtuosic technique, and experimented with cross-disciplinary collaboration and improvisational choreographic strategies.[18]

The aesthetics that Banes identifies, however, have since been problematized for their apparent association with whiteness or, at the very least, a supposedly apolitical and non-racialized stance. As Maura Nguyen Donohue states, the experimental qualities of postmodern dance are dominantly understood as representative of a racially "unmarked (white) aesthetic,"

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[16] Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987). In mentioning the "varied" approaches to defining postmodern dance, I invoke the debate between Banes and Susan Manning about what the "postmodern" means. See Sally Banes and Susan Manning, "Terpsichore in Combat Boots," *The Drama Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1989).

[17] Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*, 9. A more thorough discussion of this history and the primary ideas of postmodern dance will follow in Chapter Three of this thesis.

[18] Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*, 17.

establishing a conceptualization of postmodern techniques as the domain of white artists.[19] Artists of color, by contrast, are often obligated to represent their race and racial identities through, as Donohue articulates in reference to specifically Asian American choreographers, stereotypical images such as "reference to foods of the homeland or "snippets of the mother tongue".[20] A binary construction of race is therefore implicitly created in postmodern dance: racially unmarked (white) choreography explores experimentation or, as Joan Acocella states, "ambiguity and analysis [and] transgression" whereas racialized choreography is associated with representations of identity and community and not, by extension, experimental aesthetics.[21]

Within this context, the mixed-race analytic ascertains and interrogates images of race that disrupt this dominant binary logic, not merely seeking out choreographers of color who employ a postmodern aesthetic but problematizing the assumed whiteness of experimental dance overall. The analytic severs the distinction between racially unmarked choreography and the monolithic understanding of dances as "about race" to ask, how is race known in this dance? What constructions of race are put forth? Are there multiple images of race that might nuance or qualify the understanding of this dance as generally racialized? In reading for racial disruption, the mixed-race analytic employs the methodological strategy of "overreading," as theorized by Randy Martin. "Overreading" emphasizes the connection between dance and context: the scholar closely analyzes the formal elements of a dance (the movement, the costuming, the bodies) yet

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[19] Maura Nguyen Donohue, "Ambivalent Selves: The Asian American Female Body in Contemporary American Dance," in *Contemporary Directions in Asian American Dance,* ed. Yutian Wong (University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), 191.

[20] Nguyen Donohue, "Ambivalent Selves: The Asian American Female Body in Contemporary American Dance," 192.

[21] Joan Acocella, "A History Lesson," *The New York Times*, February 21, 2012, www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/a-history-lesson.

derives their interpretation from the social-political conditions surrounding the dance itself.[22] Adapting this approach, a mixed-race analysis "overreads" for racialized images to elucidate the larger understanding of race within postmodern dance, thereby mirroring the historic symbolic function of mixed-race stereotype and its capacity to expose the logics of race construction in U.S. society.

The mixed-race analytic therefore re-inserts a concern with race into an aesthetic world typically conceived of as racially "unmarked" and thus enables a project of re-thinking dominant understandings of postmodern dance. It also fills a crucial gap in the field of dance studies by addressing current research on mixed-race in the space of choreography, facilitating a cross-disciplinary connection between analyses of dance, literature, theatre, and visual culture. Although dance has been notably absent from discussions of mixed-race aesthetic expression, representation of mixed-race people in visual form often centralize the mixed-race body: the embodiment of physical features that are legibly "between" those conventionally associated with different racial groups (a person with light brown skin and red hair, for instance) become the visual cues for recognizing mixed-race, thereby emphasizing the significance of the body to perceiving and interpreting what mixed-race is. This investment in imagining a mixed-race bodily reality further gestures to the absence of mixed-race in dance, given its status as a medium that directly mobilizes and displays the body.

Moreover, the mixed-race analytic questions the very basis of interpreting images of the mixed-race body by challenging the visual logics of reading race. If the visual optics of racial essentialism are given legitimacy through the recognizable representation of the "mixed" body,

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[22] Randy Martin, "Over-Reading the Promised Land," in *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture, and Power*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (Routledge, 1996), 178.

then the mixed-race analytic disrupts the stability and reliability of these visual cues. The analytic draws on the concept of "passing" — the action of a mixed-race or white-resembling person of color inhabiting or navigating the world as a white individual.[23] Passing demonstrates that the traditional markers of race (for example, hair, skin, patterns of physical comportment) are unreliable in demonstrating one's racial categorization; to borrow from Judith Butler's terms, the action of passing demonstrates that "what qualifies as a visible marking" of race must be contested.[24]

The mixed-race analytic expands this inquiry to dance, questioning the dominance of literal content-based or semiotically-oriented dance analysis. It suggests that, borrowing from Rebecca Schneider's terms, the "ocular hegemony" involved in engaging with race in dance performances must be similarly interrogated.[25] If dance is a medium that traditionally invites us to visually interact with the choreography, how do we know what race is when we *see* it in a dance? Can we rely on racially essentialist visual cues to understand a dance as being about race — or, should we understand these prompts as unreliable? In challenging the visual emphasis in reading dances, the analytic shifts interpretations of dance away from a strictly literalized content-based analysis (what can be blatantly seen and what it signifies) to explore what else might exist beyond such choreographic semiotics. If perceptions of race are not always visually reliable, how might this notion transform analyses of dance primarily rooted in visual perception and visual analysis?

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[23] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Routledge, 1993).

[24] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* 170.

[25] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Routledge, 2011).

This thesis will consider these issues over three chapters. Chapter One, “Defining Mixed-Race,” will preface the theorization of a mixed-race analytic by defining what the term “mixed-race” means in a U.S. context, from the late nineteenth-century to the present. I explore the current dominant definition of “mixed-race” as an identity in addition to considering stereotypical definitions of mixed-race historically through three images: the tragic mulatto, the war baby, and the face of the future. Understanding mixed-race first requires a discussion of race in the United States and thus the chapter begins with a brief survey of the dominant understandings of race, from its framings as a biological fact to a social construct. In outlining the primary theorizations of mixed-race throughout U.S. history, this chapter will show the conflicting discourses of mixed-race-as-complex-identity and mixed-race-as-stereotype, ultimately arguing that the dominant conceptualization of mixed-race-as-complex-identity neutralizes or even erases the political valence of stereotypical representation.

Chapter Two, “Theorizing Mixed-Race,” will introduce and develop the concept of mixed-race as an analytic for dance studies. Drawing from the history of mixed-race stereotype, this chapter will discuss the theorization of mixed-race as an analytic of disruption, applicable to analyses of postmodern dance in specific. Chapter Three, “Applying Mixed-Race,” will demonstrate how the mixed-race analytic operates in the examination of two dances: Lionel Popkin’s *Inflatable Trio* (2017) and Blondell Cummings’s *Chicken Soup* (1981). These two dances, which both utilize postmodern experimentation, domestic themes, and are both choreographed by artists of color, are racialized oppositely by critics: whereas Popkin’s dance is received as an expression of postmodern techniques of abstraction and an exploration of universal representations of family life, Cummings’s solo becomes an autobiographical portrait of her identity as a black woman.

In my application of the mixed-race analytic to these two dances, I argue that Popkin's dance is, in fact, a racialized choreographic work. Although his employment of domestic imagery is typically understood as an exploration of universal themes, this same domesticity can also be interpreted as a disruption to the dominant aesthetic codes for representing mixed-race people in popular culture. Mixed-race people are often depicted through images of families, children, and domestic spaces in mainstream visual media, such as advertising and journalism. These portrayals can be understood to symbolically express the principles of theorist Lee Edelman's concept of "reproductive futurism," whereby images of children and families ideologically promise a better political future.[26] Popkin's invocation of domestic imagery can be read within this context; his dance becomes implicated within the dominant visual imagining of mixed-race as opposed to an exclusive association with universality.

In the framework of a mixed-race analytic, Cummings's dance disrupts the conventional imagining of the black female body and its link with domesticity. Despite its dominant reading as an autobiographical performance of Cummings's racial and gender identities, *Chicken Soup* actually invokes multiple images of race, ethnicity, and culture: it does this through, in particular, a spoken word recording of a recipe from Lizzie Black Kander's *The Settlement Cookbook* (1901), an instructional manual for Eastern European Jewish women immigrating to the U.S. in the early twentieth-century. The inclusion of the recipe also provokes a choreographic disruption within the larger aesthetics of the dance itself yet these components are completely overlooked by the interpretation of Cummings's dance as exclusively pertaining to her own identity and experience. The different reception of race in these dances, then, offers opportunity for a mixed-

[26] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004).

race analysis to take shape and interrogate the biases implicit in reading Popkin's and Cummings's work.

### A Note on Terminology

This paper will use the term "mixed-race" to refer to people who align themselves with more than one broad racial category. The term "multiracial" will often be used to refer to mixed-race people, as I do consider these terms to be synonymous. Recent scholarship seems to demonstrate a preference for the term "multiracial" over "mixed-race," perhaps to emphasize that the distinction between "pure" and "mixed" races is a product of the socially-invented structures meant to maintain racial hierarchies. I will therefore typically use the term "multiracial" to refer specifically to people who identify with this descriptor and to the idea of "multiracial identities"; however, I will refer to the mixed-race analytic only as "mixed-race" throughout this thesis.

There are two primary reasons for this decision. First, in employing the term "mixed-race," I place my research in conversation with the field of critical mixed-race studies (which maintains the phrase "mixed-race" in their title). Although my discussion will not always be in agreement with those made in critical mixed-race studies, the foundational research, philosophies, and arguments that scholars of critical mixed-race study propose have made my thesis possible. Second, the term "mixed-race" will also be used to emphasize the activity inherent to the mixed-race analytic: as will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter Two, thinking of "mixed" as a verb (as opposed to an adjective, a descriptor of people as being mixed), imbues the analytic with a sense of action, making it a compatible framework for dance as a movement-based medium.

## Chapter 1. Defining Mixed-Race: A History of Stereotype

What do we mean when we say the term "mixed-race"? This chapter will explore the varied meanings of "mixed-race," from references to the biological offspring of different racial "types," to the current, dominant definition of mixed-race as a complex identity. Understanding "mixed-race," however, first requires a definition of what "race" is in a U.S. context and thus this chapter begins with a brief survey of the theorization of race from the nineteenth-century to the present. Race, previously considered a biological fact of human existence, is now widely understood to be a social construct and, as some scholars argue, a manifestation of individual agency as well as a basis for political coalition-building and collective mobilization. The dominant definition of "mixed-race" as an empowering identity takes shape in this changing understanding of race itself; no longer a matter of genetic hybridity alone, mixed-race becomes a term for representing the unique experience of identifying with multiple racial groups.

The understanding of "mixed-race" as an empowering, multifaceted identity also has a specific political function: to resist, challenge, and transform the history of mixed-race stereotype in U.S. popular culture. Scholars of critical mixed-race studies, such as Paul Spickard and Cynthia Nakashima, insist that self-expressions of mixed-race identity demonstrate the nuances of mixed-race experience beyond the reductive depiction that stereotypes offer. These stereotypes, common to American literature, visual art, and popular media such as advertising, have a long and vexed history in U.S. popular culture, which, scholars argue, has resulted in a damaging portrayal of mixed-race people at large. This chapter will explore three key stereotypes in particular: the "tragic mulatto," a nineteenth-century, mostly literary character; the "war baby," common to Yellow Peril films of the mid-twentieth century; and the "face of the future," a twenty-first century depiction of mixed-race seen frequently in advertising. These stereotypes

each offer a reductive representation of mixed-race experience that, scholars argue, can be corrected through individual or communal assertions of complex mixed-race identities.

This chapter raises questions about the oppositional relationship between mixed-race identity as a source of empowerment (often expressed through aesthetic self-expression) and mixed-race representation as stereotype (understood as a damaging and limiting discourse). In this chapter, I do not intend to contest the fact that challenging reductive stereotypes is important and necessary political work; however, I do suggest that the dominant understanding of complex identity as a corrective to stereotype diminishes the political significance that these stereotypes contain. The tragic mulatto, war baby, and face of the future each demonstrate a reductive imagining of mixed-race existence, but what can these images reveal about the role of mixed-race in dominant U.S. discourse? This chapter interrogates the notion that expressions of a self-determining, agential mixed-race identity can entirely overhaul or even negate the history of stereotype and, instead, emphasizes the potential scholarly value in stereotypes as objects of critical inquiry. What can be elucidated about the dominant understanding of race through analysis of mixed-race stereotype that might otherwise be obscured or even ignored when discussions of empowerment-through-racial identity are foregrounded?

This chapter will not, however, discuss dance or any choreographic stereotypes of mixed-race.[1] In the context of my inquiry, dance does not have the same history of mixed-race stereotypical representation as other aesthetic forms and, given this apparent lack of content, this chapter will focus only on the representation of mixed-race stereotypes and self-expression of

[1] At present, I have not found evidence of the same mixed-race stereotypes in American modern or postmodern dance. The context of this assessment, however, remains limited to a U.S-based modern and postmodern tradition only; the scope of this thesis does not include dance traditions from other parts of the world or from other dance genres and therefore cannot make the assessment that mixed-race stereotypes (even if understood in this thesis from a specifically American tradition of representation) do not exist elsewhere.

mixed-race identities in American literature, film, advertising, and visual art. The lack of attention to dance in this chapter raises important questions about the dominant definitions of mixed-race and its history of stereotype in U.S. popular culture. Might the definition of mixed-race as an identity be less applicable to a choreographic form? Are the three dominant mixed-race stereotypes less easily realized in dance?

This chapter therefore capitalizes on the lack of mixed-race content in American postmodern dance to interrogate the reasons for this absence; would a history of "mixed-race" in dance require a new or alternative definition of "mixed-race" to exist? Although the stereotypical images discussed in this chapter are not specifically choreographic, they nonetheless construct, or at least gesture to, an imagining of the mixed-race body and thus implicate an embodied reality of mixed-race existence that could be applicable to dance. Visual representations of multiracial people centralize the mixed-race body: to recognize a person as mixed-race, the body must be visibly and legibly "between" races, with a mixture of physical features typically assigned to different and multiple racial groups. A mixed-race corporeality is therefore implicitly (or explicitly) invoked in the history of mixed-race visual representation, which further underscores the unusual absence of mixed-race content in dance, as an embodied form. This chapter will not explore the idea of a mixed-race corporeality in full but will nonetheless invoke the visual imaginings of a mixed-race body to question the apparent lack of these bodies in dance.

**Defining Race: Biology, Constructivism, and "Identity Choice"**

Any investigation of "mixed-race" first necessitates some discussion of what race means in a U.S. context; how can we consider someone to be "mixed-race" without an understanding of what "unmixed race" is? Race, at first, seems to function as a static and ontological identity

category: individuals are born into a racial group (typically a singular group) and they cannot change their alignment with that particular category because race is deemed, on some level, a matter of genetics. Race can be read on the body (through skin color, hair color, and other physical features and expressions), and race can also be a primary mechanism through which the individual experiences the world. Scholar Paul Spickard summarizes this dominant understanding of race in the United States as follows:

> In most people's minds […] race is a fundamental organizing principle of human affairs. Everyone has a race, and apparently only one. The races are biologically and characterogically separate from one another, and they are at least potentially in conflict with one another. Race has something to do with blood (today we might say genes), and something to do with skin color, and something to do with the geographical origins of one's ancestors.[2]

In these statements, Spickard outlines a largely biologized understanding of race: race is created through human biology, resulting from some combination of genetic codes (linked to a particular geographic location), which ultimately produces discrete racial groups. This understanding, Spickard argues, emerged from nineteenth-century scientific research in taxonomy, which expanded an interest in classifying animal species to a parallel investment in categorizing human beings into "four or five utterly *distinct and pure races*, with physical features, gene pools […] that diverged entirely from one another".[3] Like animal groups, different racial types were assumed to be "separate species" that were completely racially "pure"; racial mixture technically did not exist within the histories of each racial group because, given that racial types were different species, cross-racial breeding was considered impossible.[4] The

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[2] Paul Spickard, "The Illogic of American Racial Categories," in *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P.P Root (Sage Publications, 1992), 13.

[3] Spickard, "The Illogic of American Racial Categories," 14.

[4] Spickard, "The Illogic of American Racial Categories," 14.

biological understanding therefore proposed that race was embedded into one's physiology, a pure essence of the body that could be employed to organize human beings into singular aggregates.

The pseudoscientific categorization of humans into racial "types" also functioned to create and affirm social hierarchies: by understanding race as biological essence, pseudoscientific racists could argue for the physical, intellectual, and moral superiority of some racial groups over others as a matter of biological fact. As Spickard asserts, the nineteenth-century Euro-American framework of race as biological type "arranged the peoples of the world hierarchically, with Caucasians at the top, Asians next, then Native Americans, and Africans at the bottom — in terms of both physical abilities and moral qualities".[5] The biological determinism of race was therefore a simultaneous social determinism, as the assumed ontological status of race explicitly proposed that one's place within a racial hierarchy was similarly unchangeable; intellectual, emotional, and moral attributes were considered racially-prescribed and were thus embedded into the subject's physical being much like skin color or eye shape.

The biological understanding of race, however, proved its inadequacies.[6] As scholar Naomi Zack states, the notion that "racial essences" are "inherited through the blood," or through genetics, has "never found empirical support".[7] Zack suggests that this lack of verifiable

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[5] Spickard, "The Illogic of American Racial Categories," 14.

[6] Although the belief that race is socially constructed is widely accepted, there are still purposes for biological understandings of race. The field of medicine, in particular, relies on the biological similarities between people of the same racial group (as constructed within U.S. society) to test for diseases and advocate for specific health needs. The organization Mixed Marrow, for example, recognizes that bone marrow matches often necessitate a donor from the same racial group. This organization advocates for mixed-race donors (and donors of color in general) who could give to a bone cancer patient of the same racial group or similar racial mix. The full extent of medical purposes of race, and their relationship to the scholarly framing of race as a social construct are beyond the scope of this thesis.

[7] Naomi Zack, "The American Mixed-Race: The United States 2000 Census and Related Issues," in *Mixing It Up: Multiracial Subjects*, ed. Sansan Kwan and Kenneth Speirs (University of Texas Press, 2004), 18.

scientific evidence demonstrates "that there is no known biological method by which racial identities could cause either specific physical traits or psychological or cultural traits".[8] Spickard argues that the contradictions within attempts to categorize humans elucidate the inherent failings of the biological understanding. He notes that the categories proposed by racial scientists are not constant and enduring (as a biological understanding would assume) but are instead just one example of racial organization. The history of the U.S. Census racial categories, Spickard offers, demonstrates the changing categorizations of race over time: although the 1870 Census included the categories of "White, Colored, Chinese, and Indian," the 1950 Census offered just three options ("White, Black, Other").[9] This shift in categorical schemas reveals that racial categorization was not solely a biological matter; the changing categories are responsive to specific social contexts, rather than representative of fixed biological types.

Zack and Spickard therefore argue that race can be understood as a social construct rather than a biological fact: each understanding of race is specific to its social context and it, according to Spickard, "reflects a different social, economic, and political reality" rather than a biological imagining of the human body.[10] These scholars maintain that the framing of race as socially constructed might still result in the use of race as a basis for a system of classification, yet this system might mirror its social context as opposed to proposing a deterministic racial essence. The U.S. Census demonstrates this idea: each selection of racial categories reflects a contextual organization of race, which changes according to the racial politics of a particular time and

[8] Zack, "The American Mixed-Race: The United States 2000 Census and Related Issues," 18.

[9] Spickard, "The Illogic of American Racial Categories," 18. See note 13 in the Introduction for an expansion of this discussion into contemporary organizations of race on the Census.

[10] Spickard, "The Illogic of American Racial Categories," 18.

geographical location. Scholar Angela Onwuachi-Willig elaborates on Spickard's Census discussion, asserting that "a person who could be categorized as black in the United States might be considered white in Brazil or colored in South Africa".[11] Race, as a social construct, loses its assumed association with biologized fixity: the organization of race is not an unchanging model but one that is responsive to and reflective of its contextual politics.

A constructivist understanding of race also emphasizes that the seemingly discrete boundaries between racial groups are, in fact, social inventions. As Spickard contends, the insistence on "discrete and pure" boundaries between racial types was "a necessary tool of dominance" meant to "separate the subordinate people as Other".[12] Zack argues that the distinctions between racial groups have no biological basis at all, as "contemporary biologists argue that there is greater diversity within so-called racial groups than between them".[13] The socially-constructed understanding of race also undermines the notion that each racial group is genetically pure: as scholar Natalie Masuoka summarizes, the belief in racial categories and racial purity is scientifically and historically impossible given that current "demographic simulations estimate that all human beings alive today likely share a common ancestor".[14] Understanding race as a social construct therefore offers the opportunity to re-conceptualize the biological basis for the separation of races to elucidate the larger investment in maintaining racial boundaries and hierarchies.

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[11] Angela Onwuachi-Willig, "Race and Racial Identity Are Social Constructs," *The New York Times*, September 6, 2016.

[12] Spickard, "The Illogic of American Racial Categories," 19.

[13] Zack, "The American Mixed-Race: The United States 2000 Census and Related Issues" 19.

[14] Natalie Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

The constructivist perspective espoused by Spickard, Zack, and others, does not, however entail a belief that race has no material effects. Race remains a fundamental organizing principle in U.S. society, as the continued collection of racial data on the U.S. Census makes clear. Masuoka expands the deeply entrenched reliance on racial classification beyond the Census, stating that "it is common for a person to be asked to report her racial backgrounds on daily forms ranging from healthcare to education to consumer preferences".[15] The notion that race is a social construct also does not ignore the fact that race-based discrimination and prejudice continue to exist; instances of anti-black police brutality and white supremacist terror attacks (often on minority spaces of worship, such as mosques, synagogues, and historically black churches) demonstrate the devastating material consequences of race-based violence.[16] Instances of institutional racial discrimination are similarly present. African American women earn $0.61 for every dollar earned by a white male counterpart.[17] African American men comprise 29% of California prisons, while only accounting for 6% of the state's male residents.[18] The understanding of race as a social construct does not disconnect it from this material reality but,

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[15] Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States*, 46.

[16] At the time of writing this thesis, there had recently been a mass shooting at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, a shooting at a synagogue in San Diego, USA, and an incident of police brutality involving the assault and arrest of an unarmed, non-violent fifteen-year-old African American boy in Miami, USA. Clearly, race and racism is still very much a lived reality. Black Lives Matter, an international activist group founded in 2013, is a direct response to race-based violence and systemic inequality: the organization, which formed after the acquittal of police officer George Zimmerman in the death of Trayvon Martin (2012), regularly stages protests that emphasize the gravity of anti-black police brutality and systemic racism.

[17] Courtney Connley, "Reminder: Today Isn't Equal Pay Day for All Women," *CNBC*, April 2nd, 2019. https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/10/today-isnt-equal-pay-day-for-black-latina-or-native-american-women.html

[18] Justin Goss and Joseph Hayes, "California's Changing Prison Population," *Public Policy Institute of California* (blog), accessed May 11, 2019, https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-changing-prison-population/. These two sociological statistics also invoke the gender politics of race; this topic, however, is beyond the scope of this thesis.

rather, emphasizes the structural, as opposed to essentialist or biological, basis of racist attitudes and actions at large.

In historicizing the transformation of race from a biological to a constructivist understanding, Masuoka also adds a third conceptualization of race that, she suggests, is dominant in twenty-first century American society. She argues that race can also be understood as a manifestation of "identity choice": race is "not simply a marker of one's demography but more appropriately a feature asserted by an individual".[19] She traces the concept of identity choice to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, noting that this political era promoted "the belief that racial minorities and other marginalized groups should have authority over the meanings attached to their identity".[20] Masuoka emphasizes that this investment in race as identity laid the foundation for the

> subtle but important shift […] from viewing race as a characteristic that is primarily the product of social assignment to one that reflects a certain sense of self (identification). As a result, race is increasingly seen as a marker of personal identity, which has cultivated the belief that individual agency and choice should determine how one is to be racially identified.[21]

Race-as-identity-choice contrasts with the biological understanding of race, whereby individuals are seemingly born into a single racial classification, and it elaborates on a constructivist perspective by suggesting that the subject's alignment with socially-constructed racial categories can be a product of their own choosing. In the framework of identity choice, race becomes a site of self-expression; claiming one's racial identity is a definition of self that is often separate from, as Masuoka terms, the immutable "assigned classification" of the body to a

[19] Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States*, 12.

[20] Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States*, 41.

[21] Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States*, 3

particular racial group.[22] Although Masuoka suggests that all racial identities can be considered manifestations of identity choice, multiracial identities specifically demonstrate this shift.[23] The inclusion of multiple racial identifications on the 2000 U.S. Census, for example, signified the visibility of race as an identity: in offering the opportunity to individually *choose* more than one race, the 2000 Census implicitly suggests that race can be understood as an expression of self-definition.

For Masuoka, the idea of being "multiracial" is an exercise of identity choice: to claim a multiracial identity is a choice to simultaneously align oneself with different races — as opposed to just one of an individual's multiple racial backgrounds — as the most accurate expression of selfhood. The possibility to manifest this racial identity choice, she argues, is only made possible through the transformation of race from biological to socially constructed concept. When understood as a social construct, race becomes further detached from its assumed association with biological fixity and can begin to function as a platform for identity expression rather than merely an "assigned classification".[24] Following from Masuoka's argument, we can conclude that "mixed-race," like race itself, is a socially-constructed category: it is not the biological mixture of different racial types that constitutes "mixed-race" but also the individual choice to align oneself with multiple socially-constructed racial categories. To be multiracial, in Masuoka's understanding, is not to reaffirm the artificial biological distinction between

[22] Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States*, 3.

[23] I use the term "multiracial" throughout most of my summary of Masuoka's argument to reflect her terminology. As I discuss in my Introduction, I understand "mixed-race" and "multiracial" to be synonymous yet I only discuss my analytic as "mixed-race" (rather than as a multiracial analytic).

[24] Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States*, 3.

supposedly "pure" versus "mixed" or multiply race-d bodies but, rather, is a constructed concept that exemplifies the transformation of race to an identity choice.

**Defining Mixed-Race: Tragic Mulattos, War Babies, Future Faces**

What, then, is "mixed-race"? For Masuoka and other scholars in the field of critical mixed-race studies, mixed-race is an identity but also an empowering and politically-charged act of self-definition. Spickard, for example, affirms Masuoka's claim that the civil rights movement was an origin point for productive discussions of mixed-race identity and argues that, in the decades following, mixed-race "individuals began to assert their right to choose their own identities — to claim belonging to more than one group, or to create new identities".[25] Scholar Cynthia Nakashima echoes Spickard and Masuoka's arguments when she defines mixed-race as a form of "self-expression".[26] Nakashima asserts that the act of identifying as mixed-race was essential to activist organizations like the Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans, which, in addition to lobbying for Census changes, stressed the importance of cultivating a mixed-race identity. These activists emphasized that identifying as mixed-race was a form of resistance to dominant American organizations of race and a powerful move to establish a sense of community for mixed-race people, often separate from dominant racial groups.[27]

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[25] Spickard, "The Illogic of American Racial Categories," 21.

[26] Cynthia Nakashima, "An Invisible Monster: The Creation and Denial of Mixed-Race People in America," in *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P.P Root (Sage Publications, 1992), 21.

[27] Cynthia Nakashima, "Voices From the Movement: Approaches to Multiraciality," in *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Sage Publications, 1996). Although Nakashima does not discuss this directly, her point raises questions as to whether or not there can be a "mixed-race community" in the same way that there are African American or Asian American communities, and, moreover, whether there can be a mixed-race community that can be separate from other racial groups. Could a mixed-race Asian American be a part of a mixed-race community but not an Asian American one?

For Spickard and Nakashima, self-definition as mixed-race should be a primary goal for mixed-race people and for critical discussions in mixed-race scholarship: they insist that, in addition to demonstrating the presence of mixed-race people within a dominantly monoracial society, identification as a complex, diverse mixed-race subject performs the important political work of challenging and overturning the stereotypical depictions of mixed-race in American popular culture. Mixed-race representation has a varied and contentious history in American cultural production, particularly within literature, film, and popular media such as advertising. Early depictions in nineteenth-century American novels and short stories constructed the dominant image of a mixed-race person as the figure of the "tragic mulatto," born of black and white parentage, but characterized by an inability to reconcile their multiple racial backgrounds.[28] The mulatto, trapped in a world that would not accept them as either black or white, was doomed to a life of melancholy, inner conflict, and, often, an untimely death.

Although a literary device, the tragic mulatto can also be understood as a response to its racial-political context. As Nakashima argues, following the disruption of the "Black/White boundary…with the dismantling of slavery," anti-miscegenation sentiment became increasingly commonplace and efforts to maintain the separation of racial groups manifested in popular culture.[29] Tragic mulatto figures embodied these attitudes: their psychological dysfunction warned against interracial relationships and thus supported negative perceptions of race-mixing. Pseudoscientific research in this period similarly espoused an understanding of race-mixing as undesirable and even damaging to society; according to Nakashima, racial scientists analyzed

[28] For additional analysis of the tragic mulatto in literature, see Elam (2011), Nakashima (2001)

[29] Cynthia Nakashima, "Servants of Culture: The Symbolic Role of Mixed-Race Asians in American Discourse"," in *The Sum of Our Parts: Mixed-Heritage Asian Americans*, ed. Cynthia Nakashima and Teresa Williams-León (Temple University Press, 2001), 37.

mixed-race populations through the framework of "hybrid degeneracy theory," a belief that "people of multiracial heritage are genetically inferior to both (or all) of their parent races".[30] Under hybrid degeneracy theory, mixed-race people *became* the tragic mulatto trope, thought to embody a similar melancholy. They also signified societal stagnation: hybrid degeneracy theory declared the mixed-race, or the *mulatto*, to be, like the *mule*, unable to reproduce. This notion both animalized the mixed-race body (more akin to a mule than to a human being) and implied that an increasingly mixed-race population would result in total human extinction.

The tragic mulatto, however, was not a mere melancholic figure but, rather, represented an important symbolic threat to the racialized status quo. As scholar Siobhan Somerville argues, the presence of the mulatto challenged any attempt to classify human beings by race: by embodying both black and white racial categories, the mulatto disrupted the organization of individuals into discrete races and thus refuted racialized social hierarchies. The death of the tragic mulatto represented an attempt to eliminate the mixed-race threat in the world of literature; the field of racial science responded similarly, intending to diminish the potential danger posed by mixed-race people by labelling them "disharmonious" in physical embodiment and social role. Eugenicist Charles States, for example, argued that "miscegenation commonly spells disharmony — disharmony of physical, mental, and temperamental qualities".[31] This condition also included a relationship with society: mixed-race people, like the tragic mulatto, were unable to thrive in the dominant world and were thus considered out-of-sync or in disharmony with their largely monoracial surroundings.

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[30] Nakashima, "An Invisible Monster: The Creation and Denial of Mixed-Race People in America," 165.

[31] Somerville, "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body," 31.

Cultural fascination with the mixed-race figure persisted beyond the era of slavery, taking new represented forms throughout the twentieth century. The stereotype of the "war baby" gained visibility in mid-twentieth century literature and film, following American involvement in wars in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam that had produced a population of mixed-race Asian-American children.[32] The "war baby" image reflected the new visibility of this group yet it limited representation of these children by situating them as the tragic offspring of an American GI and an Asian sex worker. The war baby lived a tumultuous existence: according to Laura Kina and Wei Ming Dariotis, war baby characters were consistently depicted as "at war with themselves," unable to reconcile their different racial backgrounds and find their place within monoracial society.[33] Like the tragic mulatto, the war baby also possessed a symbolic function, representing the invasive threat of the foreign Asian "Other" into the American national body.[34] The image therefore disrupted any understanding of "pure" American identity and represented an anxiety towards intimacy with the international Asian Other.[35]

Although other configurations of mixed-race exist in American popular culture (such as the Native American "half-breed" trope), this chapter focuses on the two images of the tragic mulatto and the war baby given their relative representational dominance. Tragic mulatto characters proliferated in nineteenth and early-twentieth century literature, appearing as central

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[32] Laura Kina and Wei Ming Dariotis, eds., *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art* (University of Washington Press, 2013).

[33] Kina and Dariotis, *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art*, 12.

[34] Kina and Dariotis, *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art*, 12.

[35] Several historical events contributed to this cultural anxiety. U.S. involvement in wars in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam spurred domestic anti-Asian sentiment. The Asian Exclusion Act, which placed heavy restrictions on Asian immigration to the United States (barring immigration entirely in 1924), was repealed in 1943. The influx of Asian immigrants to the U.S. in the mid-twentieth century exacerbated the Asian "threat" to white U.S. society.

figures in Kate Chopin's "Desirée's Baby" (1893), Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), Fannie Hurst's *Imitation of Life* (1933), and William Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932).[36] The war baby stereotype similarly flourished in literature and films associated with the Yellow Peril, the colloquial term identifying a national xenophobic fear towards Asian (and Asian American) peoples spurred by American involvement in wars in the Pacific. Popular films and theatrical productions such as Joshua Logan's *Sayonar*a (1957) or Schönberg and Boubil's *Miss Saigon* (1989) relied on the inclusion of a war baby character, or at least the suggested birth of one within the interracial love plot. The high visibility of these stereotypes in mass culture demonstrates the vast circulation of anti-mixed-race sentiment within dominant discourse; therefore, an analysis of these two stereotypes in specific helps to conceptualize how mixed-race was understood in the popular imaginary, at least before the "face of the future" emerged as a contesting trope.

The two stereotypes, moreover, also offer important parallel conceptualizations of mixed-race existence in their tragic characterization, symbolic threat to racial hierarchies, and their implication of gendered violence. The tragic mulatto was often born from the rape of an enslaved woman by her master, establishing that the character's existence was inherently a product of criminal, violent activity. The war baby's mother was also often a victim of rape by an American soldier and, if not, was still typically depicted as an Asian woman (most frequently a sex worker) submissive to the American military presence[37]. Both of these stereotypes posited a narrative of

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[36] Although a discussion of the tragic mulatto figure in these literary texts is beyond the scope of this thesis, there is considerable scholarship about these characters. Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* discusses Larsen's Passing in detail. Victoria Bryan's MA thesis, "Disrupted Constructions: Joe Christmas's Formation of Race and Sexuality in *Light in August* (University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, 2009) offers an in-depth reading of the "passing" narrative of Faulkner's mixed-race protagonist.

[37] In Kina and Dariotis's introduction to War Baby/Love Child, they cite Myung Mi Kim's poem, "A Rose for Sharon" as an exemplary characterization of the submissive Asian woman in the war baby narrative.

control over the feminized, racialized body by the masculine, white authority, representing an embodied image of, in theorist Edward Said's terms, the "Orientalizing" of minority groups.[38] Like orientalist discourse, which constructs "a relationship of power, of domination" through the colonization of the feminized Orient by the masculinized Occident, the gendered politics embedded in mixed-race stereotypes insist on the conquest of minority bodies.[39] The concept of mixed-race thus became associated with the violent subjugation of the minority body.[40]

Even when born of a consensual interracial relationship, the dominant understanding until the mid-twentieth century still associated mixed-race bodies with criminal, illicit behaviour. In addition to experiencing social ostracism and a "disharmonious" existence, characters like the tragic mulatto and the war baby were represented as unable to thrive in dominant society because they were, to some degree, criminalized subjects; they were born of legally forbidden interracial relationships, which were formally outlawed until the mid-twentieth century in the United States, and were therefore the products of technically criminal activity.[41] State laws banning interracial marriage remained in effect until the landmark Supreme Court decision *Loving v. Virginia*, in 1967. Mildred Loving, an African American woman, and her white husband, Richard, had been

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[38] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1994). In this book, Said discusses the patronizing construction of the "Orient" (the geographical area that might be referred to as the Middle East) by the West, or the Occident. He argues that the idea of "orientalism" is a cultural construct produced by European powers to assert dominance over the Middle East region and its people. A key component of this construction is gendered power: the Orient is typically depicted as feminized, penetrated by the colonial conquest of the West as masculinized symbol.

[39] Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

[40] It is, however, very important to recognize the differences between these two representations. They each emerge from a specific political context (slavery, international warfare) that cannot be ignored or underemphasized. They also do not overlap; there are few, if any, examples of a character who occupies both tragic mulatto and war baby roles. Despite the large number of children born of an Asian mother and an African American GI father, the war baby is almost exclusively represented as, in Kina and Dariotis's terms, the "Eurasian" of mixed European and Asian heritage.

[41] Joanne Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

sentenced to a year in prison for their marriage, which violated Virginia's anti-miscegenation-based Racial Integrity Act (1924). When the couple appealed their case to the U.S. Supreme Court, all remaining state laws banning interracial marriage were terminated.

In the aftermath of *Loving*, the association between mixed-race people and criminality dissolved and the lack of legal restrictions on interracial relationships initiated what Maria P.P. Root terms the "biracial baby boom" of the 1970s into the late-twentieth century.[42] Post-civil rights attitudes towards a growing (and now legal) mixed-race population were largely accepting and the dominant cultural consensus about mixed-race identities transformed from pejorative to generally positive. In this context, a new mixed-race stereotype emerged, which scholar Antonia Nakano Glenn refers to as "the "face of the future".[43] This stereotype proffered a vision of mixed-race people as the embodied representation of a future American society in which, as Nakashima states, "racial groups do not separate and segregate but marry and have babies".[44] The face of the future stereotype suggests that mixed-race individuals are the solutions to a historical racial tensions: by identifying with multiple racial categories, mixed-race people become an image of the ultimate "melting pot," promising a dissolution of discrete racial groups and, by extension, representing the potential for racial equity at large or even demonstrating the imminent irrelevance of race.

In contrast to the degenerate nature of earlier mixed-race stereotypes, the face of the future represents the utopian possibility for harmonious race relations and, ultimately, the end of

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[42] Maria P.P Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America* (Sage Publications, 1992).

[43] Antonia Nakano Glenn, "Racing and E-Racing the Stage: The Politics of Mixed-Race Performance" (Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2004).

[44] Nakashima, "Servants of Culture,"42

racism. This promise mirrors the driving philosophies of post-racialism, a theorization of racial politics that became increasingly prominent in the late-twentieth century. Post-racialism proposes that racism, and, in fact, race itself, are antiquated constructs: in a multicultural and globalized world, racial categories are no longer important and, by extension, racial hierarchies are similarly irrelevant.[45] Scholars suggest that the positive rhetoric surrounding former U.S. president Barack Obama is generally exemplary of post-racial sentiment; as Kathryn Gines notes, "Obama was often cast as the postracial candidate, the election described as the postracial election, and then after Obama's inauguration, this nation was declared a postracial America".[46] Obama, as the first African American president, signalled for some that the U.S. had become a country without racial categories, racial hierarchies, or racism.[47] If a historically racist nation elected a black president, then the U.S. must have become officially *post-race*.[48]

In addition to the postracial promises of his presidency, Obama might also be considered an image of the postracial "face of the future" himself: born of a white mother and black father, his mixed-race heritage was frequently invoked throughout his campaign as a symbol of the increasingly progressive racial politics and the oncoming, in Tavia Nyongo's terms,

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[45] Kathryn T. Gines, "A Critique of Postracialism: Conserving Race and Complicating Blackness Beyond the Black-White Binary," *DuBois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 11, no. 1 (2014), 76

[46] Gines, "A Critique of Postracialism," 75. Although Gines rightly addresses the positive and even idealistic rhetoric surrounding Obama's presidency, this is not to assume that there was not also a negative response and, in addition, not to suggest that all U.S. citizens were content with a "postracial" nation. The current rise in white supremacism, exacerbated (and even supported) by Donald Trump's presidency, attests to the conservative reactionary response to the potential of a "postracial" United States.

[47] The complexities of Obama's racial identification (as African American, rather than mixed-race) are beyond the scope of this thesis. The implicit persistence of mixed-race heritage in his public narrative, however, will be discussed in this chapter.

[48] Scholars in critical race and critical mixed-race studies (such as Gines, Elam, Nakashima, among others) have extensively critiqued postracialism and its proposal for the end of racism. This paper does not summarize or directly engage with those debates but it acknowledges the thorough scholarship on the problems of postracialism in the United States.

"cosmopolitan hybridity" that were soon to characterize the United States.[49] As Masuoka observes, although Obama "explicitly self-identifies as African American," he has often "described his mixed racial background in his campaign speeches" and his interracial family "was well publicized" during his 2008 campaign.[50] Obama's very existence can therefore signal the breakdown of traditional racial categories and their assumed separation in the U.S. context: his well-known multiracial heritage can be considered an adjacent symbol of the postracial politics that his presidency allegedly promised to bring about. The face of the future image, as exemplified by Obama, aligns mixed-race bodies with the anticipated progressive political values of a race-less society and thus promises an oncoming societal transformation to a politically liberal and racially harmonious future.

Obama is not the only embodiment of the face of the future stereotype; as scholars argue, examples of this image abound in twenty-first century media and popular culture. Masuoka notes the presence of mixed-race content in mainstream news outlets, discussing the example of a long-running *New York Times* series, "Race Remixed" (2011), which "primarily highlighted the unique challenges of young adults who identify as multiracial".[51] Michele Elam emphasizes the immense interest in mixed-race identities and experiences in the field of education, arguing that "the U.S. national education industry has emerged as one of the most powerful vehicles through which mixed-race is manufactured and marketed," evident in mixed-race literary anthologies and covers of textbooks featuring racially ambiguous faces.[52] Nakano Glenn identifies the emergence

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[49] Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 3.

[50] Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States*, 10.

[51] Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States*, 2.

[52] Michele Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millennium* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 27.

of the “face of the future” trope to a 1993 *Time Magazine* cover featuring a computer-generated image of a mixed-race woman, supplemented by the caption “The New Face of America”.[53] The frequency and visibility of these images, like those of the tragic mulatto and the war baby, attests to their dominance in American society; the face of the future is highly recognizable and, through this mainstream recognition, widely promotes the idea of a postracial future.

Despite its liberatory affect, the face of the future remains a problematic representation of mixed-race. By suggesting that the mere existence of mixed-race people will eliminate racial hierarchies and prejudices, the face of the future obscures the need for real social action and structural reforms. The stereotype is profoundly depoliticizing: it upholds mere images as sufficient answers to complex racial tensions rather than offering strategies to negotiate fraught racial politics. The face of the future implies that merely producing and seeing more mixed-race people, as existing in society and proliferating in cultural imagery, is *enough* to claim that the U.S. is headed towards a racially harmonious state; however, patterns of racial profiling, police brutality, and race-based violence continue to happen daily, suggesting that the mere presence of mixed-race people in society might not be sufficient to overcome racism after all.[54] The images therefore promote a collective belief in racial-social transformation yet simultaneously encourage political complacency.

Although the face of the future might seem an abrupt reversal of earlier mixed-race stereotypes, these images can be understood as continuous of each other. The contrast between the stereotypes is obvious: the face of the future does not represent mixed-race as a caution

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[53] Nakano Glenn, “Racing and E-Racing.” Here, Nakano Glenn refers to the image of a woman’s face created as a composite portrait of different races: a team at *Time* Magazine compiled multiple images of people of different racial backgrounds, fusing them together to create the image of a face that would represent the “new” America.

[54] As mentioned in previously in this chapter, contemporary U.S. society is marred with countless examples of race-based violence, such as anti-black police brutality and white supremacist terror attacks.

against interracial relationships but advocates for intermarriage to ensure a continued transformation of society. The images, however, are linked through their connection to a significant change in U.S. racial politics: the tragic mulatto gains visibility during and after the abolition of slavery; the war baby comes to prominence through U.S.-Asian political turmoil; and the face of the future responds to the post-civil rights visibility of interracial relationships. Although the face of the future indicates an acceptance of mixed-race people, the image is nonetheless in dialogue with persistent negative attitudes towards race mixing: despite the seeming pervasiveness of postracial rhetoric, attitudes towards an apparently ever-increasing mixed-race population were not unanimously supportive.

A 2013 Cheerios television commercial confirms this: the advertisement features an interracial couple (white mother, African American father) and their mixed-race child in their home. The light-skinned, curly-haired daughter, reading from the description on a cereal box, playfully asks her mother if Cheerios are "good for the heart." The camera then cuts away, returning to an image of the girl pouring the cereal onto her father's chest as he sleeps.[55] The commercial sparked immense backlash, inciting racist commentary, and was pulled from television channels only days later.[56] The face of the future, as represented by the mixed-race girl in the Cheerios advertisement, still implies a "claim of transformation" in society, similar to the

[55] Scott Stump, "Cheerios Ad with Mixed-Race Family Draws Racist Response," *USA Today*, June 3, 2013, www.today.com/news/cheerios-ad-mixed-race-family-draws-racist-responses- 6C10169988. Description of the commercial from video available via this news article.

[56] Scott Stump, "Cheerios Ad with Mixed-Race Family Draws Racist Response," *USA Today*, June 3, 2013, www.today.com/news/cheerios-ad-mixed-race-family-draws-racist-responses- 6C10169988. Several viewers were shocked and appalled at the image of the mixed-race family marketing something as ordinary and "All-American" as Cheerios cereal. Cheerios, despite initially pulling the advertisement from its air time, responding the following year by airing another commercial, featuring the same mixed-race family, during the U.S. Super Bowl, one of the most coveted advertising placements.

tragic mulatto or the war baby, and thus can also provoke both negative and positive reactions.[57] Further, the negative tragic mulatto and war baby tropes and the "face of the future," intended as a positive and celebratory corrective, are conjoined in their erasure of the complexities of mixed-race identity: each image is a one-dimensional representation that ignores the nuances of the lived multiracial experience.

Theorist Ann Anlin Cheng's discussion of American racial stereotyping provides a helpful framework to understand the contiguous relationship between the tragic mulatto, war baby, and face of the future. Cheng argues that seemingly positive images of racialized bodies in U.S. popular culture can often affirm elements of earlier negative depictions; she states, "there exists a vexingly fine line between *stereotyp*e as a negative, reductionist image and *type* as a positive category through which marginalized individuals or groups are refigured and recognized. The two terms exist more as points along a continuum than as mutually exclusive polarity".[58] Building on Cheng's argument, we can understand the face of the future not as an real reversal of the war baby or tragic mulatto but, rather, an extension of similar ideas about mixed-race people. Although the stereotype transforms from tragic to liberatory, positioning mixed-race people as racial saviours rather than social threats (albeit superficially), the stereotype nonetheless represents mixed-race bodies as curiosities, objects for public attention and scrutiny, and testaments to overall racial-social change in U.S. society.

Uniting these images, moreover, is an association with racial and cultural disruption: each stereotype responds to and elaborates on the notion that mixed-race disrupts the dominant racialized social order. The tragic mulatto represents a disruption to the black/white binary that

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[57] Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States*, 20.

[58] Anne Anlin Cheng, "Skin Deep: Josephine Baker and the Colonial Fetish," *Camera Obscura* 23, no. 3 (2008), 38.

characterized antebellum society (and, in many ways, American culture into the present); the image of the war baby represents a disruption to the assumed American superiority over the foreign Asian Other, invoking an intimacy between U.S. and Asian nations as opposed to an distant estrangement; and the face of the future becomes a figure of disruption to a racially-stratified United States, challenging the traditional categorizing of humans into racial groups. Although the implications of each disruption are different, the three stereotypes characterize mixed-race as an unsettling force to a racialized structuring of society. Given the long-term investment in understanding race as a system of classification in the U.S., supported by both biological and constructivist perspectives, the concept of mixed-race alters the very foundation of American societal organization.

**Asserting Identities Against Stereotype**

Building on Cheng's argument, which suggests that pejorative and positive depictions of racialized bodies are different facets of the same stereotypical representation, the three dominant tropes can be understood as multiple sides of a reductive imagining of mixed-race. For many scholars, articulations of complex individual and communal mixed-race identities become the corrective to this. Nakashima argues that the prevalence of these stereotypes causes immense difficulty "for people of mixed-race to accept and assert a multiracial identity"; therefore the act of establishing and claiming mixed-race as a multifaceted sense of self transforms the subject's experience from a diminished to empowering state.[59] Masuoka's notion of identity choice also affirms identity formation as a political act: her concept implies that enunciations of racial identity are an exercise of individual agency and thus expressing oneself as mixed-race is a

[59] Nakashima, "Invisible Monster," 177.

demonstration of that agency in action.[60] In proclaiming a mixed-race sense of self, multiracial people effectively *self-represent* and thus challenge stereotypical external depictions of their identities in popular culture.

Other scholars argue that mixed-race self-representation is best expressed in aesthetic forms such as visual arts, theatre, and literature. In their survey of twenty-first century mixed-race Asian American visual art, Kina and Dariotis state that visual imagery is a powerful platform for "self-identification" as it can transform "limiting stereotypes" through "first-person narratives".[61] SanSan Kwan and Kenneth Speirs observe that personal essays exploring mixed-race identity are an apt medium for creating "new multiracial subjectivities" that "overturn past and present discriminatory practices".[62] Similarly, Sean Metzger and Cathy Irwin note that mixed-race theatrical productions from the 1990s "foreground…aspects of identity" to "destabilize representations that produce and perpetuate dominant…positions of privilege".[63]. These scholarly conversations imply that mixed-race art, whether expressed in literature, visual art, or theatre, is deeply invested in questions of identity, especially given its potential to challenge and perhaps renew existing stereotypes.

Claiming a self-determined, complex mixed-race identity therefore becomes a force of political resistance to stereotypical imaginings and presenting a multifaceted experience of self transforms the one-dimensionality of dominant mixed-race codes. A complex identity, as

[60] Both Nakashima and Masuoka discuss mixed-race as an individual identity but also as the foundation from which to establish collective identity for political mobilizing: activist organizations like the Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans demonstrate the political community building that arises from a shared mixed-race identity. The question of whether "mixed-race" can be a communal identity in and of itself (as opposed to mixed African American, et cetera) remains up for debate.

[61] Kina and Dariotis, *War Baby/Love Child*, 6.

[62] Kwan and Speirs, *Mixing it Up: Multiracial Subjects*, 9.

[63] Irwin and Metzger, "Ethnic Alien-nation," 164.

understood by scholars of mixed-race studies, is oppositional to stereotype, whereby the formation and expression of a layered mixed-race representation can overturn or even erase the existing simplified definitions of what mixed-race is. Although identity should be acknowledged as an important part of mixed-race experience, are assertions of a mixed-race identity truly constitutive of transformative political action? Should a complex portrait of identity be understood as *the* corrective to damaging stereotype? What happens to the history of stereotypical representation when the idea of mixed-race identity as an empowering, agency-asserting concept is foregrounded?

When scholars promote the presentation of a developed, intricate multiracial identity as an essential tool for resisting mixed-race stereotypes, they implicitly minimize the political valence of these stereotypes. Discussions of identity as a corrective to stereotype seem to suggest that the increased visibility of mixed-race self-identification and self-representation will simply dissolve the reductive images altogether, as if an increase in mixed-race-identified people will cause stereotypes to simply become irrelevant. Although problematizing stereotypes is a necessary project, the overwhelming insistence on the definition of mixed-race as only an empowering identity can erase the very real history of mixed-race stereotyping as a cultural practice. If creating or claiming a complex identity is the central parameter for defining mixed-race, then the histories of disharmony, Otherness, gendered violence, colonialism and war, and varied attitudes towards interracial relationships are lost. The political thrust of the concept is therefore neutralized, as the historic intricacies of “mixed-race,” evident in its stereotypical representation, becomes secondary — or possibly irrelevant — to expressing identity.

Dance and choreographic representations of mixed-race are missing from all of these scholarly conversations. In the larger histories of mixed-race stereotype, dance is not considered

a medium for displaying images of the tragic mulatto, the war baby, the face of the future, or other reductive imaginings of mixed-race bodies (despite the fact that dance directly mobilizes and displays the body). In discussions of contemporary art by mixed-race artists, scholars never mention explorations of mixed-race identity in dance specifically. What, then, is the connection between dance and mixed-race; is there one at all? How might dance — a corporeal and traditionally non-verbal medium — transmit the same stereotypes or the same empowering statements of mixed-race identity as scholars analyze in other representational forms? Or does it claim to do something else? The lack of attention to mixed-race in dance scholarship, especially in comparison to analyses of other aesthetic forms, leaves several questions about the definition of "mixed-race" unanswered, and I address these conundrums in the ensuing chapter.

## Chapter 2. Theorizing Mixed-Race: An Analytic of Disruption

Given the apparent lack of scholarly interest in the intersection of "mixed-race" and dance studies, it might be possible to conclude that "mixed-race dance" is simply not a viable topic for scholarly research. Yet, what if the dominant definition of mixed-race as an identity does not apply to a dance studies context in the same way that it does to other aesthetic realms such as literature, theatre, or visual art? Are there other ways to define "mixed-race" that might make the topic of "mixed-race dance" a more viable site of scholarly inquiry, with additional materials or resources for analysis and an expanded theoretical understanding of what "mixed-race dance" might be? This chapter explores the possibility of theorizing mixed-race not as an identity (that can be expressed in verbal statements, Census boxes, or aesthetic representation) but as an analytic: a way of reading a dance as "mixed-race" -- and not in a way that scans a choreographic work for its content in terms of representations of mixed-race bodies, identities, or experiences. In this chapter, I will outline the basic principles of a mixed-race analytic: its objectives, its essential similarities and differences to queer analysis and critical race theory, and the possible interventions that the analytic might make into the dance studies field.

This chapter will also briefly consider the (few) existing examples of American dances that explore mixed-race identity as a theme. Although limited in number, there are, in fact, a few choreographers and performance artists, active between 2000-present, who have created work about their mixed-race identities and complex multiracial experiences.[1] There are not, however, many examples existing scholarly writing about these performances.[2] This chapter will therefore

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[1] Lionel Popkin, whose work represents one of the most extensive repertoires of dances about mixed-race identity, will not be included in this discussion as an in-depth analysis of his choreography will follow in Chapter Three.

[2] Sandra Chatterjee and Shyamala Moorty, "BiDentities, Not Binaries: Using Choreography and Writing to Investigate Bi-Cultural Experiences," *Mots Pluriels* 23 (March 2003). Sandra Chatterjee and Shyamala Moorty, whose dance, *Inner [Di]visions,* is discussed in this chapter, wrote an autoethnographic essay about their

discuss three dances by mixed-race artists to argue that reading for mixed-race identity exclusively has its limitations. Performance reviews of these dances highlight specific representational techniques considered to legibly depict "mixed-race identity," thereby implicitly cultivating a standardized way to perceive mixed-race in dance.[3] The mixed-race analytic proposed in this chapter resists and elaborates on this mode of viewership: rather than apply a standardized criteria for viewing mixed-race identity to dances, the mixed-race analytic looks for moments of what I call "racial disruption" to raise questions about the construction and categorization of race as depicted in U.S.-based dance.

**Theorizing Mixed-Race in Dance: The Critical Limitations of Identity**

Although very few dances about mixed-race exist in the context of my inquiry, there are three notable productions, staged between 2002-2016, that each explore mixed-race identities, issues, and experiences as central themes.[4] The most recent example is *Check All That Apply: A Declaration of Mixed-Race Existence* (*CATA*, 2016) by New York-based choreographer Sarah Esser and her independent collective, ERA Dance.[5] *CATA* explicitly asserts its investment in mixed-race content in its title — *A Declaration of Mixed-Race Experience* — and its interest in "declaring" mixed-race is a key feature of the performance. Esser and a cast of ten mixed-race-

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experiences as mixed-race Indian dancers performing in various contexts. *Inner [Di]visions*, however, is not discussed in this essay.

[3] The standardized "cues" for recognizing mixed-race in choreography might represent the creation of a canon or distinguishable body of work but, in my larger argument in this chapter, I suggest that this standardizing process might limit the representational possibilities for what qualifies as "mixed-race dance."

[4] I found these three productions from Internet searching and archival research at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, WOW Café Theatre, and UCLA. I have chosen to discuss these three dances because I was able to view them via video and/or interview the choreographers, who were discussed the choreographic process and final dance product with me.

[5] Sarah Esser, *Check All That Apply: A Declaration of Mixed-Race Existence*, video recording shared via email interview to me, 2016.

identified dancers employ speech in addition to embodied movement, effectively *declaring* themselves as mixed-race through the use of spoken language. The dance opens on a solo female performer standing in the center of the stage.[6] She is approached by another dancer, who begins to touch the standing performer's different body parts: elbows, then feet, then nose, then hair. The standing performer begins to speak as she is poked and prodded. Facing the audience, she recounts comments directed at her appearance, such as "Other than, 'Definitely Asian,' what are you?"[7]

This opening sequence highlights *CATA*'s primary representational vehicle: spoken language, which is heavily featured throughout the dance's hour-long duration. Esser includes several monologues similar to this opening speech, in which performers recount objectifying, intrusive, and stereotypical comments that they attribute to their experience of embodying multiple races. Other moments include sharing stories of feeling pressure to identify with one race over another, of recognizing one's difference as a mixed-race person to their largely monoracial families, and of coming to terms with identifying as multiracial in a racially-stratified U.S. society. Esser often includes gestural movement in tandem with the spoken language, creating what reviewer Mira Dayal terms "verbal-physical translation": when the dancers speak, they repeat the statement with an accompanying gesture.[8] For Dayal, speech is significant to understanding the exploration of mixed-race in *CATA*: her review details Esser's use of spoken language but gives little attention to the movement, revealing an assumption that speech is *the*

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[6] The following description comes from my viewing of Esser's CATA as a video recording, shared with me via email on May 25th, 2018.

[7] Sarah Esser, *Check All That Apply: A Declaration of Mixed-Race Existence*, video recording shared with me via email interview, 2016.

[8] Mira Dayal, "Multigrain Dreams: Check All That Apply by Era Dance Collective," *New York Art Quarterly*, August 15, 2016.

vehicle for representing mixed-race identity.[9] The choreography of the body, by contrast, is seemingly not afforded this capacity.

Speech is also central to Nana Dakin's 2004 dance-theatre production *Passing*, which offers another example of mixed-race identity in choreography and dance-based performance.[10] *Passing* explores mixed-race through a combination of spoken language, choreographies of daily gesture, and West African dance choreographed by Stefanie Perry.[11] Through a series of vignettes, Dakin represents her ensemble cast performing ordinary gestural movements (such as brushing teeth), dancing West African choreography, and reciting monologues about their individual mixed-race identities. In one scene, a performer provocatively questions the audience, "if I gave you a specific answer to my race or ethnicity, will you really and truly know who I am?" In another, a performer problematizes the relationship between her self-proclaimed identity and her perceived appearance, stating "people see me and say, 'Are you really Mexican? How?!'". Throughout the performance, Dakin separates the dance vignettes from those that are speech-oriented: there is little overlap of dance and spoken language and, unlike *CATA*, few instances of, in Dayal's words, "verbal-physical translation" of the mixed-race content.[12]

Like *CATA*, mixed-race identity in *Passing* is clearly transmitted through the employment of spoken language rather than the performance of choreography. Although the speech, written collaboratively by Dakin and the performers, explores the nuances of identifying as mixed-race,

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[9] Dayal, "Multigrain Dreams: Check All That Apply by Era Dance Collective."

[10] Nana Dakin, *Passing*, (2004).

[11] The following description of *Passing* comes from the script, score, and photographs of the performance, which Dakin shared with me via Google Drive on July 4th, 2018.

[12] The script of *Passing* notes when a sequence is a "dance sequence" or a speech-driven one; there are very few examples where both means of expression are indicated to be performed simultaneously

the movement vocabulary is limited to the idiom of Perry's West African choreography. Dakin acknowledges that her interest in including Perry's choreography came from a universalizing impulse: in contrast to the individualization and diversity of racial identities articulated in the script, the choreography was intended to unify the performer's bodies into a single, uniform aesthetic.[13] Moreover, Dakin's choice to engage with West African dance came from an interest in representing an egalitarian vision, a "We're All from Africa" perspective, to emphasize the *human* race as more important than racial groups and any divisions between them.[14] The function of dance in *Passing*, then, is to universalize; spoken language is the vehicle to individually assert identity and it is therefore the means through which mixed-race experience is represented.

In contrast to these two productions, the final example of mixed-race dance that I will discuss, Sandra Chatterjee and Shyamala Moorty's *Inner [Di]visions* (2002), does not engage speech to represent multiracial identity but instead explores mixed-race through the inclusion of fusion choreography.[15] Chatterjee and Moorty identify as "half-Indian dancers in Germany and the United States" respectively, and their collaborative production *Inner [Di]visions* features a solo by each artist about their mixed-race, multi-cultural backgrounds, expressed through a fusion of ballet, modern dance, and classical Indian dance forms.[16] Dance critic Victoria Looseleaf identifies this particular combination of dance styles in her review of *Inner*

[13] Nana Dakin, interview by Miya Shaffer, in-person, July 27, 2018.

[14] Nana Dakin, interview by Miya Shaffer, in-person, July 27, 2018.

[15] Shyamala Moorty and Sandra Chatterjee, "Inner [Di]Visions," (Performance, February 23, 2002), viewed via mini-disc video recording on September 8th, 2018. Shared by Moorty from her personal archives.

[16] Chatterjee and Moorty, "Bidentities, Not Binaries." Interestingly, both choreographers articulate their identity as "half-Indian" and initially state the nation of their upbringing (Germany, the U.S.) but not the specific ethnicities of their non-Indian background. Although a full discussion of this issue will not occur in this thesis, it is worth questioning whether the "half-Indian" side has more significance for Chatterjee and Moorty; is it because, as they both note in their essay, they "look Indian"? How do we know what "Indian" looks like?

*[Di]visions*, entitled "An Uneven Fusion of Ethnic with Traditional".[17] Looseleaf reads Moorty's solo "Balance of Being" as a combination of ballet and an unidentified Indian form; Moorty performs "traditional ballet moves with one side of her body and Indian dance with the other," which, Looseleaf argues, she represents sartorially by wearing one ballet shoe and one bare foot.[18] In Chatterjee's "Hapa," Looseleaf similarly notes the combination of a "fluid and graceful" ballet aesthetic and the "deep squats and delicate arm work," which she associates with classical Indian dance.[19]

Looseleaf's review demonstrates that the legibility of Chatterjee and Moorty's mixed-race heritage in the work relies on what she perceives as "fusion" dance: the solo dances become representative of the artists' "mixed-parentage" backgrounds when Looseleaf associates their choreography with different culturally-specific dance styles.[20] In "Balance of Being," Looseleaf implies that Moorty's performance of ballet represents the western and, as the title of the review states, the "traditional," which therefore must correspond to her half-European heritage.[21] Moorty's bare foot would therefore be a symbol of her half-Indian background but it also, in Looseleaf's reading, becomes a signifier of a racialized Otherness, a "foreign" location outside of the western ballet-driven dance world, and the "ethnic," positioned in opposition to the "traditional." The superficiality of these assumptions is confounded by Looseleaf's refusal to

[17] Victoria Looseleaf, "An Uneven Fusing of Ethnic with Traditional," *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 2002.

[18] Looseleaf, "An Uneven Fusing of Ethnic with Traditional."

[19] Looseleaf, "An Uneven Fusing of Ethnic with Traditional."

[20] Looseleaf, "An Uneven Fusing of Ethnic with Traditional."

[21] At no point in Looseleaf's review does she mention what specific ethnicity Moorty's European side is. In addition, Moorty's discussion of her own identity in "Bidentities, Not Binaries" makes no reference to her non-Indian ethnicity; she discusses her "European ancestors" and her "American" identity, but the invocation of race and ethnicity does not go further than that. Can we assume that Moorty's background is white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant because of the lack of attention to specificity? When race is not made specific, does it not often default to "white" (and a non-ethnic "white" at that?)

qualify her understanding of Indian dance. She merely remarks that Moorty performs "Indian dance" with one side of her body yet there is no attempt to clarify this statement or specify which Indian dance form Moorty is performing in her so-called "fusion" choreography.

In Chatterjee's own discussion of her larger choreographic repertoire, she implicitly resists the "fusion" categorization: in her co-authored essay with Moorty, "Bidenties, Not Binaries: Using Choreography and Writing to Investigate Bi-Cultural Experiences," Chatterjee chooses to align her choreography with the concept of "hapa" rather than the idea of "fusion" dance.[22] Although the essay presents an interesting and complex shift between "bi-cultural" and "mixed-race" that cannot be adequately addressed in the scope of this thesis, this attention to the term "hapa" nonetheless demonstrates Chatterjee's investment in mixed-race themes. Describing her experience at the University of Hawaii, Chatterjee emphasizes the significance of "hapa," an Indigenous Hawaiian term that "means half and refers to individuals of mixed ancestry," to her developing choreography.[23] For Chatterjee, the concept of hapa allowed "an approach to hybridity" that was not associated with impurity or degeneracy; rather, hapa celebrates mixture and thus became a central philosophy to her dance-making.[24] Although Chatterjee articulates hapa as a sense of "hybridity" as opposed to a specifically "mixed-race" principle, the

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[22] Sandra Chatterjee and Shyamala Moorty, "BiDentities, Not Binaries: Using Choreography and Writing to Investigate Bi-Cultural Experiences," *Mots Pluriels* 23 (March 2003).

[23] Hapa, or *hapa haole*, is an Indigenous Hawaiian term roughly translating to "half-foreigner." The term initially referred to people of mixed Indigenous Hawaiian and white European settler heritage; however, "hapa" has gained widespread traction and is now often applied to people of any mixed-race ancestry (although it is more commonly used by Asian American Pacific Islander groups). Although Chatterjee does not discuss the politics of "hapa" in her essay, the widespread use of the term is controversial: some scholars insist on the specificity of Indigenous Hawaiian ancestry to the term "hapa" and argue that any non-indigenous use is an extension of the linguistic colonialism of the Hawaiian language by mainland Americans.

[24] Chatterjee and Moorty, "Bidentities, Not Binaries: Using Choreography and Writing to Investigate Bi-Cultural Experiences."

association of hapa with mixed heritage affirms the alignment of her choreography with mixed-race themes and implicitly rejects "fusion" as a descriptor of her work.[25]

These three examples of mixed-race dance — Esser's *CATA*, Dakin's *Passing*, and Chatterjee and Moorty's *Inner [Di]visions* — elucidate the terms through which mixed-race identity is often represented and received in choreography and dance performance. Spoken language and "fusion" dance function as some of the primary choreographic choices employed to depict mixed-race as an identity, becoming aural, visual, and physical cues through which audiences are able to understand a dance as representative of mixed-race. These two representational techniques can be considered to possess the capacity for a direct expression of meaning; it is quite simple to perceive a mixed-race theme in a dance that explicitly states this interest in spoken monologues and it is similarly straightforward to interpret a body as "mixed" or culturally "hybrid" when it is, quite literally, performing two different dance styles at the same time.[26] Speech and fusion choreography therefore possess a relative ease in conveying a legible and concrete meaning, which can be employed to clearly represent mixed-race identity in a given dance.[27]

If these three examples are representative of the aesthetic strategies prevalent in recent U.S.-based dances about mixed-race identity, then we can consider the performance of speech

[25] In this thesis, I have chosen not to engage the term "hapa" in my theorization of a mixed-race analytic given its complex colonial associations in Indigenous Hawaiian history.

[26] My alignment of "mixed" (race) and culturally "hybrid" takes its cue from Chatterjee and Moorty's own approach to these terms; I hope to expand and nuance my distinction between them in a later version of this thesis, ultimately questioning when to read a dance as culturally multiple or racially multiple.

[27] The assumed legibility of "fusion" choreography can be questioned: who is making the assessment that a dance employs a combination of different, culturally-specific dance styles? What parts of the choreography lend themselves to apparently simple and legible readings of multiple cultures within one dance? These questions are invoked in this paper but are beyond the scope of my discussion.

and fusion choreography to be some of the dominant conventions for representing mixed-race themes in dance.[28] By extension, we might consider these conventions almost necessary for understanding a dance as thematically connected to mixed-race; viewers might rely on speech or the combination of apparently different dance forms to understand a dance as *about mixed-race*, implicitly ignoring or overlooking other ways of representing mixed-race that are, perhaps, less obvious or blatant.[29] If these three dances reflects trends in the small but still existent field of "mixed-race dance," is their prominence due to their relatively simple and legible expression of mixed-race identity? If there are other dances that explore mixed-race themes, is our ability to recognize them limited because we, as viewers, are accustomed to receiving these themes through conventional, specific, and literal representational mechanisms?

Although these three performances confirm that there are very limited examples of "mixed-race dance," analyzing the reception of these productions suggests that a possible reason for this limitation might be the specificity of the terms through which "mixed-race identity" is understood. If speech and fusion dance function as some of the dominant cues for depicting and receiving mixed-race identity, is their dominance implicitly affirming that representations of mixed-race in dance must be, to some degree, overt and legible to be understood as "mixed-race"? Two possible critical directions emerge from this conclusion: first, we might choose to look for other ways of deciphering mixed-race identity in dance, expanding the set of criteria beyond speech and fusion choreography to include costuming, props, visual media, written text, or music. Or, we might consider abandoning the project of looking for mixed-race *identity* in

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[28] This statement is addressed further and given nuance in Chapter Three of this paper, in my discussion of Lionel Popkin's dances. Popkin's dances both employ and reject these themes yet the topic of mixed-race identity remains central to reviews of his work.

[29] This is, of course, a generalization about how viewers individually perceive dances about mixed-race yet the persistent return to these representational choices (speech, fusion dance) suggests that there are conventions for depicting mixed-race identity, possibly intended for easy reception.

dance altogether; perhaps it is not only the codified imagining of mixed-race identity in dance that limits the possible resources for this field but the project of reading for identity in particular.

If dance demonstrates a dearth of mixed-race content in comparison to other aesthetic forms, it might be worth considering that the idea of "mixed-race" must be approached differently in dance studies than in visual arts, literature, and film. If representations of mixed-race identity seem to have a limited existence in choreographic form, how else might we conceptualize "mixed-race" beyond its apparent association with identitarian concerns (and their aesthetic representation)? Considering a re-definition of mixed-race therefore raises questions about the dominant strategy of equating mixed-race with an identity category in scholarship, U.S. society, and the arts at large. Although scholars actively emphasize mixed-race as form of empowering, complex identification or, in Masuoka's terms, an "identity choice," is mixed-race limited to this alone? Is the ability to claim mixed-race identity — as an agency-giving, self-defining assertion — the pinnacle of achievement for mixed-race politics, meant to resolve the histories of mixed-race stereotype?

The apparent lack of mixed-race content in dance therefore further affirms the limitations of defining mixed-race as an identity exclusively. When mixed-race is only equivalent to an identity, it becomes a near-impossible site of inquiry in dance studies; from a pragmatic perspective, there are simply not enough analytical objects (dances about mixed-race identity, choreographers who emphasize their multiracial backgrounds in their work) to allow critical discussions of mixed-race dance to develop.[30] Moreover, if the larger equivalence of mixed-race with identity in contemporary scholarship neutralizes the historical politics embedded in mixed-

[30] The intention of my mixed-race analytic is not to increase the number of dances that would qualify as "mixed-race," and thus create a larger field of "mixed-race dance" but to instead raise questions about the ideological power of the mixed-race concept, beyond its identitarian concerns, However, I would like to continue to acknowledge that some of the impetus behind theorizing the mixed-race analytic is the absence of mixed-race content in dance.

race stereotype (from the tragic mulatto to the face of the future), how might dance interact with this dynamic? Would the few dances that explore themes of mixed-race identity also contribute to the depoliticizing of "mixed-race" as a concept? If mixed-race in dance is only understood as an empowering representation of identity and not, for example, as a disruptive force within the dominant structuring of race in U.S. society, could there be a political reading of mixed-race dance beyond enunciations of self-definition?

**Theorizing Mixed-Race: An Analytic of Disruption**

Rather than continue to insist on the centrality of identity to definitions of mixed-race, we might question whether the concept of "mixed-race" can, in fact, be understood as an identity at all. The agency to self-define is inarguably important to individual experience, regardless of the category of identity (race, gender, sexuality, nation, et cetera). The capacity to identify as mixed-race is significant to mixed-race people, as it establishes a sense of feeling seen, recognized, and accepted within dominantly monoracial U.S. society. Yet, is "mixed-race" truly an identity or is it instead an philosophical concept that relies on the traditional structuring of racial types into "pure" categories? All racial groups are, after all, biologically "mixed": the notion of racial purity is a myth intended to erect and maintain social hierarchies, therefore the idea of mixed-race" is a construct that relies on this invented theorization of distinct racial groups.[31] If "mixed-race" is an identity, does it implicitly reify mixture as something unique and different from the standard racial categories?

Moreover, it is worth questioning whether "mixed-race" can even exist as a unique identity in and of itself: is it possible to claim identity as just "mixed-race," rather than, for

[31] Paul Spickard, "The Illogic of American Racial Categories," in *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P.P Root (Sage Publications, 1992).

example, as a person of mixed white European and African American heritage? If this is the case, the important distinctions between different racial combinations can be overlooked or entirely erased; a person with a mixed white European and African American background, for example, would endure a different reality of racial discrimination, prejudice, and even the experience of embodying multiple races than someone of mixed Asian and white European heritage, yet both could be referred to as only "mixed-race" if the belief in a specifically mixed-race identity holds. The concept of mixed-race identity, then, is profoundly generalizing: if we wish to acknowledge the significant differences that various mixed-races invoke, then the idea of a homogeneous "mixed-race identity" becomes a near impossibility.

We might, then, consider that the term "mixed-race" does not only refer to actual "persons" (i.e. people who align themselves with "mixed-race identity" in some capacity) but also to a perspective that challenges the ideologies of race, its regulation, and its operation in U.S. society. Drawing on the symbolic function of the three mixed-race stereotypes discussed in Chapter One, we can conclude that mixed-race is a concept that disrupts and contests dominant organizations of race: the mulatto defies a hierarchy based on a binary of black and white, the war baby disturbs the absolute distinction proposed between American national identity and the foreign Other, and the face of the future represents an overhaul of current racial inequities and the racially-stratified organizing of U.S. society. Mixed-race is therefore a disruptive force to conventional societal structure, a source of "disharmony" to standards of racial classification and hierarchy.[32] "Mixed-race," the literal mixing of races, upends any belief in the assumed discreteness of racial groups and thus undermines the very foundation of a racially-stratified society.

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[32] Siobhan Somerville, "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body," 31.

The concept of "mixed-race" can therefore be unmoored from an exclusive equation with identity and mixed-race people, which allows for a re-configuration of the seemingly contradictory relationship between identity and mixed-race stereotype. Rather than insist that an increase in the frequency and visibility of complex mixed-race identities will resolve the problematic history of stereotype, we might consider that this history cannot be separated from the term "mixed-race" overall; understanding mixed-race necessitates thinking about its stereotypical forms and its history of societal disruption. The concept of mixed-race can therefore be considered to inherently possess the capacity of disruption, as the images of the tragic mulatto, war baby, and face of the future represent. Instead of treating these stereotypes as mere reductive imaginings of mixed-race identity and experience, we might instead highlight the potential for social disturbance embedded within each representation as something productive, critical, and capable of initiating larger discussions about race in U.S. society.

This genealogy of stereotype must therefore be emphasized, as it contains the political possibilities of mixed-race as a disruption to mainstream racial structure. If we conceptualize mixed-race as a force of ideological disruption as opposed to a self-definition in purely identitarian terms, then we can theorize it as a stand-alone political concept, connected to but not exclusively equivalent with identity. This theorization would foreground the history of disruption and highlight the capacity of mixed-race to elucidate the larger social understanding of racial groups, their boundaries, and their visual embodiment. Mixed-race, in its theoretical form, can become an analytic: an interpretive framework, divorced from the bodies of mixed-race people themselves, that offers a point of entry into discussions of racial structure and, specifically, race in dance. Expanding mixed-race into an analytic opens the possibilities for analyzing mixed-race

dance, no longer tied to the legible limited thematic content of mixed-race identity, embodiment, or experience.

### Theorizing a Mixed-Race Analytic: Overreading Racial Disruption

A mixed-race analytic offers a position of looking: a way of watching, engaging with, and interpreting a dance to interrogate its dominant constructions of race, beyond representations of racial identity. The positionality offered by the mixed-race analytic can be considered parallel to queer analysis, for instance, which similarly presents an interpretative framework not limited to analyzing queer identity politics. Scholar David Halperin examines how the term "queer," although often associated with LGBT-identified people, has a larger philosophical and analytical resonance:

> Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence…demarcate[ing] not a positivity but a position vis-à-vis the normative…[describing] a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance.[33]

For Halperin, "queer" can refer to an identity but it is not limited to this: queer is also a position, a political and theoretical stance in contrast to dominant modes of understanding and engaging with society. Queer analysis, then, proposes the opportunity to take up the queer position when interpreting a cultural text; it offers the possibility of conducting analytical work from a non-dominant or non-normative perspective, regardless of the analyst's identity as homosexual, bisexual, transgender or otherwise. The analytic is available for anyone who wishes to frame their interpretation of a cultural object through the driving philosophies of a queer (non-normative, non-dominant) perspective.

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[33] David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

Similarly, queer analysis does not necessitate the presence of literal queer-identified content in the material to be explored. If we conduct a queer analysis of a dance, our interpretation does not require a choreographer who explicitly self-identifies as queer nor content that explores queer identity, same-sex desire, or non-normative representations of gender. In Clare Croft's application of queer analysis to dance studies, she suggests that dances that "teach us new ways of looking, [that] help us see beyond the ruts in which we ride" can be considered "queer dances," regardless of whether the dances contain references to LGBTQ identity.[34] Like Halperin, Croft argues that the term queer connotes "a critique of normativity" and "an embrace of heterogeneity," which, she suggests, is well-suited to analyses of dance.[35] Both dance and queerness "hold space for multiple meanings" and often value "unstable, always in motion" interpretations; the queer analytic can highlight the instability that, Croft argues, is essential to the values of postmodern dance.[36] For Croft, the concept of "queer dance" refers to dances that highlight the instability of meaning and, like theorizations of queer analysis, aim to initiate different, non-dominant modes of viewership.

Building from Halperin and Croft's discussion, a mixed-race analysis similarly does not require the thematic content of mixed-race experience, narratives of multi-cultural upbringings, or even the presence of mixed-race people to initiate a reading of a dance *as mixed-race*. A "mixed-race dance" does not need to be choreographed by someone who self-identifies with the term mixed-race and does not need to feature mixed-race-identified dancers or some sort of visual or aural representation of mixed-race bodies (although it can include all of the above). A

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[34] Clare Croft, *Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 16.

[35] Croft, *Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings*, 8.

[36] Croft, *Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings*, 13.

mixed-race analytic substitute the words "person" or "identity" typically affixed to the end of "mixed-race" with the term "dance" itself; the analytic asks, what *is* a mixed-race dance, as opposed to how is this dance *representing* mixed-race identity? Like the non-normative positionality offered by the queer analytic, the mixed-race analytic creates an interpretive position from which to question what the dominant choreographic logics of race are in a dance and what this specific organization elucidates about the larger construction of race in postmodern choreography overall.

This investment in challenging dominant constructions of race also aligns the mixed-race analytic with critical race theory, which, according to Kimberle Crenshaw et al., is concerned with "the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, American society as a whole".[37] Although now a cross-disciplinary theoretical matrix, critical race theory was originally developed by American legal scholars to satisfy two objectives: first, to enact an attempt to understand "how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America" and, second, to explore "a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to change it".[38] The mixed-race analytic can be considered a corollary to critical race theory, given its parallel concern with the construction of "race and racial power".[39] It does, however, specify a dance studies context, thereby adapting critical race theory's concern with the

[37] Kimberle Crenshaw et al., eds., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (The New Press, 1995), xiii.

[38] Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, xiii.

[39] Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, xiii.

"vexed bond between law and racial power" to discuss the relationship between racial images, racial hierarchies, and postmodern dance.[40]

Although conceptually similar, a mixed-race analysis is distinct from critical race theory, due to its primary investment in the idea of disruption. Given that mixed-race has historically been an overhauling, rupturing force to standard theorizations and implementations of race construction in the United States, the mixed-race analytic centralizes disruption as its interpretative focus. Within the framework of a mixed-race analysis, disruption takes the specific form of racial disruption or, in other words, an aesthetic breach caused by the combination of images of race in a dance that, within the dominant logics of American race construction and representation, might be unexpected or even incompatible. Examples of these images could include different representations of the body (through costume, movement aesthetics, physical features), thematic concepts (explored within the dance or directly articulated in the accompanying program notes), the *mise-en-scene* (music, props, set design), among others. Do these images individually depict a specific representation of race and, when in combination with each other, disrupt the conventional imagining of race within a specific choreographic idiom?

The mixed-race analytic highlights these moments and asks, why? Why does a particular combination of racialized body with dance genre and elements of *mise-en-scene* produce the sense that multiple and perhaps incompatible images of race are performed? Is there a particular sense of rupture between the discussion of race in the choreographer's program notes and the bodies of the dancers performing onstage; if so, what are the biases implicit in recognizing this and what might they be attributed to? In seeking and reading for disruption, the mixed-race

[40] This is not to suggest that the dance studies field has not engaged with critical race studies; the intersection of dance and critical race theory has a long scholarly history and I am far from the first to explore it. This paper, however, draws on the original theoretical matrix of critical race theory put forth by Crenshaw and others to distinguish a mixed-race analytic from it — not to claim that there is no history of critical race scholarship on dance.

analytic aims to expose how race is operating within the dance in question: building, again, on the symbolic function of mixed-race stereotype, the analytic emphasizes how an interference with the conventional structuring of race illuminates the larger racial construction within a specific dance. What does the moment of disruption tell us about how race is typically received in a particular dance genre, dance aesthetic, or dance history?

Considering these questions through the mixed-race analytic requires the specific methodological approach of "overreading," as theorized by dance scholar Randy Martin.[41] Martin's method approaches a dance with "the assumption that the subtext displayed in dancing accounts for more than that particular aesthetic activity" and therefore aims to "read through and past the dance to the point where it meets its own exterior or context".[42] Overreading is the method that emphasizes this connection between dance and context: the dance scholar closely analyzes the formal elements of a dance (the movement, the costuming, the bodies) yet derives the interpretation from the social-political conditions surrounding the dance itself.[43] Adapting this approach, a mixed-race analysis "overreads" parts of a dance for its possible representations of race. Although these formal components might not each literally reference race in the same way that another aesthetic media (novels, films, visual art examples) might, a mixed-race analysis will, in Martin's terms, "read through and past," enacting an overreading of the dance to discover how larger racial ideologies might be implicated within the choreographic form.

**A Mixed-Race Intervention into Dance and Dance Studies**

[41] Randy Martin, "Over-reading the Promised Land," in *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture, and Power*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (Routledge, 1996).

[42] Martin, "Over-Reading the Promised Land," 178.

[43] Martin, "Over-Reading the Promised Land," 178.

Theorizing a mixed-race analytic expands the possibilities of "mixed-race dance": it removes the limiting association of mixed-race with identity to suggest that dances can be "mixed-race" regardless of a commitment to identity-based concerns. Yet, why interpret a dance through a mixed-race analytic, as opposed to another theoretical matrix like critical race theory? Following from Croft, who argues that queer analysis is well-suited to dance studies, a mixed-race analytic is similarly fitting to many of the fundamental qualities of dance and, specifically, postmodern choreography. The idea of disruption can also be considered central to postmodern dance; as Sally Banes argues, the postmodern "avant-gardist" choreographers expressed "ideas about dancing [that] departed drastically from the mainstream," centralizing the disordering of conventionality as part of their practice.[44] Postmodern dance, for Banes, upset standard classification of artistic disciplines, creating "less definable categories" through cross-disciplinary collaboration.[45] If postmodern choreography already dislocates dominant conceptualizations of dance, then an analysis of racial disruption becomes a fitting addition to this overturning of convention.

In addition to its postmodern and, in Banes's terms, "avant-gardist" sensibility, the mixed-race analytic is an action-oriented framework, well-suited to capturing the activity of dance. The word "mixed" in the analytic should be understood as an action, as opposed to an adjective: rather than describe a person as "mixed," citing a stable or continuous state based on a past event of amalgamation, the term can instead be a verb that emphasizes the active mixing of the different parts, combining and re-combining throughout the duration of a dance. To articulate this idea of mixing, I engage with C. Riley Snorton's definitions of "trans" and "black" from

[44] Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 8.

[45] Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*, 10.

*Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017).[46] To define "trans," Snorton borrows from Claire Colebrook's understanding of the term not only in connection with "transgender" but as a reference to the word "transitive".[47] As Snorton notes, the term "transitive" refers to the "passing into another condition, changeable, changeful".[48] When trans becomes "transitive," it avoids, as Colebrook argues, "the impetus to nominalize 'trans' as a category of gender, sex, or species".[49] Colebrook's "trans" therefore implies the changing or traversing of boundaries (whether connected to gender binaries or otherwise) and the impermanence of occupying a single condition of being.

Snorton extends Colebrook's definition of trans to re-conceptualize blackness as similarly changeful and possibly fluid. He does not argue that the racial category of "black" can be entirely transcended or avoided altogether; indeed, Snorton does not advocate for a post-identity, post-racial understanding of blackness as an embodiment that can be put on or removed at will, at any moment. Rather, the alignment of "black" with Colebrook's definition of transitive proposes that, as Snorton argues, the two concepts "overlap in referentiality — inasmuch as blackness is a condition of possibility for the modern world".[50] Snorton's articulation of blackness, then, resists a static ontological understanding of the term that is limited to

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[46] Snorton's larger argument in this book explores the fungibility and simultaneity of transness and blackness. He argues that these two concepts have emerged together throughout history and, although typically discussed separately, should be analyzed together. My paper does not engage with this argument but rather borrows from Snorton's definitions of "trans" and "black" as productive to my theorizing of "mixed."

[47] C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 5.

[48] Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, 6.

[49] Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, 6.

[50] Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, 6. Blackness, for Snorton, does not only overlap with transness but can be understand as interchangeable with one another, whereby both concepts are "constituted as fungible, thingified, and interchangeable."

discussions of identity alone. Instead, blackness becomes a source of engagement with the world that allows for the same movement through and across allegedly stable boundaries that the term "transitive" evokes.

Building on Snorton's discussion, the term "mixed" in the mixed-race analytic highlights the activity involved in mixture in the same way that "trans" can be understood to invoke "transitive." A mixed-race analytic sees mixture as a continuous interaction, emphasizing the constant shifting of racial images that, in specific moments of mixture, can incite a sense of choreographic disruption. Conceptualizing "mixed" as a verb demonstrates the mutually supportive relationship between the mixed-race analytic and dance as a movement-based medium, thereby affirming the significance and suitability of interpreting dance through a mixed-race analysis. The activity invoked in "mixed," moreover, suggests that the mixed-race analysis resists total cohesion or synthesis of the choreographic disruption: the combinations of images that the mixed-race analytic interprets do not need to unify through application of the analysis but instead are able to maintain their active, rupturing interaction. In understanding "mixed" as active mixture, the analytic resists the association of mixed-race with the harmonious homogeneity associated with post-racial sameness and the face of the future stereotype.

Activity is further centralized in the analytic through its inclusion of the concept of racial "passing". The action of "passing" is fundamental to the history of mixed-race representation: many nineteenth-century American novels explored the story of a mixed-race character who attempts to "pass" for white and thus perform the social role of a white person (made possible by their white physical features as defined in a Eurocentric framework). If the passing was successful, the character would be received as "white" by dominant society, thereby escaping prejudice and gaining social mobility. The narrative is most often associated with Nella Larsen's

1929 novella, *Passing*, in which a mixed-race African American woman attempts to inhabit 1920s New York City as white. When her mixed-race heritage is ultimately exposed to her white husband, the woman falls from a window to her death; the circumstances of her fall (was she pushed? did she jump? did she accidentally tumble while trying to run away?) remain ambiguous. Given this tragic ending, Larsen's novel is frequently read as a classic tragic mulatto narrative yet one in which the sense of hopelessness is exacerbated by the passing act.

Judith Butler offers an analysis of *Passing* in her book *Bodies that Matter* (1993) that goes beyond the standard tragic interpretation to introduce reading of Larsen's novel through a psychoanalytic framework. Although it is beyond the scope of my project to contend with Butler's engagement with psychoanalysis and her larger interest in the novel's expression of queer desire, her discussion of racial passing is valuable to theorizing the mixed-race analytic. Passing, in Butler's argument, is facilitated by the changing relationship between race and visibility in Larsen's novel:

> Blackness is not primarily a visual mark in Larsen's story, not only because Irene and Clare are both light-skinned, but because what can be seen, what qualifies as a visible marking, is a matter of being able to read a marked body in relation to unmarked bodies, where unmarked bodies constitute the currency of normative whiteness.[51]

Butler asserts that it is the relationship between supposedly different bodies that produces the difference of race, whether immediately visible or not. In Larsen's novel, Clare's husband discovers her mixed-race heritage when he sees her among a group of African Americans. The association between Clare and her African American peers proves Clare's blackness to her husband; as Butler argues, "it is only on the condition of an association that conditions a naming

[51] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Routledge, 1993), 170.

that her color becomes legible".[52] Passing, in Butler's analysis, comes from the ability to obscure association with a specific racial group — to refuse to make racial markers visible.

Butler's understanding of passing as a relationship between racially marked and unmarked bodies productively frames a mixed-race analytic: just as the passing act unsettles physical signifiers of race, the mixed-race analytic destabilizes the visual dominance constructing what constitutes race in a dance context. Passing suggests that the traditional markers of race (hair, skin color) are unreliable in demonstrating racial categorization; likewise, the mixed-race analytic emphasizes that "what qualifies as a visible marking" of race in postmodern dance is similarly unreliable and must be interrogated.[53] When considering the idea of passing in a dance, a mixed-race analysis allows for the re-reading specific dances as racialized: is postmodern dance, a genre associated with a predominantly white demographic, always racially unmarked? Or, might the choreography "pass" as one image of race (or lack thereof) when there is, in fact, a more complex representation and organization of race at work? A mixed-race analysis raises these questions and engages the concept of passing to interrogate the traditional markers of race in dance and the viewer's reliance on them.

The mixed-race analytic represents a re-conceptualization of the term "mixed-race" for application in dance studies: rather than understand the absence of "mixed-race dance" as a sign of unviable academic inquiry, it seeks to re-define "mixed-race" to make this scholarship a possibility. The mixed-race analytic transforms "mixed-race" from an equation with identity to an analytical position, employing strategies of overreading to discover "racial disruption." Building from the disruptive power of the mixed-race figure in its representational history, the

[52] Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* 171.

[53] Butler, 170.

mixed-race analytic looks for moments of disruption (unexpected or incompatible representations of race) that can prompt a theorization of race within a dance. This emphasis on disruption parallels the disruptive qualities of avant-garde performance, thereby demonstrating the suitability of the mixed-race analytic to studies of postmodern dance. The active qualities of the analytic also affirm the mutual support of mixed-race analysis and dance, establishing the analytic as an optimal framework for interpreting dances.

If the mixed-race analytic distances itself from an identitarian project, what might it offer to dance productions that explicitly demonstrate a thematic investment in mixed-race identity? How would a mixed-race analytic interpret Esser's *CATA*, Dakin's *Passing*, or Chatterjee and Moorty's *Inner [Di]visions*? Rather than demonstrate that these dances represent mixed-race identity, or explore what their assertions of mixed-race identities entail, a mixed-race analysis would emphasize *how* "mixed-race identity" becomes legible. The analytic would highlight in *CATA*, for example, the disruption between speech and embodied choreography; why is, as reviews of this dance demonstrates, the representation of mixed-race identity located only in the spoken language but is not perceived in the movement itself? In *CATA*, how is the speech understood as representative of race whereas the movement is implicitly racially unmarked; what to make of the disruption produced between these images of speech and gesture?

Exploring these questions through a mixed-race analytic separates the construction of race in *CATA* from the representation of mixed-race identity exclusively. Applying the mixed-race analytic to dances, then, initiates discussions of race beyond reading for racial identity alone; the politics of racial construction, its function within the choreographic world of the dance, and its reception by viewers become points of inquiry that the mixed-race analytic seeks to elucidate and explore. What would this application look like, in detail, when applied to a

dance? How would the strategy of overreading for racial disruption take shape? Moreover, given that the analytic represents a position of interpretation as opposed to an identity, how would this analytic work when applied to dances that are not specifically about mixed-race identity or are not even choreographed by mixed-race choreographers? Applying this theorization of a mixed-race analytic to dance opens the possibilities of interpreting race beyond identity, beyond literalized themes or visible racial markers, and beyond conventional models of spectatorship.

## Chapter 3. Applying Mixed-Race: An Analysis of Lionel Popkin's *Inflatable Trio* and Blondell Cummings's *Chicken Soup*

With this theorization of a mixed-race analytic in mind, how could the analytic apply to a given dance? This chapter will explore an application of a mixed-race analysis to two dances: Lionel Popkin's *Inflatable Trio* (2017) and Blondell Cummings's *Chicken Soup* (1981) to, first, demonstrate what the reading of a dance as "mixed-race" might entail. What does this analysis recognize as significant? What parts of these two dances would it highlight? How does a mixed-race analytic frame and interpret choreographic images that it deems indicative of racial disruption? The application of a mixed-race analysis to *Inflatable Trio* and *Chicken Soup*, specifically, entails an interrogation of race, postmodern dance aesthetics, and the dominant interpretation of both of these concepts in the mainstream reception of these dances. This chapter will survey the performance reviews of *Inflatable Trio* and *Chicken Soup*, from newspapers and online dance publications, in comparison to a mixed-race overreading of these dances to elucidate what the reception (and its implicit understanding of choreographing race) might ignore to ultimately argue for a more complex organization of race in each work.

In comparing my own close-reading of the two dances with their mainstream reception, this chapter aims to expose and interrogate the normative understanding of race within the world of American postmodern dance. Although the definition of "postmodern" dance is widely debated, this chapter borrows from Sally Banes's definition from her book *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (1980).[1] Banes understands the "postmodern" to refer to a

[1] By engaging with Banes's understanding of postmodern dance, this paper implicates the specific debate between Banes and dance historian Susan Manning about the definition of the "postmodern" in dance and the applicability of this term to the group of artists whom Banes discusses. See Susan Manning, "Review: Modernist Dogma and Post-Modern Rhetoric: A Response to Sally Banes' 'Terpsichore in Sneakers,'" *The Drama Review* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1998) and Sally Banes and Susan Manning, "Terpsichore in Combat Boots," *The Drama Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1989).

specific group of choreographers working in New York City in the 1960s and 1970s, who represented "revolutionary" changes in dance that transformed the dramatic aesthetics and, in Banes's terms, dominantly "subjective content" of the American modern dance tradition.[2] Modern dance, which Banes locates historically in the early twentieth-century and associates with choreographers such as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman, emphasized "the personal" in opposition to the codified impersonality of ballet and sought "movement styles that would express" the specific choreographic aesthetics, philosophical values, and thematic concerns of the individual choreographer.[3]

According to Banes, the emergence of postmodern dance in the 1960s and 1970s as a reaction "against the expressionism of modern dance," which highlighted formal experimentation over exploration of a specific theme or mood.[4] In her understanding, postmodern dance does have thematic concerns but, unlike modern dance, these ideas are not linked to, for instance, the staging of a narrative: postmodern themes include the "illustration of a theory," general questions about the choreographic process, or the embodiment of "different perspectives on space, time, or orientation to gravity".[5] Aesthetically, Banes identifies "fragmentation," the use of objects, improvisation, and non-virtuosic choreography as essential to the postmodern dance style. The body in postmodern dance is not "pulled up or tense," as it would be in ballet or Graham technique, but instead is so simplified that the "use of natural

[2] Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 15.

[3] Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 5.

[4] Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 15.

[5] Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 16.

movements," such as walking or running, are emphasized.[6] Although Banes clarifies that these formal properties are not intended to monolithically define the aesthetics of postmodern dance, she maintains their centrality to many artists whom she identifies as choreographers of the postmodern, such as Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Meredith Monk.

Although neither Popkin nor Cummings was a part of the postmodern dance community in the original form that Banes identifies, these two artists can nonetheless be linked to this category through their personal experience with the postmodern dance world. Popkin danced with the Trisha Brown Company for several years, beginning in 2000. He also trained extensively in contact improvisation, a movement vocabulary often associated with the context of postmodern dance that Banes describes.[7] Similarly, Cummings's first formal performing experience was with Meredith Monk and her company, The House, with whom she toured and performed several productions such as *Education of the Girlchild* (1972) and *Vessel* (1972). Although the work of Popkin and Cummings might not be thematically identical to that of the choreographers whom Banes discusses, their respective performance training with some of these artists foregrounds a similarity between the aesthetics of the original postmodern dance community and the individual choreographic pursuits of Popkin and Cummings.[8] This chapter therefore considers *Inflatable Trio* and *Chicken Soup* to be examples of postmodern dance.

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[6] Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 17.

[7] See Cynthia J. Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1990). According to Novack, contact improvisation is "frequently performed as a duet, in silence, with dancers supporting each other's weight while in motion," noting a description from a contact improviser, who thought of the style as "a cross between jitterbugging, wrestling, and making love." Novack locates contact improvisation within the same artistic milieu as Banes's postmodern world (downtown New York, Judson Church) and associates the practice with similar artists (notably Steve Paxton).

[8] By "thematically identical," I mean to suggest that *Inflatable Trio* and *Chicken Soup* do not explore the same formalist principles as central themes, which Banes suggests was essential to postmodern choreography. Popkin and Cummings both operate within an aesthetic that can be aligned with postmodern dance yet their association with identity-based themes is against the ethos of Banes's postmodern dance.

Applying a mixed-race analytic to these two dances, then, interrogates the normative perceptions and interpretations of race in and about postmodern choreography, intervening specifically in the association of postmodern dance with whiteness. In his November 2018 article for *BOMB Magazine* entitled "Does Abstraction Belong to White People?" choreographer Miguel Gutierrez makes this connection explicit: through narrating his personal experiences as a Latinx choreographer, Gutierrez emphasizes the dominance of white postmodern choreographers, the casting of only white dancers, and the assumption that experimental postmodern choreography is racially unmarked while choreography by artists of color is always and sometimes exclusively referential of racial identity.[9] He argues that "experimental" choreography, central to the postmodern idiom, acts as a "signifier for universal experience," contrasting the work of artist of color who are often obligated to present and discuss their racial identities in their choreography.[10]

Scholar Maura Nguyen Donohue presents a similar argument to Gutierrez, suggesting that the performance of "racially different" choreography directly contrasts the "unmarked (white) postmodern aesthetic".[11] In her analysis of Yasuko Yokoshi and Sam Kim, two Asian American choreographers operating in the postmodern dance world, Donohue argues that artists of color are often compelled to represent their identities through "static and narrow parameters," repeatedly invoking stereotypical imagery such as "reference to foods of the homeland or "snippets of the mother tongue" to address questions of race in their performances.[12] These racial

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[9] Miguel Gutierrez, "Does Abstraction Belong to White People?" *BOMB Magazine*, November 7, 2018.

[10] Gutierrez, "Does Abstraction Belong to White People?"

[11] Maura Nguyen Donohue, "Ambivalent Selves: The Asian American Female Body in Contemporary American Dance," in *Contemporary Directions in Asian American Dance* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), 191.

[12] Nguyen Donohue, "Ambivalent Selves: The Asian American Female Body in Contemporary American Dance," 192.

representations stand out as noticeably different or Other to the dominant postmodern aesthetic, which, as Donohue argues, is racially "unmarked" and, by extension, "white".[13] In Donohue's discussion, choreographies of race are limited to narrow representations of identity, whereas experimental dances remain "unmarked" by racial images and can be discussed in terms of their avant-garde properties.

Sansan Kwan elaborates on this distinction between marked/unmarked dances, arguing that the very concepts of the "postmodern," and, in recent years, "the contemporary," are exclusionary of both artists of color in the New York "downtown scene" and choreographers working outside of North America and Europe altogether.[14] She notes that the terms "postmodern" and "contemporary" (which Kwan uses interchangeably in the context of concert dance) are "linked with the geographical and cultural, that is, with the West," characterizing the aesthetics of the postmodern dance world as not only "white" but specifically Euro-centric.[15] The association of the postmodern/contemporary with the white Western body is also a temporal distinction, whereby the West becomes a signifier of aesthetic progress, while the "rest" of the world is limited to representations of an artistic past: as Kwan states, "Asian is yoked to be "traditional" and "contemporary" is otherwise assumed to be "Western".[16] The formal qualities of the postmodern, such as "release technique and/or contact improvisation," cross-disciplinary collaboration, and "conceptual […] or sometimes deliberately pedestrian" choices, become

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[13] Nguyen Donohue, "Ambivalent Selves: The Asian American Female Body in Contemporary American Dance," 192.

[14] Sansan Kwan, "When Is Contemporary Dance?," *Dance Research Journal* 49, no. 3 (December 2017).

[15] Sansan Kwan, "When Is Contemporary Dance?," 45.

[16] Sansan Kwan, "When Is Contemporary Dance?," 45.

signifiers of the avant-garde *present*, unobligated to present a history, nation, or tradition of dance-making practices.

Following from these arguments, the dominant understanding of postmodern dance promulgates the notion that aesthetic experimentation in choreography is unrelated to race; dances about race or racial identity are not understood with the same attention to formal innovation but are instead limited to singularly identity-based interpretations. A mixed-race analytic therefore initiates a major intervention in analyses of postmodern dance, as it inserts a concern with exploring and problematizing race in a choreographic world that is dominantly conceived of as non-racialized. The analytic, moreover, aims to disrupt the boundary between what is considered racially marked and unmarked choreography in the postmodern dance context, interrogating the existence of this distinction altogether. How can the assumed equation between racially unmarked dances and whiteness be disrupted? What might be elucidated about the construction of race in postmodern choreography by destabilizing the terms through which choreography is understood as racially marked?

Popkin's *Inflatable Trio* and Cummings's *Chicken Soup* offer an opportunity to question the division of postmodern dance into racially unmarked (experimental) and racially marked (identity-based) categories due to their dual roles as choreographies of postmodern aesthetics and racialized identities. The dominant reading of *Inflatable Trio* locates the dance firmly within the category of, in Gutierrez's terms, "abstract" postmodern performance: the dance, which features a plastic inflatable furniture set, is typically understood as an experimental investigation of domesticity. This interpretation contrasts those of Popkin's earlier dances, which were frequently received by critics as representations of his racial background: Popkin, who self-identifies as a mixed-race person of South Asian Hindu and European Jewish descent, has created several

dances that invoke his racial heritage and reviewers typically discuss these productions in terms of Popkin's mixed-race identity. Reviews of *Inflatable Trio*, however, position the dance as a thematic transformation away from racial themes in Popkin's oeuvre, a re-alignment of his choreographic focus with postmodern experimentation.

By contrast, Cummings's *Chicken Soup* often functions as an exemplar of racialized, identity-oriented choreography within the postmodern dance world. *Chicken Soup* is a solo performance by Cummings in which she pantomimes a variety of domestic tasks, such as sewing, frying food in a pan, and mopping a kitchen floor.[17] The domestic content of *Chicken Soup*, however, was not received by critics as a representation of a similarly experimental and universal domesticity like that of Popkin's *Inflatable Trio*. Instead, Cummings's dance became a symbol of black femininity exclusively: dominant reception of *Chicken Soup* connected Cummings's portrayal of domestic tasks to a specifically black woman's perspective, suggesting that the dance was a (possibly autobiographical) comment on or reflection of the black female domestic experience. Cummings herself resisted this interpretation of the dance; her larger body of choreography expressed an investment in cross-cultural collaboration, which, she maintained, was still fundamental to her choreographic process when creating *Chicken Soup*.

This chapter will read both *Inflatable Trio* and *Chicken Soup* through the mixed-race analytic to explore the opposite interpretations of two dances that both invoke domestic themes and racialized bodies. I argue that Popkin's dance can, in fact, be understood as racialized, despite dominant interpretations of the work as universal. By emphasizing the disruption of domestic space (and its association with the visual representation of mixed-race people in

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[17] Blondell Cummings, *An Afternoon with Blondell Cummings: Excerpts from Excerpts* (Jacob's Pillow, Beckett, Massachusetts, 1989). Viewed at the New York Public Library Performing Arts Research Collections — Dance on March 27th, 2019.

contemporary American popular culture), a mixed-race analysis of *Inflatable Trio* reads the dance as a continuation of — rather than a departure from — Popkin's earlier investment in race. Reading Cummings's dance through a mixed-race analytic also detaches her choreography from its dominant reception: instead of understanding *Chicken Soup* as a choreography of black female identity exclusively, a mixed-race analysis suggests that the dance puts forth multiple images of race and thus disrupts the dominant tendency to read Cummings's black dancing body as the primary evidence of racialized content in the dance.

Reading these two specific dances also allows for an expansive exploration of the mixed-race analytical model. In this chapter, a mixed-race analytic is applied to one choreographer who explicitly self-identifies as a mixed-race; the other, by contrast, identifies as exclusively black. This application therefore tests the foundational assumption that this analytic can be applied to different dances, regardless of the choreographer's identities or their demonstrated interest in exploring themes connected to mixed-race experience. Like the queer analytic, a mixed-race analysis does not require the literal presence of mixed-race-identified people or mixed-race content but instead offers a hermeneutic position that reads for images of racial disruption to ultimately produce an analysis of dominant race construction and organization in the dance. *Inflatable Trio* and *Chicken Soup* offer the opportunity to test this mixed-race positionality: if the analytic does not require mixed-race-identified people or explicit mixed-race themes, then these two dances, neither of which are explicitly committed to mixed-race concerns, become rich sites of inquiry for this theoretical matrix.

**Lionel Popkin: Choreographing Mixed-Race Identity and Abstract Universality**

Los Angeles-based independent choreographer Lionel Popkin offers the most extensive body of work about mixed-race identity of the few contemporary American choreographers who

explore this theme.[18] His choreography can therefore be considered an obvious example of "mixed-race dance": he is a mixed-race-identified choreographer, his dances usually invoke his multiracial heritage, and reviews of his work in mainstream publications highlight mixed-race identity as a central theme. Although Popkin has had a lengthy career in Los Angeles and New York, performing and choreographing from the 1990s to the present, his reputation as a specifically *mixed-race* choreographer was established in the production of four dances, choreographed between 2004-2013. According to critical reception of his work, these dances — *And Then We Eat* (2004), *Miniature Fantasies* (2006), *There is an Elephant in This Dance* (2009), *Ruth Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (2013) — represent Popkin's interest in racial identity as a driving theme in his choreography.[19]

The first of these productions, *And Then We Eat*, featured Popkin and his collaborator Carolyn Hall cooking an Indian curry onstage.[20] The two performers alternate between a methodical preparation of the dish (taking supplies out of a cupboard, chopping vegetables), and the performance of a repetitive movement pattern. This movement vocabulary features inversions of the body, simple floorwork, and contact improvisation-style interactions: Popkin and Hall lean their bodily entirety against each other, tumbling over one another on the floor and supporting each other into simple lifts that resemble the "rolling, suspending, lurching" that Cynthia Novack identifies as central to contact improvisation in *Sharing the Dance: Contact*

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[18] The few contemporary choreographers I invoke here as those mentioned in Chapter Two. I have made the assessment that Popkin's work is the most diverse and extensive body of "mixed-race dance" on the basis of, first, sheer number (minimum four dances as opposed to only one dance) and, second, critical recognition. Popkin's work has been the most widely reviewed of the mixed-race choreographers I discuss in this thesis.

[19] Lionel Popkin, "Lionel Popkin," accessed May 1st, 2019, http://www.lionelpopkin.org/

[20] The following description comes from my viewing of a video recording of *And Then We Eat*, filmed at Highways Performance Space, Los Angeles, California, 2004, viewed at the New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division on March 27th, 2019.

*Improvisation and American Culture* (1990).[21] This choreographic patterning was also produced through an aleatoric movement system: Popkin, inspired by his work with Trisha Brown and her choreographic process, created a method to generate choreography based on the chance combination of different movements.[22] Some critics understood this dance as an exploration of Popkin's mixed-race identity, as the image of the two performers cooking a curry invoked a cultural symbol of Popkin's half-Indian heritage. In a review of Popkin's *Ruth Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (2013), critic Pamela Squires notes that Popkin's larger body of work "frequently explore his Indian heritage," citing the curry in *And Then We Eat* as an example of this choreographic investment in investigating race and culture.[23]

Popkin's 2006 production, *Miniature Fantasies*, which surveyed the tradition of Indian miniature painting, was also interpreted as representative of his bi-racial, bi-cultural upbringing.[24] His 2009 production *There is an Elephant in This Dance* was understood similarly: the dance featured a group of four dancers changing in and out of an oversized elephant costume, creating the image of a human-elephant hybrid that drew comparisons to the Hindu deity Ganesh.[25] Critic Caroline Palmer makes this connection between Hindu imagery and Popkin's

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[21] Cynthia J. Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 8.

[22] Lionel Popkin, interview by Miya Shaffer, in-person, June 14, 2018. Banes asserts the centrality of chance movement patterns and creation procedures to postmodern dance practices, tracing this idea to Merce Cunningham, who believed that "chance subverts habits and allows for new combinations," undermining "literal meanings attached to sequences of movements". Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 7.

[23] Pamela Squires, "In 'Ruth,' Choreographer Lionel Popkin Engagingly Dismantles St. Denis's Orientalism," *The Washington Post*, March 4, 2013.

[24] Lionel Popkin, "Other Projects," accessed May 1st, 2019, http://www.lionelpopkin.org/other-projects

[25] Lionel Popkin, "There is an Elephant in This Dance," accessed May 1st, 2019, http://www.lionelpopkin.org/elephant-2

racial-cultural-religious background in her review, asserting that the Ganesh figure "was prominent in Popkin's upbringing with a Hindu mother and a Jewish father".[26] Palmer also extends her reading of the Ganesh image as a symbol of Popkin's mixed-race identity to the choreographic styles of the dance, suggesting that Popkin's movement vocabularies similarly symbolize a mixed-race background. She classifies dancer Ishmael Houston-Jones's rhythmic stomping as a "sped-up Bharatanatyam-like dance," which she then contrasts with what she identifies as a Trisha Brown-style "sturdy sense of flow" in other moments.[27]

The last production of this 2004-2013 series is *Ruth Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (2013), which tackled the complex legacy of American modern dance pioneer Ruth St. Denis and her cultural appropriation of Indian dances.[28] Through an investigation of St. Denis's staging of traditional Indian dance styles, Popkin critiques St. Denis's cultural imperialism but also questions his own relationship to the Indian (often Hindu) imagery he employs. In a moment of dialogue in the dance, Popkin addresses the audience and states, "so, you see, my last few pieces, they all referenced India in some way or another…so, I started asking myself, why do I keep looking elsewhere to make something here and now?".[29] In this statement, Popkin uses St. Denis's appropriative acts to interrogate his own intention in engaging with Indian imagery in his dances, including the sari fabrics that are scattered throughout the stage immediately following

[26] Caroline Palmer, "Dancers with Elephants, Seeking Truth," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, November 14, 2010.

[27] Palmer, "Dancers with Elephants, Seeking Truth," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, November 14, 2010.

[28] Lionel Popkin, "Ruth Doesn't Live Here Anymore," accessed May 1st, 2019, http://www.lionelpopkin.org/ruth. The topic of St. Denis's cultural imperialism has been explored extensively in dance studies scholarship. For further discussion of this topic, see Priya Srinivasan, "The Bodies Beneath the Smoke or What's Behind the Cigarette Poster: Unearthing Kinesthetic Connections in American Dance History," *Discourse in Dance* 4, no. 1 (2007) and Jane Desmond, "Dancing Out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism Ruth St. Denis's Radha of 1906," ed. Ann Cooper Albright and Ann Dils (Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

[29] Lionel Popkin, *Ruth Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 2013, viewed via Vimeo recording, May 2, 2019

this speech. How, Popkin asks, is his own engagement with these images different than St. Denis's acts of cultural appropriation?

Critical reception of *Ruth* suggests that the difference between Popkin's use of Indian imagery and cultural appropriation is his ancestral connection to Indian Hindu culture. Reviewer Paul Kosidowski suggests that what absolves Popkin of appropriation is his own identity "as an American dancer of mixed Indian and Jewish heritage".[30] Kosidowski implies that it is Popkin's identity itself that drives him to interrogate St. Denis's problematic legacy; because Popkin identifies with an Indian heritage, he is therefore interested in the idea of St. Denis "trying on the trappings of Indian costume and movement".[31] In Erin Bonboy's review of *Ruth*, she connects the dance to Popkin's three preceding performances, creating a genealogy of the thematic of mixed-race identity in Popkin's repertoire. She explicitly states Popkin's racial heritage ("his mother is Indian") and notes that Popkin "has incorporated his background into several pieces," from *And Then We Eat* to, finally, *Ruth Doesn't Live Here Anymore*.[32]

These four dances construct the dominant understanding of Popkin's work as "mixed-race dance," according to an identity-oriented definition of the term: his dances invoke his multiracial background through the inclusion of Indian (and often Hindu) imagery, which critics then link to Popkin's own experience, thereby affirming his racial identity as a primary concern of the dances. Reviews of these four dances identify the "mixed-race" element of Popkin's choreography as the Indian imagery that he employs: the curry, miniature paintings, elephant

[30] Paul Kosidowski, "You Got to Move It: Lionel Popkin at Alverno," *Milwaukee Mag*, November 18, 2013.

[31] Kosidowski, "You Got to Move It: Lionel Popkin at Alverno," *Milwaukee Mag*, November 18, 2013.

[32] Erin Bonboy, "Choreographer Lionel Popkin Navigates a Cultural Legacy in 'Ruth Doesn't Live Here Anymore,'" *The Dance Enthusiast*, October 27, 2015.

figure, and sari fabrics become signifiers of Popkin's racial background and their inclusion, for critics, allows each work to become representative of his mixed-race identity. Mixed-race, therefore, becomes visible through the inclusion of culturally-associated images and thus functions similarly to the employment of speech and fusion dance styles by mixed-race choreographers Esser, Dakin, Chatterjee and Moorty, as discussed in Chapter Two. The Indian images allow Popkin's work to be interpreted as *about* mixed-race, an analysis that can then be linked to his identity as a mixed-race person.

The readings of an equivalence between Popkin's mixed-race identity and his employment of Indian imagery suggests that Popkin's dances must invoke a visible cultural Otherness in order to be a representation of mixed-race. The curry, miniature paintings, elephant figure, and sari fabrics can be considered a racialized semiotic system, whereby the Indian image acts as a signifier of racial difference (as something recognizably distinct from or "Other" to Popkin's postmodern idiom), which then becomes a signifier of Popkin's racial and cultural identity. Considering that the reviews of each work routinely emphasize that Popkin is of half-Indian, half-Jewish descent, his racialized identity is specifically a mixed-race identity; the Indian imagery, then, can be considered a signifier of mixed-race. If Popkin's choreographic style is otherwise considered a postmodern dance aesthetic (evident in reviewers' consistent comparisons of his work to Trisha Brown's), then it is the inclusion of the Indian imagery that transforms his dances from a racially unmarked, "white" postmodern style to an exploration of racial identity.

What if these signifiers of racial difference were removed from Popkin's four dances altogether? How would his choreography be interpreted without the Indian imagery that typically provokes readings of his dances as racialized? Critical reception of these four dances

demonstrates a profound reliance on Indian imagery as the interpretive foundation for reading each dance as a representation of mixed-race identity. It is therefore worth considering if the dances would still be understood as similarly mixed-race without the inclusion of legible racial Otherness. What if Popkin had chosen to highlight his European Jewish heritage? What if he had decided to align his white Jewish background with the whiteness of postmodern dance — could this still be considered a representation of mixed-race? Reviews of Popkin's work seem to imply that his choreography requires images of racial difference (something traceable to a non-western space or to non-white bodies) to be understood in terms of mixed-race identity; a choreographic alignment with postmodern whiteness would likely not produce the same effect.

Would it be possible to interpret Popkin's dances as mixed-race without relying on images of racial difference? Engaging with the mixed-race analytic can begin to answer this question: the application to Popkin's dances can destabilize the overreliance on Indian imagery as the primary evidence for reading his work as mixed-race and instead consider other ways that racialized content can manifest in his choreography. The dominant understanding of Popkin's four dances as representative of mixed-race identity is a valid interpretation and this application of the mixed-race analytic does not intend to argue against it; however, this reading of Popkin's dances does limit the understanding of race in his work to identity only and does not consider additional ways that his dances might be in dialogue with larger discourses about race, or might disrupt them. The dominant understanding of Popkin's four dances implicitly affirms the separation between racially unmarked postmodern dance and racially marked choreographies of identity; his dances with Indian imagery are about race yet those without are representative of postmodern aesthetics.

The mixed-race analytic can therefore be employed to disrupt this separation. Popkin's 2017 production, *Inflatable Trio*, offers the opportunity to test a mixed-race analysis of his choreography: the dance, which premiered three years after *Ruth*, was not interpreted as a representation of identity but, rather, as a thematic departure from the mixed-race themes of his earlier dances. In Victoria Looseleaf's review of *Inflatable Trio*, she asserts that his "indelible imagery" visualizes "domesticity gone awry" rather than his racial heritage.[33] Debra Levine similarly highlights the universality of Popkin's domestic scene, suggesting that his engagement with inflatable furniture demonstrates "how *our* most familiar modes of operating [….] are in upheaval".[34] Neither critic directly connects *Trio* to Popkin's mixed-race background but they foreground his race nonetheless: both Looseleaf and Levine directly state Popkin's Indian-Jewish heritage yet use this fact to demonstrate his turn away from identity-based themes.

*Inflatable Trio* therefore signalled a shift in Popkin's choreographic interest from the personal specificities of racial identity to allegedly commonplace and relatable themes: the dance's inflatable furniture set created a vision of a domestic space that critics deemed universal rather than racially-specific, like the Indian imagery of his earlier dances. If *Inflatable Trio* premiered just a few years after the apparent finale of Popkin's mixed-race series with *Ruth Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, and was still choreographed by the same mixed-race-identified choreographer, why is this dance not considered a thematic investigation of mixed-race? Why is this dance not discussed in terms of race at all but is instead understood as a vision of general domesticity? Reading *Inflatable Trio* through the framework of a mixed-race analysis can elucidate the possible constructions of race within this dance and their apparent difference to

[33] Victoria Looseleaf, "Blow Up: Inflatable Trio," *Fjord Review*, March 4, 2017.

[34] Debra Levine, "Review: Lionel Popkin's 'Inflatable Trio' at the Skirball Center," *Arts Meme*, February 26, 2017.

those of Popkin's four earlier dances, thereby disrupting the separation of Popkin's "mixed-race dances" and his "universal" performance.

**Reading *Inflatable Trio* Through a Mixed-Race Analytic: Disrupting Images of Identity**

The melodic ringing of bells initiates the brightening of the stage, where three dancers (Lionel Popkin, Carolyn Hall, and Samantha Mohr) stand in the space.[35] Each dancer is unusually costumed: Mohr wears a house coat and rubber gloves over a tight-fitting brown dress; Popkin stands in a purple argyle sweater and red pants; Hall covers a blue velour jumpsuit with a transparent plastic raincoat. Popkin raises his hands to his sides, pointing with his fingers, and, like an orchestra conductor, sweeps his arms below his shoulders to initiate a group inhale. The dancers, facing the audience, attempt to contain that inhale as they begin to show signs of struggle: they close their eyes and squirm with tension in an attempt to keep their breath in. With an eventual exhale, the dancers disperse, walking casually throughout the space. Following their pedestrian pattern, the audience is invited to gaze around the stage and observe a yellow inflatable couch, lying upturned on the ground, and a matching chair and ottoman scattered a few feet away.

The sauntering steps continue until Popkin and Hall exit, leaving Mohr alone and contemplative at center stage. Her casual stroll transforms into small and delicate turns on one leg, pivoting from one to limb to another to change her orientation in the space before collapsing into a forward hang on both feet. She continues, alternating between small steps on forced arches, slow undulations of the torso, and full body rolls over low, grounded side-to-side lunges. As Mohr moves, a soundscape begins to take shape. The stage fills with the sounds of moving objects, such as the scraping of knives on a cutting board, the clanging of glassware, and the

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[35]Lionel Popkin, *Inflatable Trio*, 2017, vimeo.com/208906456, viewed via Vimeo recording, May 2, 2019. The following description of the dance comes from this Vimeo recording.

unmistakable rhythm running water. When Popkin and Hall re-emerge into Mohr's vicinity, walking once again, the soundscape changes. The high-pitched wail of a kettle rings out, yet neither Mohr, Popkin, nor Hall seems to notice the changing sounds. Instead, the dancers appear completely immersed in their individual movement explorations, unbothered by the frantic noise around them.

This is the opening sequence of *Inflatable Trio*, which introduces several important aesthetic ideas to the choreographic milieu: in addition to the minimalist movement, props, costuming, and sound become central players in this scene. These three elements create a domestic world on the stage, in which the living room furniture, domestic-oriented clothing (rubber gloves and a housecoat) and the sounds of household actions fuse to form a recognizably domestic environment. Popkin, however, makes this onstage household noticeably bizarre by creating slightly off-kilter representations of each domestic item. The furniture is inflatable plastic and the costumes are a strange mishmash of evening wear and household work clothes. The sounds are seemingly random and unattached to any tangible sources onstage: when the kettle begins to wail the sound seems to come out of nowhere and the dancers seem unaffected by its irritating noise.

At first glance, this opening sequence seems to correspond with reviewers' exclusive emphasis on the domestic: Popkin creates a domestic world of living room furniture, household sounds, and three dancers who resemble some sort of kinship, or even family, structure. Yet, is this representation of domesticity universal, as Looseleaf and Levine suggest? Are domestic spaces not often racialized or considered culturally-specific? Popkin's domestic imagery might instead function as a racialized image: rather than signify a universal space of family life, the domesticity in *Inflatable Trio* might invoke the larger visual language for representing mixed-

race in contemporary American popular culture. Popular images of mixed-race people, circulating in contemporary advertisements and mainstream media, often represent mixed-race through images of families and children, thereby creating a specific visual convention for depicting and interpreting what mixed-race looks like. Might Popkin's domestic space not correspond to these other depictions?

A 2009 article for *Time Magazine*'s website, entitled "Are Mixed-Race Children Better Adjusted?" provides a strong example of how these pop-culture images can manifest and function.[36] Author John Cloud explores the possible forms of identification for mixed-race people: do mixed people identify with just one of their racial backgrounds or do they proclaim themselves to be multiracial? He summarizes a study published in the *Journal of Social Issues* (2009) that insists on the benefits of the latter. The study insists that high school students "who identified with multiple racial groups reported significantly less psychological stress" than their multiracial peers who identified with a single race.[37] Cloud states, "fortunately all these questions of racial identity are becoming less important, as we inch ever closer to the day when the US has no racial majority".[38] The article also concludes with an image: a stock photo of a multiracial family, in which a White mother and a Black father smile at their young multiracial children as the family sits in bed together.

Cloud's article reveals a disconnect between its content and its accompanying image: why include an image of a young mixed-race family in a domestic setting when the article discusses mixed-race youth at a high school? Although seemingly distinct, the image and

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[36] John Cloud, "Are Mixed-Race Children Better Adjusted?," *Time Magazine*, February 21, 2009, content.time.com/time/health/article/0.8599.1880467.00.html.

[37] Cloud, "Are Mixed-Race Children Better Adjusted?"

[38] Cloud, "Are Mixed-Race Children Better Adjusted?"

Cloud's writing can be considered similar in their implicit investment in imagining a multiracial future. When Cloud states the oncoming irrelevance of racial identity, "as we inch ever close to the day when the US has no racial majority," he affirms the sentiment of the face of the future stereotype and its promise of a future racial utopia. The stock photo, then, might also be considered a representation of the face of the future in visual form: the image can be understood to perform the symbolic function of associating multiracial bodies with a vision of a post-racial future, with the family and young children acting as visual reassurance that mixed-race people will bring about a racially harmonious society.

In order to understand how images of children, families, and interracial couples prompts this association, Lee Edelman's concept of reproductive futurism provides a productive framework to conceptualize the representational power of this imagery. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Edelman argues that American political and cultural discourse emphasizes the reproduction of a "better tomorrow," whereby the actions of the present must work towards a utopian vision of the future.[39] For Edelman, the figure of the Child embodies this socio-political investment in futurity. The Child, Edelman insists, is "not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children" but should instead be thought of as a symbolic embodiment of "the social order" who thus structures political discourse around its two essential characteristics: innocence and the promise of future social renewal.[40] Politics must aim to protect that innocence and create a utopian world for the Child to ultimately inhabit.

This investment in the figure of the Child is essential to reproductive futurism, which Edelman defines according to a phrase from the novel *Children of Men* (1992): "if there is a

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[39] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004).

[40] Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, 11.

baby, there is a future, there is redemption".[41] Although the Child is an ideation rather than a lived reality, it nonetheless incites an imperative to parent or procreate. If the Child represents the potential for a utopian future, the possibility of achieving this society necessitates, at least in a conceptual sense, heterosexual reproduction that will produce children. The reproductive future is therefore both literal and symbolic; the Child represents the reproduction of a new social order and the imperative to literally bring the heirs of that society into the world.[42] Edelman offers examples of children in literature and popular culture that perform that symbolic function of the Child, such as the titular character of the musical *Annie*. Edelman emphasizes Annie's famous song "Tomorrow!" to demonstrate that the future, in the framework of reproductive futurism, is also "endlessly postponed".[43] When Annie sings "Tomorrow — you're only a day away!" she looks forward to a future that has not yet arrived; likewise, the imagined world of reproductive futurism represents remains imaginary and does not become a lived reality.

Edelman's argument, which builds on existing queer theory, proposes that queerness conceptually acts as a form of resistance to reproductive futurism. Although a mixed-race analysis of *Inflatable Trio* does not engage with Edelman's broader queer studies perspective, his idea of reproductive futurism remains a productive framework for interpreting mixed-race images in contemporary American media. For the purposes of a mixed-race analysis, Edelman's Child can be understood as the multiracial Child, whose age and ethnic heritage are *both* associated with an utopian future. This ideation of the multiracial Child possesses the two key characteristics that Edelman stresses (innocence and futurity) but these are invoked in media

[41] Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, 13.

[42] Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, 19.

[43] Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, 13.

imagery to envision a specifically race-less future. Reproductive futurism therefore comes to represent a recreation of the social order in terms of race relations and it is the image of the multiracial Child — and parallel images of the family and interracial couples — who embodies and symbolizes the promise that this future will appear.

Cloud's article, then, can be revisited through the frameworks of Edelman's Child and reproductive futurism: the irrelevant stock photo included with the article demonstrates the ideological investment in images of multiracial children and families as signifiers of hope for an oncoming racial utopia. The article is one of many representations of mixed-race through family imagery: recent examples include National Geographic's *The Race Issue* (2018), which prominently features the images of mixed-race children and families within domestic spaces as visual accompaniments to articles about race and racial identity.[44] Given the dominance of these examples, domesticity can be considered a visual signifier of mixed-race; if images of the domestic function as representational conventions for depicting mixed-race in visual form, and these images widely proliferate in contemporary mainstream media, it is through representations domesticity, family, and children that the idea mixed-race becomes dominantly visible.

Popkin's *Inflatable Trio* can be interpreted within this larger social understanding of mixed-race domesticity and the national investment in post-racial futurity it represents. His representation of domestic space is not a universal theme, as critics like Looseleaf and Levine suggest, but an image embedded within a visual culture that aligns mixed-race with domesticity and, ultimately, with a vision of a racially harmonious future. When Popkin employs a similar visual vocabulary to that of dominant mixed-race representation, he implicitly invokes the ideological associations of mixed-race futurity; his choreography, however, *disrupts* these

[44] National Geographic, "The Race Issue," April 2018.

associations and intervenes into the conventions for recognizing and understanding mixed-race within dominant cultural forms. Popkin challenges normative mixed-race representation American popular culture but he also disrupts dominant understandings of mixed-race in postmodern dance. His choreography does not employ speech, fusion dance styles, or culturally-specific imagery; reading *Inflatable Trio* in the context of mixed-race representation therefore destabilizes the conventional choreographic cues for recognizing mixed-race content.

This disruption of the normative mixed-race images can be understood as an example of José Esteban Muñoz's "disidentification": a strategy through which minority subjects can both engage with and resist the limitations of hegemonic culture.[45] To disidentify, minority subjects neither embrace nor entirely refuse majoritarian society but instead adapt elements of dominant culture to "scramble and reconstruct the encoded message of a culture text".[46] For Muñoz, disidentification can be a survival strategy that allows minority subjects to work through exclusionary cultural codes without assimilating to or subverting them but it is also an aesthetic strategy, creating opportunities for "decoding mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy".[47] Disidentification can therefore be activated in aesthetic performance: minority artists can perform parts of dominant culture and, in their performance, disidentify with the normative function of those cultural ideals.

Building on Muñoz's discussion, Popkin's props, costumes, and sound in *Inflatable Trio* can be considered an aesthetic disidentification with the conventional visualization of mixed-race

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[45] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[46] Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, 31.

[47] Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, 25.

bodies and their association with multiracial futurity. By staging domesticity, Popkin invokes the stereotypical association of family life and a racially harmonious future yet elucidates the inherent absurdity in these images. *Inflatable Trio* therefore presents two moments of disruption: first, when the dance parodies the conventional representation of domestic space, it creates a racial disruption by invoking the image of the mixed-race body (Popkin), who occupies that space in popular culture, but destabilizes the post-racial values associated with that image. Second, when read within the context of Popkin's larger body of work, *Inflatable Trio* disrupts the interpretive separation of racially marked and unmarked postmodern choreography. Although Popkin does not employ the same South Asian imagery that he does in his earlier dances, *Inflatable Trio* can nonetheless be read as a dance *about* race rather than an experimental representation of supposedly universal experience.

The mixed-race analysis of *Inflatable Trio* therefore asserts the presence of racialized content in the dance yet does not connect this reading to Popkin's racial identity; the larger images of race that the dance might invoke are not understood as necessarily a part of Popkin's identity as a mixed-race *person* but instead offer insight into how race is conceptualized within postmodern dance and popular visual representation. In separating the choreographic questioning of race from racial identity, the mixed-race analytical model has successfully performed its primary function: it highlighted moments of disruption to ultimately suggest a new interpretation of the dance as invested in racial imagery (although not necessarily in racial identity). If a mixed-race analytic can read race in a dance that is typically understood as racially unmarked postmodern performance, how might the analytic work when applied to a dance that is specifically understood as racialized? Can a mixed-race analysis successfully perform when

interpreting a dance that is typically received as a representation of racial identity and, moreover, monoracial as opposed to mixed-race identity?

**Blondell Cummings: Re-Thinking *Chicken Soup***

As a dance that does not involve mixed-race choreographers, performers, or identity-based themes, Blondell Cummings's 1981 production *Chicken Soup* provides an alternative analytical object to test the mixed-race analytic. *Chicken Soup*, a solo dance choreographed and performed by Cummings, is a part of a larger series, *Food for Thought* (1981), which consists of four dances: *Meat and Potatoes*, *Chicken Soup*, *Tossed Salad*, and *Chocolate*. In her introduction to a performance of *Chicken Soup* at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in 1984, Cummings describes *Food for Thought* as, simply, a series "about food," in which each dance employs a particular food image to explore a larger theme.[48] The first dance in the series, *Meat and Potatoes*, presents a series of athletic movements and the consumption of "a sandwich, perhaps, and something from the thermos near at hand," as described by New York Times dance critic Jennifer Dunning.[49] *Chicken Soup*, Cummings explains in her pre-show talk at Jacob's Pillow, is "about a woman who uses food as nourishment" for her family, both physically and spiritually.[50] *Chocolate* explores sensuality while *Tossed Salad*, Cummings states, represents a vision of a multicultural United States with "people coming from different cultures, all thrown together".[51]

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[48] Blondell Cummings, *An Afternoon with Blondell Cummings: Excerpts from Excerpts* (Jacob's Pillow, Beckett, Massachusetts, 1989).

[49] Jennifer Dunning, "Dance: Food Suite by Blondell Cummings," *The New York Times*, February 17, 1983.

[50] Blondell Cummings, *An Afternoon with Blondell Cummings*.

[51] Blondell Cummings, *An Afternoon with Blondell Cummings*.

Although *Food for Thought* is considered a seminal work of Cummings's choreographic oeuvre, *Chicken Soup* is perhaps the most well-known dance of the series: it features Cummings dancing solo, performing a series of domestic gestures (sweeping, sewing, scrubbing the floor) to recorded spoken word and a minimalist, piano-based musical score by Brian Eno, Meredith Monk, and Colin Walcott. The dance opens with the image of Cummings standing with her back towards the audience, draped in a floor-length white dress and matching apron, with a brown paper shopping bag just to the right of her feet.[52] As the lights illuminate her figure, Cummings extends her arm towards the shopping bag; she reaches, slow and persevering, as if the bag is just slightly out of arm's length, never quite arriving at its plastic handles. Cummings's hand hovers over the bag and she delicately shakes her fingers as if gesturing for the bag to slide into her palm on its own volition. She continues and the lights fade to black; when the stage brightens once again, Cummings has turned to the audience but obscures her face by holding the shopping bag tight to her head.

The soft striking of piano keys can be heard. Cummings walks in an almost cartoon-like manner: on the spot, moving her arms back-and-forth in an exaggerated swing, letting the shopping bag follow the rhythm of her lively jaunt. She stops the walk but lets her arms continue the swinging pattern. The shopping bag moves excitedly, rapidly rebounding from one side of her body to the other in a u-shaped swing. Again, the lights dim to complete darkness and, when they return, Cummings takes a slow roll down through the body, dropping her head and the shopping bag to her feet. The lighting pattern — fading and re-appearing, to find Cummings somewhere else of the stage — creates a near-cinematic effect, as if watching scenes in an early

[52] Blondell Cummings, *Blondell Cummings: Chicken Soup* (Jacob's Pillow, Beckett, Massachusetts: Jacob's Pillow Dance Interactive, n.d.), danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/blondell-cummings/chicken-soup/. The following description of Chicken Soup comes from a viewing of the video recording at the New York Public Library Performing Arts Archive on March 26th, 2019.

film. The action of the scene occurs, the camera cuts away, and we, the audience, re-emerge elsewhere in the narrative.

The next “scene” takes shape as Cummings retires the shopping bag and walks to a wooden chair. She sits, swaying her torso back-and-forth as if transforming the stationary chair into one designed for rocking. She moves her mouth in what viewers can imagine is a silent conversation yet the words are completely indecipherable. Instead, Cummings’s gestural movement provides the legible narrative of this sequence, as she pantomimes rocking a baby, sewing, and mixing ingredients in a bowl. The pantomime begins in what can be considered legible representation (the circular movement of the left arm hovering above a rounded right arm evokes the mixing bowl) but it becomes gradually exaggerated and less imitative of a real gesture; the clean, precise mixing bowl becomes an unwieldy circling of the shoulder and wrist. The piano music fades and a woman’s voice takes its place. She speaks, “the kitchen was the same. The table was a narrow table…easy to clean.”

The rhythmic rebound of Cummings’s swaying torso brings her from the chair to standing, before slowly descending to the floor. The recorded speech disappears but Cummings, on all fours on the ground, continues her own musical score by scrubbing the floor with a bristled brush that makes an audible noise with each scrub. Crawling on her knees with the brush, actively scrubbing at the stage floor, Cummings arrives at a long piece of fabric lying unassumingly in the middle of the stage space. She tosses the fabric into the air, watching its natural patterns and shapes as it moves from its airborne moment to its graceful fall. The tossing continues, resembling a childlike game with an equally innocent sense of wonder in Cummings’s expression and her fascination with the dancing fabric. The wonder, however, is temporary: she

stops, pragmatically tying the fabric around her waist and resuming her scrubbing. The moment of escape comes to an end and the domestic duties resume.

Cummings crawls and scrubs as a second recorded voice echoes throughout the performance space. The speech is, at first, difficult to decipher: beginning as only a muffled vocal resonance, a few recognizable key words ("pounds," "chicken," "scale" "remove") become clear. Although individual words can be heard with some degree of clarity, the relationship between each term is initially unknown; what about the chicken? How many pounds? The voice repeats the same key words over and over, cutting in and out, at some moments clearly decipherable and at others entirely incoherent. The repetition of certain words suggest that the voice might be reading a recipe yet it remains unclear what the recipe is for; what is the voice instructing Cummings to make? If the voice is, in fact, reading a recipe, there is no emphasis on the sense of order or organization that a recipe would typically value. Instead, this recipe is incoherent, perhaps entirely out of order.

Cummings enacts different responses to this voice, mirroring the seeming incoherency with which the recipe is read. At times, she seems entirely unaffected by or ignorant to the speech: she rolls to the ground, holds her body in a plank-like position and sways side-to-side, demonstrating no obvious relationship between the voice and her movement vocabulary. At other times, she pantomimes the act of cooking, as if following the recipe herself. When the voice reads, "add the vegetables," Cummings mimes grabbing different items and assembling them into a group below her torso. Then, Cummings's body also becomes the food itself: when the voice reads the instruction to "let simmer," Cummings imitates a simmer within her body, shaking her torso and shoulders slightly as if replicating the bubbles of a simmering dish. When the voice finishes reading the recipe, Cummings picks up a frying pan and simulates frying food.

The lights fade on Cummings, shaking the frying pan throughout the space, as the dance comes to an end.

*Chicken Soup* presents an image of domesticity in which Cummings, the lone performer onstage, enacts a series of domestic activities, from food shopping to food preparation to house cleaning. The dance represents an image of Cummings, a black woman, performing conventional domestic chores within a space that, although not literally represented through set design, is likely a kitchen. This image of the black female body within a domestic world has overwhelmingly led reviewers to conclude that *Chicken Soup* is a dance about black female domesticity or, according to critic Nancy Goldner in a 1983, "a fond memory of black rural life".[53] Critic Craig Bromberg, also reviewing the dance in the 1980s, similarly emphasized themes of black experience and conventional gender roles.[54] Cummings summarized Bromberg's review in a 2009 interview with dance critic Joan Acocella: "he thought that *Chicken Soup* was about a black woman cleaning the floor of a white woman's house. He said, 'The piece takes place in our house' — white people's houses".[55]

Although Goldner's reading does not invoke the same racial hierarchies and power dynamics as Bromberg's review, both interpretations suggest that the dance is fundamentally expressive of a specifically African American perspective. The dance, in these reviews, is a representation of racial experience (that is also rural and working class), which can be connected to Cummings's identity as a black woman. Scholar Ann Cooper Albright elaborates on this

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[53] Quoted in Ann Cooper Albright, "Auto-Body Stories: Blondell Cummings and Autobiography in Dance," in *Engaging Bodies* (Wesleyan University Press, 2013).

[54] Quoted in Joan Acocella, "A History Lesson," *The New Yorker*, February 21, 2012, www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/a-history-lesson.

[55] Joan Acocella, "A History Lesson," *The New Yorker*, February 21, 2012,

connection between Cummings's performance in her solo dances and her own identity as Blondell Cummings, choreographer.[56] Albright suggests that Cummings's "solo choreography repeatedly presents the audience with links between the characters she is portraying and her own self," fostering the interpretation of her solo performances as autobiographical.[57] The "autobiographical" in Albright's argument is premised on the notion that Cummings's dances are rooted in her racial and gendered identities, developing "directly from Cummings's personal experience" of existing as an African American woman.[58] When Goldner and Bromberg emphasize the African American experience in *Chicken Soup*, they implicitly base this assumption on the slippery equation of Cummings-as-black-person with her onstage persona.

Recent scholarly analyses of *Chicken Soup* also support the understanding of the dance as an expression of Cummings's identity as black woman. Albright's reading of *Chicken Soup* emphasizes the idea of black cultural memory in the dance, arguing that Cummings grounds the choreography in her own identity but, through this, represents a larger racial and cultural history. Although Albright acknowledges that the dominant reading of Cummings's dance is that of black female domesticity, she too connects *Chicken Soup* to racial identities, asserting that *Chicken Soup* presents a history of black women in which Cummings performs "bits of stories from all these women's lives".[59] Similarly, scholar Sampada Aranke discusses *Chicken Soup* as a "semiotics of the Black kitchen" in which the gestures she performs "signal Black women's domestic labor" in order to "conjure body after body of Black women".[60] Albright and Aranke's

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[56] Ann Cooper Albright, "Auto-Body Stories: Blondell Cummings and Autobiography in Dance."

[57] Albright, "Auto-Body Stories: Blondell Cummings and Autobiography in Dance," 101.

[58] Albright, "Auto-Body Stories: Blondell Cummings and Autobiography in Dance," 101.

[59] Albright, "Auto-Body Stories: Blondell Cummings and Autobiography in Dance," 105.

[60] Sampada Aranke, "Where Have All the Bodies Gone?," (2017), vimeo.com/243208827.

interpretations, although more relevant to the content of Cummings's dance than Goldner or Bromberg (where, for instance, is the reference to "rural life" in *Chicken Soup*?), nonetheless affirm the dance as a representation of identities.

In contrast to the dominant understanding of *Chicken Soup* as a dance about black experience, Cummings's contemporaries noticed the intricate balance of racialized content and (unmarked) postmodern choreography in the dance. *Chicken Soup* was also featured in Ishmael Houston-Jones's show *Parallels* (1982) at the East Village performance venue St. Mark's Danspace Project.[61] Houston-Jones, an African-American dancer and choreographer, created *Parallels* to showcase the work of Black artists in the predominantly white downtown postmodern dance scene. The show explored the dual worlds that he saw black artists as operating within: as critic Joan Acocella summarizes, black choreographers "were part of the American tradition of 'black dance,' but were also part of the overwhelmingly white American postmodern dance world that the downtown scene represented.[62] According to Acocella, choreographers like Alvin Ailey epitomized the tradition of "black dance," which drew on a variety of recognizable signifiers of black identity such as "exaltation, seduction, the blues".[63] Postmodern dance, by contrast, featured "ambiguity and analysis [and] transgression" that had typically "been the preserve of white artists," such as Meredith Monk.[64] *Parallels* interrogated this apparent divide, showcasing artists whose work challenged the distinction between the two seemingly distinct dance worlds.

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[61] Joan Acocella, "A History Lesson," *The New Yorker*, February 21, 2012, www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/a-history-lesson.

[62] Acocella, "A History Lesson," *The New Yorker*, February 21, 2012.

[63] Acocella, "A History Lesson," *The New Yorker*, February 21, 2012.

[64] Acocella, "A History Lesson," *The New Yorker*, February 21, 2012.

The inclusion of *Chicken Soup* in *Parallels* indicates its dual status as “black dance” and racially unmarked postmodern choreography yet Cummings herself rejected the dominant understandings of the dance as a representation of her racialized self. She maintained that *Chicken Soup* was not primarily about her own racial identity nor her personal experience as a woman within culturally-specific domestic spaces. In a 2007 interview with the *New York Times*, Cummings stressed that the dance was primarily about food and its capacity to generate social relationships. She stated, “food took a lot of time to make. We spent more time in the kitchen. We ate there. Kids played and helped out in the kitchen. The mothers would get together in the kitchen and talk about life”.[65] Although the process of creating *Chicken Soup* might have involved Cummings’s personal memories, she drew on the experience of cooking with others, which, she argued, was not specific to the black community but was instead a concept that was relatable across racial and cultural divides.[66] In Cummings’s understanding, *Chicken Soup* was not a specifically black dance nor a choreography of her identity as a black woman but a multifaceted performance that different groups of people could find some connection with.

The diverse and often contradictory reception of *Chicken Soup* — as a representation of black identity, postmodern experimentation, or universal relatability — demonstrates the incompatibility of this dance with conventional choreographic categories of race. Cummings’s dance disrupts the simple categorization of postmodern performance between the labels of racially unmarked and unmarked and, in the context of Houston-Jones’s *Parallels*, between self-proclaimed “black dance” and dance that merely includes a black choreographer. A mixed-race

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[65] Quoted in Margalit Fox, “Blondell Cummings, Dancer of Life’s Everyday Details, Dies at 70,” *The New York Times*, September 1, 2015.

[66] Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. “Interview with Blondell Cummings, 1998,” New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed March 27th, 2019.

analysis of *Chicken Soup* highlights this moment of disruption and asks, what to make of these differing understandings of race in Cummings's choreography? How do we interpret a dance that disrupts the dominant categorizations of race operating within the postmodern world? Instead of determining which interpretation of *Chicken Soup* is most accurate, an application of the mixed-race analytic suggests that it might instead be understood *as mixed-race*: the dance puts forth multiple images of race that challenge conventional categorization rather than adhere to a singular representation of racial identity.

**Applying Mixed-Race Analysis to *Chicken Soup*: An Extended Questioning of Identity**

What images of race exist in *Chicken Soup*? Cummings's body offers an initial, somewhat obvious answer: she is a black woman and her presence as a black body onstage cannot be overlooked or ignored when interpreting the dance. Reviews of *Chicken Soup* that offer a reading of black female domesticity rely on the visual image of Cummings's racialized body as the basis of their analysis; this interpretation, however, does not account for the second racial-cultural image that emerges in the title of the dance itself — "chicken soup." The recorded voice that recites the recipe in *Chicken Soup* reads from Lizzie Black Kander's *The Settlement Cookbook* (1901).[67] Kander, the daughter of Bavarian Jewish immigrants who had settled in Wisconsin, wrote *The Settlement Cookbook* as an instructional manual for the young Eastern European Jewish women immigrating to the United States at the turn of the twentieth-century.[68] The book aimed to help the immigrant women adapt to life in the United States, providing

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[67] Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. "Interview with Blondell Cummings, 1998," New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed March 27th, 2019.

[68] Layla Schlack, "The Settlement Cookbook: 116 Years and 40 Editions Later," *Taste Cooking*, n.d., www.tastecooking.com/the-settlement-cookbook-116-years-and-40-editions-later/. In this article, Schlack discusses the history of Kander's 1901 cookbook, detailing its original function as an instructional manual for young immigrant women to its continued cultural legacy in the American Jewish community.

recipes and advice on housekeeping that Kander thought could productively negotiate the transition to an American way of life from an Eastern European context.[69]

Cummings's inclusion of Kander's recipe for chicken soup reveals a moment of racial disruption with the dominant readings of *Chicken Soup* as a dance about black female identity or as representative of Cummings's autobiography. In an interview with Monica Moseley, Cummings's discusses how the impetus for calling the dance "chicken soup" came from a universalizing impulse:

> I remember saying to Barbara, Barbara Roan, I did this piece and I'm trying to think of something that's more universal. I think about soup or something like that. I could say, like, oxtail soup, a very Black soup or something. But I want something that's broader. What's a soup that's healing and nourishing? That's what the piece is about. She said, okay. Chicken soup. So, I said, okay. I called it Chicken Soup.[70]

Despite Cummings's association of chicken soup with something "broader," or relatable to a diverse audience, she nonetheless invokes a very specific ethnic history and immigrant experience by borrowing from *The Settlement Cookbook*. Kander's recipe therefore introduces another image of race into *Chicken Soup* and initiates an instance of racial disruption in the dance; the temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts in which *The Settlement Cookbook* was published is significantly different to the Southern Black upbringing in which reviewers of *Chicken Soup* placed the dance, demonstrating the existence of two different images of race and culture in Cummings's production.

The recitation of the recipe also signals a moment of choreographic disruption within the dance itself. Although Cummings includes recorded speech at several moments throughout the

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[69] Schlack, "The Settlement Cookbook: 116 Years and 40 Editions Later," *Taste Cooking*, n.d., www.tastecooking.com/the-settlement-cookbook-116-years-and-40-editions-later/.

[70] Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. "Interview with Blondell Cummings, 1998," New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed March 27th, 2019.

dance (she employs, for example, a recording of a spoken word poem by writer Grace Paley), the other examples of speech are clear, coherent, and have a logical narrative referent in the choreography; Paley recites, "the kitchen was the same," while Cummings sits on a wooden chair and pantomimes stirring a mixing bowl.[71] In a dance that offers an otherwise relatively straightforward narrative of a women in a domestic space, relying on pantomimed gestures and props such as a frying pan, the inclusion of the recipe marks a decisive break from the dominant choreographic style. The incoherent voice, with its use of repetition, its lack of clarity, and its disavowal of any sense of order, takes viewers out of the otherwise literal domestic world that Cummings creates and into an experimental atmosphere. Cummings's movement similarly transforms in this section: rather than perform only pantomime, she choreographs three different relationships to the sound of the recorded voice by embodying the recipe, enacting the recipe, and ignoring the presence of the speech altogether.

This choreographic disruption also affirms the aesthetic similarity of *Chicken Soup* to its experimental postmodern dance context, thereby further destabilizing the association of postmodernism with whiteness. The incoherent recording of the voice can be considered an example of aesthetic experimentation in its refusal to operate as a normative musical accompaniment; similarly, the repetitive, seemingly random piano score, composed by Brian Eno, Colin Walcott, and Meredith Monk (a central figure in postmodern dance) reflects Sally Banes's understanding of postmodern choreography as invested in "repetition, alogical structures" and "noise" in music.[72] Cummings's dance can therefore be considered a postmodern

[71] Blondell Cummings, *Blondell Cummings: Chicken Soup* (Jacob's Pillow, Beckett, Massachusetts: Jacob's Pillow Dance Interactive, n.d.), danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/blondell-cummings/chicken-soup/.

[72] Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 9.

performance through its inclusion of experimental sound yet, through its simultaneous inclusion of a racialized body, also remains a dance about racial identity. If the experimental sound in *Chicken Soup* is part of a dance about race, then, in the binary logic of racially marked/unmarked postmodern choreography, the sound is not just an experimental (white) aesthetic but a racialized one. Cummings's sonic world, then, further disrupts standard classification of *Chicken Soup* as an identity-based, rather than avant-garde, performance.

The mixed-race analysis of Cummings's choreography therefore recognizes the significance of Kander's *Settlement Cookbook*, the minimalist musical score, and the inclusion of experimental spoken word to suggest that acknowledging these elements disturbs and even overturns the dominant reading of *Chicken Soup* as a dance about racial and gender identities exclusively. If the dance is read only as a limited representation of Cummings's identity as a black woman, the inclusion of Kander's recipe and its experimental employment in the dance is unexpected and even incompatible; how can *The Settlement Cookbook* function within a dance about southern black rurality? The mixed-race analysis of *Chicken Soup* therefore reveals that the dominant readings of the dance overlook several essential components of Cummings's project; the analytic unmoors the dance from a simple equation with Cummings's identity and initiates a discussion of the multiple images of race — perhaps even "mixed-race" — taking effect.

Finally, understanding *Chicken Soup* as mixed-race re-configures the place of the dance within Cummings's larger repertoire. Cummings can be considered a "disharmonious," or at least anomalous, figure in the downtown scene; although she, like other artists included in Houston-Jones's *Parallels*, was thought to operate within "black dance" and postmodern traditions, Cummings stated that she thought of her own work as dissimilar to the other black

choreographers around her, such as Bill T. Jones of Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company or Jawole Willa Zollar of Urban Bush Women. In an interview with Monica Moseley, Cummings asserted that her choreographic values "made me a little bit different" than Zollar, whom she was compared with but who, Cummings suggested, was "dealing with basically an African American thing".[73] Cummings stated that the content and style of her own work "made it more difficult" for critics, viewers, and other choreographers to "figure out where's her position? Where is she?" given her explicit interest in cross-cultural collaboration. Cummings understood her choreographic process and aesthetic values to be fundamentally rooted in the cross-cultural rather than specifically referential of her own African American culture.[74]

The cross-cultural is a fundamental concept throughout Cummings's body of choreography: in her interview with Moseley, Cummings insists her dances are concerned with "doing stuff about African American and Japanese [culture], or Chinese, or Latino, or African," representing an attempt to "connect myself to other cultures and finding that aspect of my culture in that culture".[75] Cross-cultural collaboration was also a tenet of the artistic manifesto of her production company, the Cycle Arts Foundation, which she founded in 1978. According to a press release for Cummings's performance, *Blondell: Changing Identities* (The Kitchen, New York City, May 12-15, 1994), the Cycle Arts Foundation is described as a "multi-disciplinary arts collaborative incorporating dance, theatre, visual media and literary arts," dedicated to exploring "contemporary issues that are cross-cultural in scope".[76] Cummings asserted that this

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[73] Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. "Interview with Blondell Cummings, 1998," New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed March 27th, 2019.

[74] Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. "Interview with Blondell Cummings, 1998,"

[75] Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. "Interview with Blondell Cummings, 1998,"

[76] The Kitchen, "Blondell Cummings: Changing Identities," Press release, April 2nd, 1994.

mission statement encapsulated her larger choreographic vision, which she described to Moseley as "cross-cultural" and applicable to a "broad age range".[77]

With this context in mind, reading *Chicken Soup* as an example of mixed-race dance re-situates the work within Cummings's repertoire, re-constructing the dance as an additional example of cross-cultural collaboration rather than an exploration of Cummings's identity. The cross-cultural is, after all, embedded within *Food for Thought* itself: the third dance in the suite, *Tossed Salad*, which Cummings describes as a representation of "people coming from different cultures, all thrown together," displays an overt investment in cross-cultural connection.[78] Why isolate *Chicken Soup* from this concern? If the cross-cultural is central to Cummings's artistic philosophies and to the very suite of dances in which *Chicken Soup* resides, why interpret this dance without these same issues in mind? Reading *Chicken Soup* through a mixed-race analysis raises these questions and, in doing so, re-constructs Cummings's place within the categorization of postmodern choreographers: not identically postmodern to Monk, not "black" in the sense of Zollar, not always legibly cross-cultural but, instead, a disruption to these very classifications.

### ***Inflatable Trio* and *Chicken Soup*: Finding New Readings Through a Mixed-Race Analysis**

Reading *Inflatable Trio* and *Chicken Soup* through a mixed-race analysis demonstrates the applicability of this theoretical model to multiple different works by different choreographers. Analyzing these two dances, in particular, also raises questions about the different ways that dances can be considered racialized or not. Both Popkin and Cummings explore similar themes and some similar aesthetics, drawing on elements of the postmodern experimental style that their dances are situated in. Both *Inflatable Trio* and *Chicken Soup*

[77] Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. "Interview with Blondell Cummings, 1998,"

[78] Blondell Cummings, *An Afternoon with Blondell Cummings*.

explore representations of domesticity, yet Cummings's choreography is typically treated as a narrative, literal, and thus non-experimental imagining of domestic space, especially in comparison to that of Popkin. A mixed-race analysis challenges this assumption; the introduction of the chicken soup recipe, with its unusual and incoherent performance, is indicative of avant-garde performance techniques and therefore presents an equal disruption to the ideals of conventional domesticity to Popkin's.

In interpreting these two dances, the mixed-race analytic fundamentally revises the separation of racially marked and unmarked postmodern dance categories. Popkin's dance, which is typically read as being only experimental and therefore non-racialized, becomes a dance about race through a mixed-race analysis. Just as *Chicken Soup* is considered to be referential of an image of race within the domestic world, so is *Inflatable Trio*: mixed-race has a visual referent in the domestic and the dance can be considered to invoke this. The mixed-race analysis of *Chicken Soup* also questions the separation of the marked/unmarked categories by destabilizing the simplistic reading of the dance as solely connected to Cummings's identity. The dance, in fact, reveals a complex and literally multi-cultural, multi-racial basis and can therefore be considered a mixed-race dance. Although this dance did not "pass" as entirely "experimental" for critics, like *Inflatable Trio* does, it still demonstrates that an identity-based reading is limiting. The mixed-race analysis allows for more conversations exist about the construction of race in Cummings's work and, by extension, in the postmodern dance world in general.

## Conclusion

This paper began by asking about the absence of mixed-race is in dance and dance studies and it has not, perhaps, truly addressed this question. This paper did not find an answer to why there is less mixed-race content (representations of mixed-race identities, explicit explorations of mixed-race experience) in postmodern choreography as in other aesthetic forms, such as literature, film, or visual art. This paper did not determine whether the world of postmodern dance is less interested in mixed-race, if there are fewer mixed-race-identified choreographers in the postmodern world than in other artistic disciplines, or if there is just something incompatible with the dominant idea of mixed-race and the choreographic form. This paper, then, did not present a resolution to my earlier research project and my initial attempt to explore the topic of mixed-race dance; it did not present any answers to or any justifications for the apparent absence.

This paper did, however, consider new ways of thinking about race, mixed-race and postmodern dance that go beyond the dominant understandings that might have structured my initial research project and the very questions about racial identity and dance that I sought to explore. Rather than dwell on the apparent lack of mixed-race identity in its choreographic representation, this paper aims to consider mixed-race as an analytic instead: a theoretical lens with which to look at a dance and ask, how do we know what race is when we see it in this dance? How do we know the racial categories (or lack thereof) that frame this choreography? Is there a way to understand race in dance that is not limited to the representation of racial identities? If a dance can be understood as queer, or feminist, or postcolonial without explicitly conjuring legible themes or content associated with such identifications, why not understand the dance as mixed-race as well?

With the current and ongoing obsession with mixed-race in U.S. popular culture, rife with problematic messages of post-racial futurity, political complacency, and the continuous objectification of mixed-race bodies in visual media, it would seem fitting to consider questions about mixed-race in multiple areas of cultural production. Dance, then, must be brought into this conversation: it must be in dialogue with the larger contemporary discourses of race in the United States that, although not limited to discussions of mixed-race, certainly emphasize mixed-race people and their role within dominant society. Dance, as a medium that directly mobilizes and displays the body, can be a significant contributor to offer discussions of mixed-race in society, which so often highlight imagery of the mixed-race body and its objectification. What might analysis of dance contribute to existing discussions of mixed-race in U.S. society?

Moreover, if the fascination with the mixed-race, post-racial future continues to have mainstream visibility, how can we go beyond merely supporting or critiquing it? Scholars have extensively shown the reductive, limiting image of mixed-race experience that stereotypes like the face of the future espouse; how might these images be engaged with in a critical, theoretical manner, going beyond merely agreeing with and confirming the arguments of existing scholarship? What more can be said about mixed-race other than it is an identity and a lived experience, with a long history of stereotypical representation in the United States? The mixed-race analytic proposed in this paper hopes to continue expanding critical discussions of mixed-race beyond debates about identity and instead ask, why should we continue to discuss mixed-race in a U.S. context at all — what more can it offer us?

The mixed-race analytic therefore aims to re-conceptualize "mixed-race" in a multitude of ways, expanding critical discussions of mixed-race and continuing to provoke additional theoretical questions. Mixed-race is an identity but, like the term "queer," it is not just that.

Mixed-race often takes representational forms, both damaging and empowering, but critical discussions of these forms are not only limited to affirmation or critique. Mixed-race is also a way of engaging with choreography, with the dominant visual schema of race in postmodern dance, and with prevailing viewing biases implicit in watching dance and understanding how race is known in it. A mixed-race analytic is invested in the choreographies and politics of disruption: an overturning of the dominant, an interrogation of racial hierarchies and divisions, and a challenge to standard and habitual patterns of seeing and knowing.

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