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The Pursuit of Utopian Ideals in U.S. Contemporary Dance Practices

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History, Theory, and Criticism

by

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2017

The Dissertation of Samara Camille Kaplan is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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University of California, San Diego

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Pursuit of Utopian Ideals in U.S. Contemporary Dance Practices

by

Samara Camille Kaplan

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Theory, and Criticism

Professor Jack Greenstein, Chair
Professor Norman Bryson, Co-Chair

This dissertation brings together four case studies of U.S.-based dance artists to present and analyze their practices from conception to process to performance. Anna Halprin, Deborah Hay, luciana achugar, and Miguel Gutierrez are discussed together for the first time to draw connections and form a history that sheds light on how artistic goals operate once they are embodied and enacted. I examine dance practices as ideologies inscribed onto the bodies of dancers and disseminated to the public not just as artistic production but as social choreographies. Each choreographer's ideals around how the body ought to move and behave are examined as "utopian" for their proposal of an alternative, better way of being. The term "utopia" implies a striving-toward and comes from a conversation in Dance, Theater, and Performance Studies to which this dissertation contributes.

From both research and personal experience, I put forth four distinct arguments about how utopian practices function. Chapter 1 explores Halprin's effort to create peace in the world through her practice. Chapter 2 examines Hay's goal to shed social and artistic choreographies. Chapter 3 focuses on achugar, who aims to remove boundaries within dancers and among participants. Chapter 4 looks at Gutierrez's aggressive self-expression through the lens of queerness. Coming out of the postmodern tradition, Halprin and Hay set the stage for the utopian practices achugar and Gutierrez propose in the 21st century. This study expands the conversation around the value of an embodied practice and contributes to an understanding of choreographic intent.

Introduction

In Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies, the term "utopia" has become a way of acknowledging the artistic endeavor to imagine and enact an alternative or future social space, usually relating to minoritarian subject matter like race and gender. The choreographer may advocate an ideology about how bodies should move and behave not just on stage, but in the world. Often times these ideals offer audience members or participants the chance to engage with a social organization outside of ordinary daily life. For example, the choreographers discussed here promote an experience of the body without shame, with open sexuality, empathy, or a counter-cultural ideal of group behavior. These ideologies present a space for the performance of alternative, presumably better, ways of being.

In 1516 Thomas More coined the term utopia from the Greek word meaning 'no place,' but also 'good place,' in his seminal novel *Utopia*.[1] In his work, More outlines the social dynamics and philosophical codes of a society.[2] While More was not the first to undertake such a project, he is considered to have begun the genre of utopian thought as it is by focusing on social structures and institutions as opposed to the pastoralism of utopian ideas like Arcadia. More's 1516 idea of utopia is a far cry from what someone living in urban America today might consider utopian. In More's society, women are regarded as less than, less productive members of society, and he has taken it upon himself to dictate even the particulars of the way in which women are to breastfeed their babies.[3] Today, many Americans would view these ideals as misogynistic and patriarchal,

[1] Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, *The Utopia Reader* (New York: NYU P, 1999), 83.

far from utopic. Utopian constructs are thus a product of time, place, and positionality, dependent on the subjective experience of the author and his or her cultural context. In response to the literary genre More created, Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent determine that "the primary characteristic of utopia is its nonexistence combined with a *topos* - a location in time and space - to give verisimilitude."[4] Taking utopia out of the literary and applying politically - in real time and real space - has caused communities or even countries to witness dystopian failures, like those of communist regimes.[5] Thus as a reaction to the 'good place,' *dystopia* or 'bad place' has become a crucial part of utopian thinking. Both hope and danger weigh heavy on the term because in practice, there is no one universal vision of the perfect society. Although he is critical of utopic regimes, Sargent also argues that "while utopians can be dangerous, utopian thinking is essential."[6] Upon examining utopian thinking, we gain cultural insight and imagine possible futures.

Sociologist Krishan Kumar argues that utopia in the West has not been about indulging our wildest fantasies of a 'blissful' state (as the term utopia is often employed in popular culture) but rather about delineating real and possible realities.[7] But Kumar defines utopia as necessarily *not* reality: "All utopias are, by definition, fictions; unlike say historical writing, they deal with possible, not actual worlds. To this extent they are all like imaginative forms of literature."[8] But what happens when the art of utopia is not laid out in literature, which is distanced by text, but dance, which by definition affects the

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[4] Ibid., 1.
[5] Richard Noble, *UTOPIAS* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 13.
[6] Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Necessity of Utopian Thinking: A Cross-National Perspective" in *Thinking Utopia: Steps into Other Worlds* edited by Jörn Rüsen, Michael Fehr, Thomas W. Rieger (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 2.
[7] Krishan Kumar, "Aspects of the Western Utopian Tradition" in *Thinking Utopia: Steps into Other Worlds* edited by Jörn Rüsen, Michael Fehr, Thomas W. Rieger (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 18.
[8] Ibid., 23.

body? The enactment of ideas through forms like theatre and dance in a sense put the forth a different kind of reality than Krishan considers. In dance, there exists a world of artistic action in which ideas are inscribed onto actual bodies. It is true that the significance of utopia is that it remains a 'no place,' that the perfection embodied in the term is unattainable. But it is important to look at more than just textual notions of utopia and to expand the definition of western utopia to include forms that act directly onto bodies, as fields like Performance Studies have begun to do.

The idea of utopia has become a critical conceptual lens with which to examine performance practices. But while performance scholars have opened up the term "utopia" and tend to use the word with some degree of idealism or faith in the art about which they write, scholar Jill Dolan brings Thomas More back into the conversation as a way of acknowledging the "coercive" potential of utopian ideals.[9] It is important that the original sense of the word as a 'no place' and its impossibility remain an active part of the conversation, even when discussing artistic gestures that may seem benevolent. This dissertation will critically examine a selection of U.S. concert dance practices as contributions to the conversation on utopia within Theater, Dance and Performance Studies.

Scholars like Jill Dolan and Jose Esteban Munoz use the idea of utopia to reflect on the impact of performance. In Dolan's book entitled *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*, she "argues that live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and

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[9] Jill Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the Utopian Performative," *Theatre Journal*: 53.3 (2001): 457, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/34872.

imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world."[10] Instead of delving into the traditional western literary meaning of utopia, she uses the term in its more colloquial meaning to denote a sense of "hope" and "humanism."[11] Through a discussion of specific choreographic practices, I use the term utopia, similarly to Dolan, to explore various ways in which artists strive toward social values such as building community or expressing queerness. But I also attend to the definition of utopia in its original sense and in its literary form to delineate specific rules for a social order and acknowledge the complicated positionality of the utopia-maker. The utopias of contemporary dance practices each present a striving toward ideals for the body. I expand on Dolan's idea that only the "fleeting intimations" of live performance hold this utopian vision so that we may instead examine entire practices - ways of living and moving as a dancer - as opposed to limiting the discussion to what is seen on stage. I also complicate her understanding of utopia as necessarily providing a "better world" by examining how utopias, once enacted, might be problematic.

Jose Esteban Munoz is another important scholar who deals with the concept of utopia in relation to performance. Munoz's work *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* views the potential of queer performance to open up futures that do not presently exist.[12] Rather than a "fleeting intimation"[13] or a mere hint at something 'better',[14] Munoz sees queer performance as a "performative," as a "rejection of a here

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[10] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005), 2.
[11] Ibid., 2.
[12] Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York U Press, 2009), 1.
[13] Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 2.
[14] Ibid.

and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world."[15] Dolan focuses on utopian performance as a provider of hope,[16] but Munoz pushes this idea further when he calls performance a necessary political reaction against a present that is just not "enough."[17] Munoz implies that queer utopian performance not only shows us glimpses of the future, but propels us toward that future in concrete ways. I extend Munoz's proposition to the four artists in this dissertation by attending to dance practices that actively seek to transform participants, not just aesthetically, but socially and politically. Anca Giurchescu writes about dance as political to argue that dance ought to be studied in two ways: "dancing as an integral part of a network of social events, and dance as part of a system of knowledge and belief, social behaviour and aesthetic norms and values."[18] Applying Giurchescu's method to the four dance practices in this dissertation, I critique a choreographer's "system of belief" or ideology by analyzing the social effects of a given practice. By calling this "system of belief" distinctly "utopian," I also suggest an element of striving toward in these ideologies that both Dolan and Munoz have articulated.

The idea to continue to examine utopia in contemporary dance came as a result of the political climate in which we currently live. Presently in the U.S., conversations about racism, bigotry, homophobia, and transphobia are heated. Brutal shootings have polarized the country and The Black Lives Matter movement has been co-opted into All Lives Matter in an attempt to invalidate it altogether. In other words, issues of racism are still

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[15] Munoz, *Cruising*, 1.
[16] Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 2.
[17] Munoz, *Cruising,* 1.
[18] Anca Giurchescu, "The Power of Dance and its Social and Political Uses," *Yearbook for Traditional Music*. Vol. 33 (2001): 109.

rampant. Despite the fact that in 2015 gay marriage was made legal under the constitution, there are still people who try to deny gay citizens equal rights and despite the progress made in the LGBTQ community, transgender women are "disproportionately targeted in hate crimes" and are at high risk for suicide.[19] Furthermore, epitomizing a deep racist and misogynist sentiment is the fact that Donald Trump, who openly speaks sexist and racist remarks, is the President of the United States at the time of this writing, rendering discriminatory rhetoric acceptable. As a result of the varying responses to these crucial social issues, the U.S. is severely divided. But in a time of strife and deep conflict, there exists a hope to overcome injustice. For example, millions of people came together for the Women's March on January 21st, 2017 with protest slogans aim at unification, women's rights, and immigration rights. This moment in time is a transformational moment in the social dynamics of bodies, and choreographers and dancers as practitioners of the body are crucial in this transformation.

Contemporary dance practices form ideals that reflect the national conversation occurring around gender, race, and otherness in its many forms. With the body, choreographers can present alternatives to the way in which people react to or behave amongst each other. For example, choreographers like luciana achugar, Miguel Gutierrez, and Jerome Bel work specifically with those who do not have traditional dancer bodies to combat the idea that people should look a certain way. These choreographers push new bodies into the spotlight to be seen and admired. Miguel Gutierrez has been working with queer bodies, outsiders, non-normative bodies, so he says when he comes across a group

[19] Samantha Michaels, "It's Incredibly Scary to be a Transgender Woman of Color Right Now," *Mother Jones* (2015), accessed May 3, 2017, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/06/transgender-women-disproportionately-targeted-violent-hate-crimes.

of young fit dancers it's like he's looking at a group of 'aliens', that his understanding of a what group of dancers looks like is 'forever altered.'[20] Through pushing his own sense of normative bodies, Gutierrez carves out a place for new kinds of bodies to perform. I agree with Sargent that utopian thinking is essential to "social, political, and psychological health,"[21] but I extend that argument about thought into action. I argue that choreographers imagine utopias but also put those utopian values into practice to effect change in both dancers and audience members.

Utopian themes in art provide a sense of the very present in which the artist is working by exposing that which is desired in society but has yet to come to fruition. We see how artists play a role in activating hopes about what a better future can look like and critique what we know in order to move forward. The focus of this dissertation brings attention to one specific art form, American contemporary concert dance, to explore some artistic arguments about the way society should function. In the vein of scholars like Susan Foster, Cynthia Novak, and Thomas DeFrantz who position dance as the embodiment of an argument,[22] I examine the choreographer's dance practice (i.e. pedagogy, process, and performance) as making an argument about how people should behave and interact in the world. While I do insert my own experiences with these practices, I do not critique them from my own perspective of what utopia should look like. Instead, I lay out each individual artist's idea of utopia so that I can unpack the

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[20] Rennie McDougall, "Miguel Gutierrez in conversation with Rennie McDougall on 'Age and Beauty' at New York Live Arts," *Culturebot* (2015), accessed May 3, 2017, http://www.culturebot.org/2015/09/24482/miguel-gutierrez-in-conversation-with-rennie-mcdougall-on-age-and-beauty-at-new-york-live-arts/.

[21] Sargent, "The Necessity of Utopian Thinking: A Cross-National Perspective," 4.

[22] Thomas DeFrantz *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture* (2006), Susan Foster *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (1988) and Cynthia J. Novak *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (1990).

relationship between *their* ideology and *their* practice. For example, when I point out Anna Halprin's lack of diverse participants in her workshop, I am pointing out an inconsistency in her own utopian ideal to bring about a world community. Similarly, when I critique luciana achugar as authoritative, it is only because she has expressed her utopian desire for a non-hierarchical social structure. In other words, my analysis focuses on how the choreographer's version of utopia functions, not my own.

Most writing about dance is about performance, not practice. But there are some important studies that expand our conception of what dance is. Susan Foster's *Reading Dancing* (1986) asks questions of the choreographer's process, rehearsals, and viewer experience in order to form a "composite" understanding of the practice as a whole.[23] This dissertation aims to continue this reading of dance by considering all aspects of a choreographer's practice, both on and off stage, as political and philosophical contributions. To write about dance practices as ideals/argument/philosophy is to propose the notion that dance is not only about what one sees on a stage or in front of a public, and should thus be studied appropriately for its extensive implications about human attitude and community. What does dance have to say about how bodies should exist in the world? To answer this question, I will look at some of the ways in which dance proposes radical existence. Mark Franko sets a precedent for dance to be examined as a radical social form in his work about dance and labor in the 1930s in which he argues that "dance was not on the periphery, but at the center of politics."[24] While the artists in this dissertation remain somewhat on the periphery, their ideals are always politically relevant

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[23] Susan Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1986), 3.
[24] Mark Franko, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (Middletown: Wesleyan, 2002), 7.

as they often directly address issues like hierarchy, race and gender to push the boundaries of normative behavior. They suggest new ways of interacting and they challenge audience members to question their preconceived notions about dance and about people generally. This is what makes their ongoing work important, and what makes their practices, even beyond the stage, crucial to examine.

Since the advent of postmodern dance, many choreographers no longer choose to abide by the techniques and structures that traditional dance techniques abide by.[25] The idea that dance no longer has to look like someone moving their body rhythmically is very different from a traditional notion of dance whereby a set of very specific rules and gestures following from cultural or artistic tradition are upheld. Similar to contemporary art, the conversation has shifted somewhat away from materials and forms and toward practice and concept. In contemporary dance, the choreographer constantly redefines the term "dance" by expanding the form in this way. In a cultural climate where different kinds of bodies are experiencing increased visibility — black, muslim, queer, trans, and so forth — the ideals around how bodies should move or behave are rapidly changing. A choreographer's practice can thus be understood as a set of ideals, an argument about how bodies should move and behave in the world.[26]

Dance is not an isolated art form, it is a bodily and mental training that changes the way dancers, and even audience members, move and behave in society. In addition to having the elements of an abstract philosophy, dance is an action in the world that moves

[25] Even though dance techniques are expanding, funding for traditional techniques like ballet and modern dance remains much stronger, as does public support.

[26] A dance "practice," as opposed to a "performance," is the through line of an artist's work that builds over a lifetime. A practice is how choreographers train themselves and their dancers, the daily and constant underlying style or technique of the choreographer and his/her dancers.

beyond the representational. The ideals of a dance practice can be about awareness, identity, or more traditionally they can be about the physical form of the body, as in ballet. An audience watching a performance experiences awe and admiration for the perfection of the ballerina whose body portrays an element of the sublime in that it is physically trained to be able to achieve movements that the average body cannot. But for the dancers who practice traditional ballet, the form is inherently destructive. Bodies should be skinny so that the dancer's lines are continuous and graceful. Bodies are expected to be silent: one does not speak in a ballet class. And polite: one should land a jump with no sound. Of course, ballet as a form has opened up quite a bit in the last century, including new kinds of body shapes and allowing for new topics to be addressed. Nonetheless, a classical training is still an important part of many dance practices, especially with children enrolled by their parents. Regardless of the change that has occurred in the form, bodies are still asked to behave in a highly restricted manner, so much so that ballet dancers are often recognized as such just walking down the street, posture upright, feet unnaturally turned out.

The example of ballet can make a strong case for the argument that dance is not purely a representational art form. When a little girl takes ballet class, she is often affected by the experience for the rest of her life. There are countless stories of young girls who are told they are too fat or too clumsy or too black to do ballet. Some girls are forced to hear their thump on the floor as they land from a jump, not so silently, and are called out for it in front of everyone. They are forced to wear skin tight outfits as they watch themselves in the mirror and compare themselves to the other girls in the class. And others are forced to wear pink "skintone" tights over their brown legs. A hierarchy is

always present amongst the dancers and they always know their place in the pecking order. The master choreographer is the artist, the dancers his tools; George Balanchine was described as a puppet master, a magician, a genius who breathed life into his dancers. This is not solely an artistic training for the stage, it is a training that dictates how a lady should behave in society. She should be quiet, polite, skinny, highly feminine, and sexualized. Ballerinas train their bodies daily to fit into this particular argument about how the body should be. This is one example of a dance form as argument, an argument about the ideals of the body: not representation but action.

Dance is a unique art form in that it combines the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of an artistic practice with a daily training that changes the mental and physical state of the participant. In other words, the practice forms and molds the artist as the artist engages in it, and out of this exchange comes the work. The potential for dance, then, to change and define bodies and their states of being is endless. In the example of ballet, the body is rigidly formed to be able to perform the specific gestures of ballet. Those gestures then inform the dancer's daily life. For example, when a ballerina enters a room, she has perfectly upright posture, giving off a sense of confidence. She may also have an increased spatial awareness of those around her and light step, giving off a sense of grace. These are key elements in the ballet performance that are not lost when the dancer exits the stage.

As those within the dance field know, as opposed to ballet, "technical" training in contemporary dance can look very different; the contemporary dancer makes choices: to include or exclude pre-existing forms, to appropriate outside forms, to invent new methods. Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettl-Fiol provide a useful definition of the

contemporary dancer as an "eclectic body" that acquires and chooses from a variety of movement techniques, an assemblage of methods (Pilates, Alexander, Yoga, and so forth) appropriated in the 20th Century.[27] In her article "When Train(ing) Derails," Bojana Bauer refers to contemporary dance training as a "supermarket" selection of techniques available to dancers.[28] With such a variety of choice, what kind of body is the contemporary dancer training to develop?

In recent decades, some dance artists have moved away from a strictly movement-oriented training toward a training that promotes versatility, personal voice, mental awareness, and collaboration. Since the 60s, dance has enjoyed the freedom to be extremely technical, or theatrical, or even totally conceptual. Along this trajectory, more and more choreographers are getting their MFAs, learning how to write and speak about their work, forming their own decisions about how bodies should move and leaving behind a formal or technical training for one that is more conducive to expressing the ideas within the particular artist's work. Miguel Gutierrez, a New York-based choreographer, for example, will guide in a standard movement sequence as part of his workshop, but will also spend time training dancers with other skills, such as communicating with an audience.[29] In his performance works, there are often long movement phrases, but also extended periods of dialogue or live music.

Performance artist Marina Abramovic has created dozens of exercises as part of an endurance ritual meant to prepare artists for performance that we can see as one

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[27] Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettl-fiol, *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training* (Champaign: U of Illinois P, 2008), viii-ix.
[28] Bojana Bauer, "When Train(ing) Derails," *A Journal of the Performance Arts*. Volume 14 No 2 (2009), 76, accessed May 4, 2017, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13528160903319570.
[29] Gutierrez spends time having workshop members observe an audience and respond to their energy using various postures and attitudes.

example of bodily training toward artistic ends, whether or not we agree with her strenuous practices. Participants may not eat for days, are asked to be silent, and may be asked to be naked. One exercise involves hours of slowness, others involve tasks such as crossing back and forth over a fence, eating gold, or holding one's breath to deal with the anger that comes along with these tests of endurance (which some might argue edge on physical abuse). She suggests that by "cleaning the house," artists will "clean" their own internal bodies, preparing them not just for Abramovic's museum exhibition, but as artists. One participant in the workshop recalls, "…being physically very vulnerable, because we were naked in front of each other sometimes, I feel like cemented us as a group in a way that we could not do in five meetings where we were talking."[30] I also experienced this vulnerability in Abramovic's 2015 workshop at UCSD, where she required that we navigate the space of the gallery blindfolded for one hour in the presence of a public audience. The feeling of being seen but not being able to see was frustrating and almost felt dreamlike, which tested one's ability to perform without control. Almost immediately, I became extremely dizzy and had to sit in one place, reacting only when others came into contact with me. Fear and anxiety surfaced. The ritual aspect of this training is therefore as much about self-exploration as it is bodily training.

When a choreographer builds a practice, teaches the practice to students, and shares it with the public, that choreographer disseminates his or her philosophy about how bodies should behave in the world. The role of the choreographer is not only to create movement but to guide people in a different way of understanding their bodies and

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[30] "Marina Abramović: Cleaning the House," The Museum of Modern Art, accessed May 3, 2017, https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/MoMA/artist-interview-performance/v/moma-abramovic-cleaning-the-house.

the world around them. Is the body a speaking body? How much can the body interact with other bodies? Does the body have agency in how it moves? These are just a few of the questions that differentiate various dance practices, but each practice abides by its own set of values around these questions. While ballet, hip-hop, modern, and other forms of American dance have rich answers to the above questions, I will focus on the specific community of choreographers coming out of the American postmodern and contemporary traditions who, like the contemporary visual artist, are known for their own particular brand as opposed to an adherence to any one dance tradition. Some choreographers make dances based on research or their interest at the time and then move on to the next. Or, they rearrange or redefine pre-existing techniques. The artists I discuss here, however, have built a set of values that make up an argument about how the body should move and behave, regardless of the formal tenets of a given dance tradition. They teach these values to others thereby creating communities of people who share a way of being in the world. Because these artists innovate entire systems or practices, it is important to discuss their work not only in terms of their performances but also their philosophies.

The artists discussed here come out of a long history of utopian choreographies in the US in the 20th century, choreographies that strive toward self-transformation as way of changing of the world. For example, there are resemblances between the artists discussed in this dissertation and the "founder" of western modern dance Isadora Duncan (1877-1927). Duncan created her own performance practice that broke with the codified techniques of the past and then disseminated this technique to others. (There are still dancers today, a century later, who dance in the Duncan style.) Her style appears to lack

rigor in that the movements are not technically virtuosic, but the concepts behind her style of movement are philosophically rich. Duncan believed that dance was an expression of inner self and so through "changing your behavior" you could better yourself.[31] The goal of the dance was therefore beyond aesthetic value and into the realm of the social, much like the artists in this dissertation who each claim to be making a social impact through their movement practices.

But dancers are not the only practitioners of self-transformation in the choreographies of the past century and in fact there has been constant cross-pollination of practices between dance and other somatic forms. Perhaps the most common of these techniques in our culture is yoga, which was brought into the US in the late 19th century by Vivekananda and made popular by figures like Indra Devi (1899-2002), B.K.S. Iyengar (1918-2014) and Richard Hittleman (1927-1991). In a yoga class, the goal is to position the body in order to quiet the mind, but the language of the class very often describes a more universal effect of the practice, for example that finding inner peace and accepting the yogic teachings of nonviolence will positively affect those around you.[32] Yoga is not just meant to be a daily physical practice but to transform the practitioner in every aspect of life, much like the practices discussed in this dissertation, like Anna Halprin, who claims that changing one's own postures can transform interactions with others and affect one's presence in the world, or Miguel Gutierrez who proposes that through aggressive self-expression, dancers can open up the boundaries of tolerance.

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[31] Ann Daly, "Isadora Duncan's Dance Theory," *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1994), 25.
[32] Yoga teachers in both classes and writings reference the yoga practitioner's effect on community and world peace. Examples include such books as *From Inner Peace to World Peace: A Spiritual Approach to Social Change* (Bhavani Girard and Sandra Kubel) and B.K.S. Iyengar's *Light on Life: The Yoga Journey to Wholeness, Inner Peace, and Ultimate Freedom.*

Through methods of self-transformation, these practitioners aim to transform the world around them.

Somatic practices like Alexander Technique (founded by Frederick Matthias Alexander 1869-1955) and Feldenkrais Method (founded by Moshe Feldenkrais 1904-1984) work toward shifting awareness of the ways in which the practitioner's body behaves in the world in order to transform the practitioner. These techniques are commonly used by dancers to complement their own choreographic systems; for example, Miguel Gutierrez is a Feldenkrais certified teacher who offers lessons in the method. Developing alongside these somatic techniques in the 20th century were therapeutic techniques like that of Fritz Perls (1893-1970) who founded Gestalt Therapy, which intended to use phenomenological awareness to positively transform the practitioner. This particular therapeutic form directly influenced the work of Anna Halprin, who studied with Perls and eventually developed her own method for healing based on those studies. Halprin was also influenced by the work of Moshe Feldenkrais and other forms that sought greater awareness in a process of self-transformation.

The 20th century saw the proliferation of practices that aimed toward self-transformation, toward reconciling the struggles between mind and body, inner world and outer world, in order to make people (both practitioners and audiences) "better" members of society. The dance performer in these practices, then, is meant to be a catalyst for social change. With contemporary choreographers like achugar and Gutierrez, these utopian practices open up to include minority subjects in order to address a new set of issues around bodies that become particularly pressing in the 21st century, such as queerness, diversity, and gender. But while the content of the work may continue to

develop, the utopian goal to re-train bodies for social betterment remains consistent from the 20th and into the 21st century.

Methodologies

The choreographers in this dissertation strive toward utopian ideals by disseminating their philosophies about how bodies ought to behave in the world. One might argue that classical ballet — in the eyes of those who disseminate the form — is an example of a utopian dance practice because it dictates lines and postures for the body that claim a heightened sense of grace and beauty and can only be carried out by certain, 'perfectly designed' bodies. In this way, the choreographer Wayne McGregor could also be considered utopian in that he proposes a new way for the body to move and behave through his animalistic, robot-like choreography that pushes the physical limitations of what bodies can do. In this project, I am not interested in techniques like ballet or McGregor's where the dancer on stage is so far removed from the audience in both skill and proximity, but rather in methods that engage all kinds of bodies, including those of the audience in a connective, interactive conversation. Because I write from the point of view of a dancer and scholar, it was important to have as much access as possible to research the choreographers I selected, so they are all practicing within the U.S.

There were specific criteria for selecting the artists Anna Haprin, Deborah Hay, luciana achugar, and Miguel Gutierrez. First, they each have their own practice that they share on the bodies of others. Each of the four choreographers in this dissertation has a pedagogical approach but more than that, a cohesive practice that continues to develop over time but that has consistent philosophical tenets. For example, for Anna Halprin it is her Life/Art process in which she practices healing and for luciana achugar it is her Pleasure Project in which the boundaries of the body are explored. These practices are structured and teachable and they each dictate a particular way in which bodies should

move and behave. Secondly, in addition to having a cohesive practice and with that, a pedagogical approach, these choreographers make work that they see as moving society forward, as striving toward counter-hegemonic ideals about people and human behavior that affect the way audiences see the world. For example, Miguel Gutierrez casts a gender neutral child in his work *Age & Beauty Part 3*, suggesting that unconventional bodies ought to be seen, heard, and accepted not only in the dance community but in society. Deborah Hay makes work that aims to unravel the social choreographies that have been inflicted on bodies, such as gender distinctions, to find new possibilities for moving. Each artist in this dissertation puts forth her or his own ideals not only toward physical form but toward social change. Thus, the following discussion reaches beyond aesthetic interpretation and into the realm of the social to find meaning in human interaction.

There are many choreographers who do not fit into a discussion of the utopian. At one point in my research, I thought that Yvonne Rainer could be considered a utopian artist for her feminist perspective. But after going through her archival footage and studying her career, she did not fit the criteria for a utopian choreographer. This is for two reasons, the first being that she stopped choreographing in the 70s to take up filmmaking, which meant that she did not develop a cohesive practice beyond her works that would spread onto other dancing bodies. The second reason is that her work did not correspond to a practice in a way that was readable as a philosophy. At the time she was making works in the 60s and 70s, she describes herself as taking in many different kinds of techniques.[33] While her *Trio A* (1966) has been analyzed as feminist for its aversion to

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[33] Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings Are Facts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 95.

the gaze, there is not a through line in her work that would suggest a utopian perspective. So in the end, Rainer did not meet the criteria for a utopian choreographer (although this might change in the coming years as she continues her choreographic practice). In other words, the utopian choreographer must be able to be approached from a holistic perspective that examines practice, pedagogy, and performance for how these elements affect participating bodies.

In 2010, historian Jennifer Homans declared that ballet is dying.[34] She laments that we no longer believe in ballet's ideals, in skill or virtuosity or the divine image.[35] Dance, she argues, "is increasingly polarized: ballet is becoming ever more conventional and conservative, while contemporary experimental dance is retreating to the fringes of an inaccessible avant-garde."[36] For Homans, ballet lacks visionary choreographers and charismatic performers, while contemporary dance lacks connection to a public who has no way of penetrating the form. She notes that with the retirement of ballet departs the values that ballet once upheld, including discipline, rigor, ethical principles, civility, and taste.[37] In response to grim proclamations such as Homans', this project will present an alternative view of the state of contemporary dance. Rejecting its dismissal as an impenetrable, fringe phenomenon, contemporary dance is, to the contrary, asserting itself at the forefront of artistic imagination and inquiry. Performance studies scholar Andre Lepecki explains that our contemporary moment of artistic freedom and experimentation in dance has been largely deemed "down time" by critics who expect a certain flow or

[34] Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), 549.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 550.

mobility (ie technical display) in choreography.[38] But, as Lepecki argues, this is more symptomatic of a lull in dance discourse that has not found a way to adequately address the developments in choreographic practices.[39] While traditional dance calls for traditional dance criticism — analyzing staged performances — this is not adequate for the evaluation of contemporary dance as an art practice that does not necessarily abide by codified movement principles.

In order to study the utopian choreographer it was important to find a methodology that would account for the artist's entire practice. Nadine George-Graves is one of the few scholars to have undertaken an extensive, in-depth study on a contemporary living choreographer's whole practice using participatory and long-term research methods. Her work on Urban Bush Women successfully integrates experiential research to form an understanding of the company that could not have been accessed otherwise. She resists the idea that an objective observer provides "rigor and validity" to research.[40] Rather, she proposes that her years of experience as an "embodied" participant observer gave her the knowledge required for analysis.[41] For example, George-Graves brings into discussion the company's community-based work to show how choreography can translate into "actual problem solving."[42] As a result of the depth of her study, she has solidified the importance of Urban Bush Women and expanded female African American studies, as well as contributed to making dance more accessible. Like George-

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[38] Andre Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*. (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Nadine George-Graves, *Urban Bush Women: Twenty Years of African American Dance Theater, Community Engagement, and Working It Out* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 3.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

Graves' work, which "targeted a wide readership," this project aims to deepen engagement with contemporary dance across a range of fields such as art and sociology that could benefit from its knowledge.[43]

In order to structure my discussion as a participant or non-objective observer, I engage with the subject matter and content of this research through a phenomenological lens based on Sondra Fraleigh's approach to the study of dance. Fraleigh establishes a methodology for engaging with dance that satisfies the experiential quality of witnessing or performing in dance works that moves beyond a purely visual or associative approach. In her 1991 essay entitled "A Vulnerable Glance: Seeing Dance through Phenomenology," Fraleigh explains that this kind of approach relies on "immediate experience" and can describe the experience of both the dancer and the audience.[44] It is not meant to be purely subjective, however, as there should be a universality to the writing that does not assume unique experience.[45] More specifically, this dissertation takes on a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, allowing for "...interchanges among one's own pre-understandings, the text, as well as the traditions and cultural context of the text…"[46] In her discussion of hermeneutic phenomenology, Joann McNamara writes, "The hermeneut does not attempt to reproduce or objectively represent reality but, rather, builds an interpretation via a blueprint of her or his own design, and through logical argumentation."[47] Here McNamara describes a point of view in which interpretation is

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[43] Ibid.
[44] Sondra Fraleigh, "A Vulnerable Glance: Seeing Dance through Phenomenology," *Dance Research Journal* Vol. 23, No. 1 (1991), 11.
[45] Ibid.
[46] This is Joann McNamara's paraphrase of Hans-Georg Gadamer's description of methodology.
[47] Joann McNamara "Dance in the Hermeneutic Circle" in *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 163.

backed by logical argumentation but maintains an understanding that reality that is not fixed, unlike a more scientific or objective approach. These methodologies come out of Fraleigh's larger project to try to carve out an approach to dance that takes into account the positions of the viewers, the dancers, the choreographer and the contexts in which each of these groups exist. Like myself, Fraleigh is a trained dancer who writes about dance in a way that aims to negotiate a non-objective and interpretive but not isolated account of performance based on lived experience. This kind of methodology is specifically useful when writing about dance because it allows meaning to be produced out of ephemeral moments of interaction. For example, when I write about Anna Halprin's pedagogy, I refer to my own experience dancing with her as my teacher. I recognize my own position rather than conceal it in order to deepen our understanding of Halprin's practice, but I also try to step away from my own experience in order to provide evidence for my argument. I use the official notes of the workshop to convey the score for her *Planetary Dance* and I relate the intention of the ritual as I understand it directly from Halprin but I also convey an interpretative analysis of the experience, such as my discomfort in enacting what felt like another culture's ritual. I often talk about a discomfort I feel when watching or participating in the works described, a discomfort that might initially describe my own personal experience of the work but when interrogated further, might also point to a larger issue within ideas of identity politics, appropriation, or personal/public boundaries. This interlacing of lived experience with 'logical argumentation' forms an interpretation that aims toward shared understanding but that also opens up meaning in the works I discuss.

The dissertation is organized into two distinct parts based on the generational difference between artists and their corresponding social concerns. Part One examines the work of two important figures, Anna Halprin (1920) and Deborah Hay (1941), who began their choreographic careers in the postmodern tradition and continue to make work into the contemporary era. In the 1960s, Anna Halprin led a workshop at her home in Northern California where some of the Judson Dance Theater members congregated including Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti. Their interest was in Halprin's method of freeing the body from the restrictions of modernism and her emphasis on improvisation. On the other coast in New York City during this same period, Deborah Hay performed with the Judson group and was influenced by the new definitions and methodologies of dance being built at that time, such as the inclusion of pedestrian movement, verbal scores, and improvisation in dance performance. Both artists went on the develop their own extensive pedagogical and performative techniques alongside their impressive portfolios of choreographed performances. Halprin is well known for her 1965 piece *Parades and Changes* in which dancers become nude on stage, which was hugely controversial in its own time. She is also well known for workshops in which dancers dance freely outdoors and connect as part of a community. Hay is known for early work with untrained dancers and for her Solo Performance Commissioning Project (1998-2012) during which she coached other artists to develop solos. Both Halprin and Hay have devoted their careers to working and collaborating with other artists in addition to making their own staged works. Each choreographer not only expresses her ideals through performance but affects thousands of other dancers through her pedagogical contributions.

In Part Two, I examine two contemporary choreographers, luciana achugar and Miguel Gutierrez (1971), for their utopian ideals about sexuality and queerness that are embodied in their practices. achugar is a Uruguayan born artist living in New York whose work often contains nudity, sexual exploration, and a desire to express the feeling of pleasure. Her sometimes three-hour-long performances encourage dancers and audience members to undergo a transformation toward increased freedom. Gutierrez is known to be very explicit in the way he sends a message through his work, often speaking directly to the audience. He uses nudity and sexual expression to explore ideas of queerness and personal histories. Gutierrez's work appears to straddle the line between performance art, dance and theater as he will often make music on stage, speak, and include other non-traditional dance elements. When he is on stage, Gutierrez is a highly charismatic dance artist who directly and even aggressively expresses his message about how to make the dance world and the world in general a more tolerant place. Each in their own way, Gutierrez and achugar articulate facets of sexual politics that have been on the rise over the past half century. Achugar continues the conversation on feminist ideals about body image and sexual freedom and Gutierrez continues the conversation on LGBTQ rights. In each case, the body without shame is foregrounded.

While the chapters are separated into these distinct parts, there are many ways to find connections between the choreographers in part one and those in part two. For example, Halprin and achugar both use large group ritual dances to convey ideas about how people should engage in community and to start to shift the role of an audience in favor of a fully participatory performance. Whether achugar studied the work of Halprin as an influence was unclear from my conversations with her, yet Halprin certainly laid

the roots for this kind of dance ritual to be accepted in a western concert dance setting. Gutierrez studied with and danced for Deborah Hay, citing Hay as one of his major influences. Halprin and Hay deeply influenced the way contemporary dance was to unfold by addressing themes such as the authority of the choreographer, audience interaction/participation, self-expression, and group dynamics.

[Part One] Chapter 1: Self and Community in the Work of Anna Halprin

Throughout the 1960s, Anna Halprin made dances that went against not only the standards for western concert dance but the political structures of everyday reality and were therefore met with outrage:

> In Italy they threw things at us, but asked us to come back (Four Legged Stool, 1962). They said they had never had such a gorgeous scandal. Everywhere the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop went something violent would happen: shoes were thrown at us; spectators screamed and shouted; we were arrested in New York City because we undressed on stage (Parades & Changes, 1965); an audience member broke a glass lantern on stage and drew blood from a performer (Parades & Changes, 1966, U.C. Berkeley).[48]

Most of this outrage came because one of Halprin's most well-known works *Parades and Changes* features a section where dancers become nude, which was more shocking then than it is today. In 2017, knowledgeable dance audiences can expect to see at least some nudity when attending an experimental dance performance. But at the time, Halprin was imagining what a future dance might look like by returning to past cultures and rituals in which dance, nudity, and real life were closely linked.[49] During this time, Halprin laid the foundation for what was to come of contemporary dance without support from the mainstream. This is to suggest that Halprin tends to operate outside the norm by providing an alternative way of being in the world as an antidote to the cultural climate of her time.

[48] Anna Halprin, "Planetary Dance," *TDR*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (1989), 54.
[49] Ibid., 54.

At the time this is being written, Anna Halprin is now in her late 90s, still dancing and teaching. She has created numerous dance works, written books about her practice, and developed the Tamalpa Institute and a series of workshops devoted to expressive arts therapy. More than her role as a choreographer, Halprin's teachings have been crucial to the development of western concert dance. Her effect is widespread through her workshops and trainings that take place in various locations, but mainly in her space on Mount Tamalpais in Northern California. In the late 1950s at her home on Mount Tamalpais, Halprin held a workshop that Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, and other essential postmodern figures attended. Every evening, participants were invited to improvise. As Sally Banes writes, "Halprin encouraged improvisation, not as a blind flood of expression but as a means to set loose all conceivable movements, gestures, and combinations of anatomical relationships, ignoring connotation, and bypassing habit and preference. Halprin approached improvisation analytically."[50] Improvisation was an essential element of the exploration of new movement and performance possibilities that took off in the 1960s and Halprin's workshop had a profound effect on the Judson Dance Theater members who attended. Breaking the mold of codified technique that ballet and modern dance had made so popular, Halprin's improvisational methods made room for future movements, future possibilities for dance and bodily expression. Rainer, Forti and others inspired by Halprin took with them the tools to change the course of dance history as they redefined dance to include mundane movement and freedom of self-expression.

During the 1960s and 70s Halprin experimented with new ideas about dance and theater. Her descriptions of the goals of three of her works shed light on the utopian

[50] Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance.* (Middletown: Wesleyan, 1987), 22.

quality of her work that is not meant as mere representation but as a means of transformation toward a better, more connected future:

> *Animal Ritual* (1971)
> Intention: to create a new dance based on the stylistic diversity of the multi-ethnic performers. Performed at the American Dance Festival, New London, Connecticut.
> *Trance Dances* (1971-73)
> Intention: to have large groups explore group mind and archetypal movement with no separation between audience and performer. Performed at Dancers' Workshop Studio-Theatre, San Francisco.
> *City Dance* (I976, 1977, I978)
> Intention: to unify performance, environment, and people to achieve a sense of "community." Performed once each year in diverse neighborhood streets of San Francisco.[51]

In these descriptions, Halprin speaks of diversity amongst participants, audience participation, and a striving toward “a sense of community,” all indicating the idea that social change—as opposed to virtuosity or entertainment—was at the forefront of her intentions. In other words, these descriptions touch on the social aspects of her work rather than their technical or formal qualities. In the 1980s, Halprin reflects on her early works:

> The chief intention of these works was to understand how the process of creation and performance could be used to accomplish concrete results: social change, personal growth, physical alignment, and spiritual attunement. This necessarily involved studying the relationships between audience and performers, between a person's life issues and the performance content, between performance skills and life skills. In other words, developing an integrated life/art process.[52]

This life/art process meant that instead of the performer expressing the choreographer’s vision of form and aesthetics, the performer’s own perspective and transformation was central. For this reason, many of Halprin’s works involve the audience *as* performers. An

[51] Halprin, “Planetary Dance,” 56.
[52] Ibid., 56.

emphasis on the audience as a diverse and active player in the dance, as opposed to a mere viewer, reveals Halprin's utopian ideal that dance could be a catalyst for social change. In other words, participation in expressive dance performances could lead to a better understanding of others.

In Halprin's utopian world, everyone is a dancer and everyone can undergo a transformative experience through dance. This is the philosophy behind the Tamalpa Institute which she and her daughter Daria Halprin founded in 1978. Along with workshops all over the country and beyond, the Tamalpa Institute in Northern California hosts training programs designed to teach Halprin's methods to those who can then go back to their communities and teach others. Her pedagogical approach is called the Life/Art Process, a technique designed to explore individuals' own life experiences as artistic expression. Graduates of the institute describe the program as "life changing," meaning beyond an artistic education, Halprin's work functions on a personal level.[53] In the Tamalpa course catalogue the mission reads, "Our guiding purpose is to explore and respond to the question of how the expressive arts might contribute to a more embodied, creative, and participatory world in which art as a healing force is fostered."[54] While it might seem overly idealistic, Halprin's goal is make the world a better place through the healing methods of movement, much like practices such as Alexander technique or Feldenkrais method that are aimed at human improvement.

Despite her role as one of the most influential teachers and choreographers of the 20th century, there is very little written about Halprin in English beyond a handful of

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[53] This information came out of one-on-one conversations with past participants during Halprin's Esalen workshop in 2015.
[54] Tamalpa, "Course Catalogue Level 1, Level 2, & Level 3 Training Programs 2016-2017," accessed May 3, 2017, http://tamalpa.org/wp-content/uploads/catalog2016_2017.pdf.

books mostly written by Halprin herself.[55] As a result, there is difficulty in critiquing pedagogy or that which is not readily categorized as art; her practice is often overlooked as therapy and her work placed in the category of theater. Even when some scholars do attempt to write about the work, they shy away from critical analysis in favor of a more descriptive or historical approach.[56] Scholar Janice Ross writes most critically about Halprin's work, looking at Halprin's use of what she calls "urban ritual" as a contribution to contemporary dance aesthetics.[57] Ross also suggests that dance scholarship in general does not adequately address a choreographer's pedagogy in relation to their choreographic practice.[58] In this chapter and throughout this dissertation, I address the choreographer's practice beyond that which is seen on stage to fill this gap in scholarship.

Through a discussion of Halprin's *Planetary Dance* and her pedagogical approach, this chapter examines her methods for human transformation. Halprin's work is often cited as looking to past cultures and rituals where communities perform dance for specific purposes. While Halprin's work references the past, it is only to look toward a potential future, a utopian vision of peace that is always just out of reach. Halprin's utopianism maintains a constant *striving* toward social betterment that, in its non-dogmatism, resists finality. At the same time, it focuses heavily on self-expression and self-improvement, emphasizing the importance of the individual participant. I argue that Halprin creates a sense of communitas but only through the quest for self-improvement.

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[55] *Moving Toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* (1995), *Returning to Health: With Dance, Movement & Imagery* (2002), *Dance as a Healing Art: Returning to Health with Movement and Imagery* (2000), *Movement Ritual Created and Developed by Anna Halprin and the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop* (1981).
[56] Ursula Schorn, et al., *Anna Halprin: Dance - Process - Form.* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2014.)
[57] Janice Ross, "Anna Halprin's Urban Rituals," *TDR*, Vol. 48, No. 2 , (2004), 49.
[58] Ibid.

This discussion does not concern itself with audience or a stage but rather with experience of participating in Halprin's practice first-hand.

In his 1966 book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Turner differentiates between the structured hierarchy of political societies and the less structured equality of moments of community or communitas.[59] He further differentiates a type of communitas he calls "existential or spontaneous communitas" which signified for him "approximately what the hippies today would call 'a happening.'"[60] This sort of "liminal" occurrence does not refer to a social system or a society at large but is rather a rite or ritual meant as "a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person's being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared."[61] This ritual is done among individuals who for that liminal time share equal status, as opposed to the general social structure in which hierarchy separates them. This makes the ritual a non-normative moment outside political systems. In thinking about Halprin's relationship to communitas, it is useful to consider her work as beyond the scope of normal political or social systems that we abide by in our daily lives. Rather, as Turner describes, these rituals happen *in conjunction* with our structured lives.[62] Halprin's utopian ideal is meant to complement whatever system we might live in with a liminal experience that people can take back to their normal daily lives but that does not dictate their daily lives in any kind of dogmatic way. It is instead simply meant as an augmentation to reality that

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[59] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Jersey: Aldine Transaction, 1995), 360.
[60] Ibid., 132.
[61] Ibid., 138.
[62] Ibid., 373.

transforms perspective through that which is "profoundly communal and shared."[63] Halprin's work *The Planetary Dance* aims to achieve this sense of communitas amongst participants.

Halprin's life work is concerned with community formation and personal and public healing. In 1987, she created *The Planetary Dance* (1987-present), a piece that takes place in various locations around the world simultaneously on a chosen day. The initial piece began in Halprin's community on Mount Tamalpais following news of a trail killer who was murdering women. To "reclaim the mountain," Halprin led people around to do various rituals to cleanse the space. Halprin then expanded this dance to make it a global piece by adding different themes and purposes, always toward healing. Since the 1980s, *The Planetary Dance* has been performed hundreds of times around the world. Well into her 90s, Halprin still gathers people together for *The Planetary Dance* in her workshops and with her community on Mount Tamalpais. The goal of the dance is to bring people together for peace, "peace between people, peace between nations, peace with the planet."[64] To perform *The Planetary Dance*, a letter goes out to participants around the world with instructions for the dance. Halprin's score marks the time of day, the intentions of the piece, variations that can take place, allows for questions and concerns, and specifies documentation.[65] The score also alludes to the fact that the participant is both performer and audience member and can be examined and reformed with each iteration to give more agency to participants. Halprin's aim is to make a world

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[63] Ibid., 138.
[64] Anna Halprin, "Anna Halprin About Planetary Dance," YouTube, 2016, accessed May 3, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtgNjVGttQc.
[65] Anna Halprin, *Moving Toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance*. (Middletown: Wesleyan, 1995), 232-233.

community dance for peace in which the hierarchy of the choreographer has no place. The function of participants is not to observe but to intervene socially.

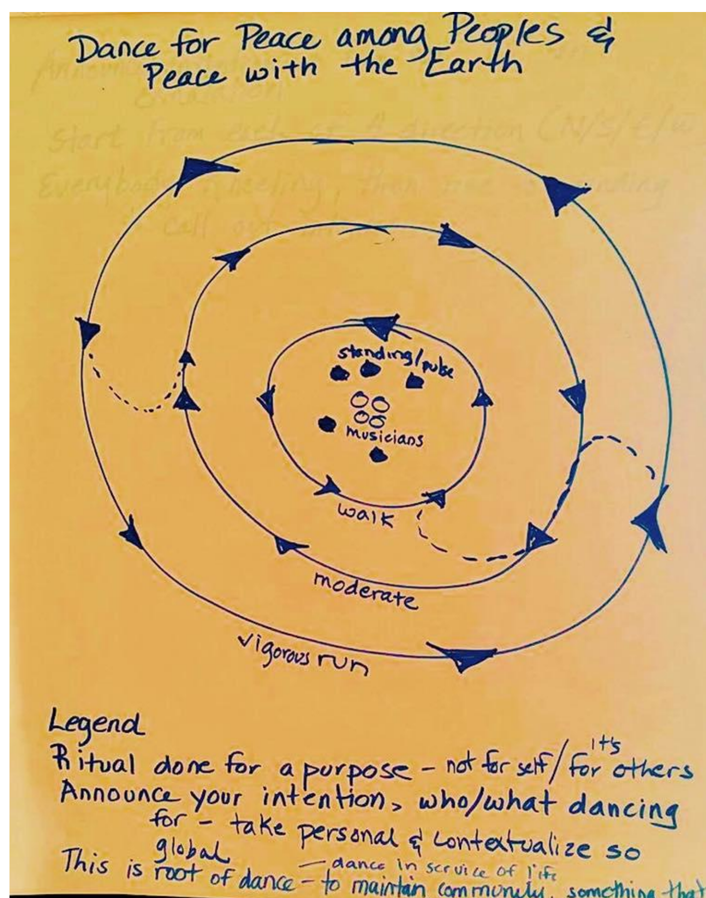

Figure 1.1: Anna Halprin, *Dance for Peace Among Peoples & Peace with the Earth*

For the structure of the dance, a group of people (dancers and/or non-dancers) form three concentric circles moving in opposite directions. The inner circle walks, the next circles walks quickly, and the outer circle jogs. In the midst of performing in these circles, one feels an almost childlike excitement at the game of keeping up with the pace of the group as musicians beat loudly on various types of drums in the center of the circle. The dance is aesthetically similar to a Native American ritual with the constant pulse of the drum and chanting. The first time I participated in a

Planetary Dance I recall being embarrassed because those around me were mimicking a cultural dance that was not theirs. On the other hand, the dance has such clearly positive intentions that it becomes celebratory and reverent. Before beginning the run each person stands up and shouts out what or who they are running for, an act that is supposed to put personal intention toward the change that is meant to take place, to make the dance about someone or something other than oneself. The circular shapes, the music, and the attention given to individuals are all part of the ritual element of the work, which is, much like prayer, meant to facilitate change.

The ritual intention of the work places it apart from the modern dance tradition (under which Halprin was trained), which employs the stage to separate the art space from the audience and which treats art as something to be gazed upon as an aesthetic or representational display. Halprin's ritual, on the other hand, removes the stage and makes the performance entirely about the participants themselves without the gaze of an audience. The work is not for sale and there is no way to keep track of when or where it is carried out, having been ongoing for more than 30 years. The work relies on experience as its essential element with no place in the market and no set formal attributes. Showing resemblance to a Happening and inspiring some of the same interactive qualities as Relational Art, Halprin's work blurs the lines between life and art, often times resisting the category of art altogether. During the 1950s and 60s Halprin and Allan Kaprow were working on opposite sides of the country, Halprin on her rituals and Kaprow on his Happenings, and both on their writing and pedagogy. Kaprow's Happenings relied on audience participation, open scores, a non-gallery setting, and an energy outside the art market, similar to Halprin's work. There was something about

contemporaneous art that was not satisfying either Halprin or Kaprow's need for a connection to everyday life.

By removing the stage and positioning audience as performers, Halprin creates an environment where the transformational experience of the participant is foregrounded. Scholar Janice Ross writes about Halprin's work *The Five-Legged Stool* as what she calls an "urban ritual," an activist, kinesthetic experience whereby the choreographer acts as witness to the work.[66] This argument about the choreographer as witness can be applied to *The Planetary Dance* as well. One finds that Halprin speaks only at the beginning of the ritual, explaining the circular structure, the directions for calling out intentions, and big picture goals of the work. Then, she migrates to the center of the circle and lets the group take over. In the two times I have participated in *The Planetary Dance*, there was never a point when Halprin made corrections or communicated with anyone in the group to make any changes. Instead, she simply witnesses the group dynamic. Halprin relinquishes her power as choreographer even more when she sends this score around the world. Since the 1980s, the score has been performed hundreds of times in many different countries around the world where Halpin herself is not present. Not only does Halprin give her dance away, she has created a dance that everyone can do. Trained dancer, non-trained dancer, disabled, old, young, and so forth… this is a dance presumably for everyone, by anyone.

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[66] Ross, "Urban Rituals," 49.

Figure 1.2: Anna Halprin, *Planetary Dance*

In the above image, we see the circular structure of the ritual as a container where focus is led inward toward the musicians and the other participants as opposed to outward, which is the traditional direction in which dancers perform. As we can see from the image, there is no audience standing by to watch. Instead, everyone present is part of the piece, whether they run or stand. This again shows the inclusive nature of the performance, where even the very elderly (Halprin herself still participates at age 96) are as much a part of the dance as anyone. From the picture we might also note the outdoor location of the work. But the work is also held indoors, revealing once again that the ritual is not meant to be watched but to be experienced, regardless of backdrop or site. This is very different from the specificity of some staged dance works in which backdrops or props are crucial to the aesthetic intention of the work.

Before beginning the run, participants are asked to stand up and shout what or who they are running for (a friend who is ill, a child who is suffering). Halprin does not dictate the personal meaning of the dance but instead gives each participant creative agency in the work. This is slightly different from the ancient rituals to ask for rain or crops, or coming of age rituals, dances that are meant for a specific purpose. Halprin herself likens her dance to these cultural and social dances around the world when she notes the importance of the collective force in making the ritual significant.[67] This collective mentality, the force of the large group, could make dance of this kind potentially coercive.[68] But Halprin claims that through a flexible score, she maintains a non-authoritative role in the ritual.[69] In an excerpt from the directions sent out for *The Planetary Dance*, Halprin writes, "within the score, we encourage you to explore narrations appropriate to your group or culture," opening the score up to possibilities outside the scope of Halprin's knowledge or expertise.[70]

While the community ritual brings people together, there are also ways in which the representation of self is made central. For example, in the photo above and in both iterations of *The Planetary Dance* I performed in, the group was made up of mostly middle-aged white women. The comfort that comes along with being around like individuals makes a dance like this much easier to fulfill without ever going outside of one's own sphere. In other words, feeling a sense of community with those who are already a part of your social group does not foster new communities, but rather

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[67] Halprin, *Moving Toward Life,* 229.
[68] Naomi Jackson, et al. Eds. *Dance, Human Rights, and Social Justice: Dignity in Motion* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008), xv.
[69] Halprin, *Moving Toward Life*, 229.
[70] Ibid., 233.

potentially re-solidifies divisions in class, race, and gender. Both times I participated in *The Planetary Dance*, participants broke into spontaneous noises and songs and the circles got messy, nonetheless Halprin stayed out of it by remaining an active participant but never asserting authority. While Halprin does stay out of it, the chanting, tribal movements, and ecstatic expressions were strikingly similar between the two groups. It felt as though people were in the know about what the ritual should look like and followed that knowledge accordingly, not allowing the group dynamic to take on a life of its own but rather encouraging individuals to enact their preconceived notions of the ritual. There was a certain pattern of self-release, of letting out loud sounds in order to relieve oneself of pain. Even in the beginning of the dance, when each participant stands up to shout their intention, participants are revealing their own personal stakes. As a result of this emphasis on self-healing, during the run certain participants start to stand out for their pronounced expressions of self. So while the score is open-ended enough to allow Halprin to slink into the center and become part of the group, creating a more egalitarian ritual, the group makeup and its dynamic consistently return to the self as the center of the project. If Halprin's goal with this dance is world peace, it is actually practiced here through the focus on the betterment of oneself as an individual.

Whereas my experience of Halprin's work has been within California, there are many versions of her work that reach far beyond the U.S. For example, Tamalpa graduate and American expatriate Dana Swain took the practice and *The Planetary Dance* to her

then home in Angola, Africa to try to connect with the people there and create peace within their communities.[71] Swain records:

> During the Earth Run portion of the dance, kids dedicated their run to the women of Angola, to the children who couldn't afford going to school that year, to adequate health care, and many other deeply relevant issues… At the end of the run, the kids sat back to back, and two kids who'd had a bit of a rivalry going during the workshop spontaneously spoke out a prayer: One asking for forgiveness, and the other granting his forgiveness.[72]

Here we see a more pointed gesture toward community uplifting that is not carried out by Halprin herself, but rather translated through an intermediary. In this case, an educational or community-building intention is prioritized over artistic production. It thus becomes challenging to critique artistic value where the creator is not the facilitator and the participants are children the author of the work has never been in contact with. Unlike Halprin, Swain makes no mention of the choreographic purpose of her work, but rather focuses solely on its social mission. In fact, Swain is not a practicing choreographer or dancer but an arts facilitator. Based on Swain's positionality, how does the Angola performance fit into realm of art historical critique?

Halprin's *Planetary Dance* can be viewed in relation to other socially engaged art practices and fits into a larger conversation in art criticism about the implications of community-based art. Claire Bishop's 2006 *Artforum* article "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents" critiques the genre of community-based or socially engaged art in response to scholars Miwon Kwon, Grant Kester, and Nicolas Bourriaud. Bishop argues that the conversation on socially engaged art has moved toward a critique of the ethical in the processes by which artists work at the expense of a critical art

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[71] Dana Swain, "Dancing for Peace in Luanda, Angola, Africa: A Tamalpa Leadership Training Project," 1. Accessed May 5, 2017. http://tamalpa.org/wp-content/uploads/Swain_Packard-1.pdf.
[72] Ibid., 3.

discourse.[73] She takes issue with art that is "valued for its truthfulness and educational efficacy rather than for inviting us… to confront darker, more painfully complicated considerations of our predicament."[74] Halprin's project becomes blurry as it turns from a choreographic structure with a movement score and a distinct style (California) into a therapeutic ritual for children (Angola). Enactments of *The Planetary Dance* do not always hold together as artistic gestures available for critique and they sometimes operate solely, to use Bishop's phrase, on their "good intentions."[75] Although one could argue that the Angola performance is art, one might also struggle to find value in critiquing it because it does not "fulfill the promise of antinomy" that Bishop finds so crucial to the place of art.[76] But Bishop's brief examination of socially engaged practices does not account for dance, a form that lends itself to a different model of critique altogether due to its inherent embodiment. I argue throughout this dissertation that the social and ethical attributes of dance can be critiqued even with their "good intentions" and that those (utopian) intentions make the processes themselves important to study. While many aspects of Halprin's process resist a place in critical discourse, such as the many offshoots of her methods by practitioners worldwide, there is value in critiquing her ideals. The Angola performance can be considered part of Halprin's larger, worldwide social choreography and is pertinent in a Dance and Performance Studies discussion of how Halprin's work behaves in the world.

One might look closer at the result of Halprin's artistic goal to transform participants. Richard Schechner argues, "Performance is amoral, as useful to tyrants as to

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[73] Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," *Artforum* (February 2006), 180.
[74] Ibid., 183.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.

those who practice guerilla theatre. This amorality comes from performance's subject, transformation: the startling ability of human beings to create themselves, to change, to become—for worse or better—what they ordinarily are not."[77] Here, Schechner reads transformation as a potentially dangerous tool. Thinking about Bishop's dismissal of community-based art that relies solely on its "good intentions," we might approach the subject of transformation differently to bring Angola back into a critical conversation. For example, the Angola performance sheds light on the problematic attitude that Halprin holds the answer to betterment for the world through her training. One might pursue the argument that the Angola workshop and performance simultaneously imposes Western culture and devalues native ritual. Dare Arowolo argues that because of colonial destruction, "African ways of doing things became primitive, archaic and regrettably unacceptable in public domain."[78] In some ways, teaching Halprin's methods ignores the means Africans have developed to promote community, for example their own dance rituals. Swain describes the extreme poverty she witnessed in Angola and writes "I knew how movement and dance set my heart free, and I felt that if I could connect on that level with people in Angola, I'd be on my way to finding a healing place for them, and for myself."[79] While "good intentions" run through this sentiment, Swain positions herself as the bearer of a "frontline civilization"[80] and once again positions herself at the center of the project. To return to Schechner's warning about the power of performance to transform people, the Swain project seems to straddle a difficult line. On the other side of

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[77] Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*. (London: Routledge, 1993), 1.
[78] Dare Arowolo, "The Effects of Western Civilisation and Culture on Africa," *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences,* Volume 1, No. 1. (2010), 2.
[79] Swain, "Dancing for Peace," 1.
[80] Arowolo, "The Effects of Western Civilisation," 2.

that line, Swain does seem to make a positive change on the lives of children she works with and in that sense she does in fact accomplish spreading peace in the world. Someone who devotes herself to helping people, Swain works toward Halprin's mission to effect positive change.

Despite its influence and action around the world, Halprin's practice is non-dogmatic in the sense that participants need not totally re-form themselves in Halprin's image (such as the case with classical ballet). It was common in the 20th century for choreographers like Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham to develop schools of dance to teach their technique to the younger generations and train them to join the choreographer's company. But this is a modernist phenomenon that goes along with the company structure and has lost its use for many contemporary choreographers who no longer abide by the company model and who are instead free to teach workshops all over the world. In the 1950s, Halprin shifted the institute model and began teaching students who would come to her home in Northern California. Instead of preparing them for a company, she would teach them tools and techniques that they could incorporate into their own artistic practices. The purpose of the technique was not to codify a performance style, but to, much like the goal of *The Planetary Dance*, spark transformation and growth in the practitioner as an individual. She calls her technique the Life/Art Process, a therapeutic form she developed out of her work with Fritz Perls and from her experience battling cancer.

The Life/Art Process is influenced by collaborations with specialists in the fields of dance, therapy, education, architecture, and art and is "an approach based on working

with peoples' own life experiences as the utmost source for artistic expression."[81] The goal of the method is to be "creative, healing and transformative" to both the individual and communities.[82] In this way, the technique is meant to act not only on the artistic aspect of a person's life but on his or her personal life as well. Dolan argues that performance has the capacity to deliver "fleeting intimations of a better world."[83] But while an audience merely watches these intimations, it is the dancers themselves that experience them, and so Halprin's mission does not focus on the end result (the performance) but rather on the transformative experience of the dancer who need not even be a professional. This training program, then, is intended not to represent moments of a future, better world on stage or for any particular duration, but rather to act directly on participants as a shift in their understanding of themselves. While Dolan focuses solely on performance as the utopian event, the utopia from the point of view of the audience, I look at the ways in which Halprin's utopia operates on participants themselves through her rituals, trainings and workshops from the inside out to create transformation and growth in striving toward a sense of communitas.

In what follows, I employ Tamalpa Institute's website to examine the pedagogical philosophy of the Life/Art Process and then provide an account of my own experience participating in one of Halprin's workshops at Esalen in Big Sur, California, in the summer of 2015. My aim is to understand Halprin's intentions for the practice and then provide an analysis of the practice itself. On the Tamalpa website, Halprin lists the following philosophical tenets pertaining to the Life/Art Process:

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[81] "Our History," Tamalpa Institute website, accessed May 5, 2017, http://www.tamalpa.org/about-us/our-history/.
[82] Tamalpa, "Course Catalog," 5.
[83] Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 2.

> -Our bodies are vehicles of awareness.
> -There is a relationship and interplay between the physical body, emotions, and mental/imaginal realms.
> -Body sensations, postures, and gestures reflect our history, our culture and our current ways of being.
> -When we engage in expressive movement/dance and the expressive arts, the ongoing themes and patterns from our lives are revealed.
> -When we work on our art (a dance, drawing, poem, song or performance), we are also working on something in our lives.
> -The symbols we create in our art contain valuable messages which speak to the circumstances of our lives.
> -The ways we work as artists teach us about the ways we relate to ourselves, others, and the world.
> -When we enact positive visions through our art, we create images and models that can become guiding forces in our lives.
> -It is in our art that we find expression for that which disturbs us and for that which we want to celebrate. As we learn how to work with the principles of creativity and the practice of the arts, we are able to apply what we learn to all aspects of our lives.[84]

Throughout this manifesto is the idea that art and life are inherently connected and that we can use art to become more aware of, and even change, aspects of our lives and our relationships with others. The focus of Halprin's philosophy is self-expression, the improvement of oneself based on the techniques of the practice. The tenets above not only describe a connection between art making and life transformation, but in so doing imply the making of a better future. There is a forward-moving idea about this process, an idea that art can cause growth, "enact[ing] positive visions." The above mission also addresses the artist directly, as opposed to addressing performance as it relates to an audience. For Halprin, the interest is within the participant, not in watching art happen, but in transformation through art making. This focus on the participant is crucial to a study of Halprin's work: whereas with her choreographic works we might study them

[84] "Our Process," Tamalpa Institute website, accessed May 5, 2017, http://www.tamalpa.org/about-us/our-process/.

from the point of view of the viewer, Halprin's pedagogy must be examined from the point of view of the dancer/participant as a catalyst for change.

At her workshop in Esalen, Halprin spends five days sharing her work with a large group of participants. During this time, Halprin's aid takes notes on a board recording each exercise. Esalen is a retreat center in Big Sur for people to come and experience an alternative lifestyle, take a workshop, or just simply relax. Halprin comes in the summer each year to teach her workshop in this particular environment as Halprin's work shares many of the same tenets of Esalen's philosophy. Just like Halprin's practice, Esalen is a place where everyone is supposed to be treated equally, community-building is central, and respect for each other and the land is paramount. In 2015, I attended a five-day workshop at Esalen with Anna and Daria Halprin. During the retreat, I participated as a dancer but tried to maintain a critical eye knowing that I would later write about Halprin's practice.

As an overall description of the workshop, one might say that it moved from internal, minute explorations within one's own body outward toward large group performance by the end of the course. The workshop therefore aimed to first create a transformation within each participant to then nurture communication and cooperation among the entire group. For example, one of the very first exercises consisted of sitting up and slowly rolling down one vertebrae at a time, then slowly rolling back up to seated. Spending about an hour doing this simple exercise, we began to become aware of our own anatomical structure, balance, and muscle simply from our own experience of our bodies. Then, during the middle of the workshop, Halprin asked us to work in pairs, doing exercises that tested our emotional states of vulnerability by working with

polarities. At the end of the workshop, Halprin presented the entire group with a score in which groups of people would come to the center of the room to improvise with other participants while the rest of the group observed as audience. Finally, Halprin had the entire workshop perform *The Planetary Dance*. Working from the individual to the large group, Halprin's methods aim to transform individuals toward greater capacity for communication and cooperation with the community at large.

One of the individual exercises Halprin always includes in her workshops is drawing. Participants draw one self-portrait at the very beginning of the course and one at the very end. The idea is that the participant will have undergone a transformation from beginning to end during which time he or she will have become more aware and more open. The intention behind the portraits is twofold, at once a marker for self-transformation and a selling point for the efficacy of the Life/Art Process. While I have acknowledged Halprin's position outside the art market, there is an economic exchange within her practice, a sense of getting one's money worth that arises from the before-and-after portraits. During a slideshow presentation, Halprin shows images of before-and-after drawings of her past participants. Some of them are remarkable, even miraculous, where they might begin without any sense of color or shape and end in an elaborate and fully realized image. In the workshop I participated in, the before and after portraits were more subtle, yet in each image we could all see change and transformation.

The below image is taken from Elizabeth Coleman's article describing her two-day workshop with Halprin as published in *Art Animal*.[85] The picture shows two images,

[85] Elizabeth Coleman, "Transformative Dance Workshop with Anna Halprin," *Art Animal* (2012), accessed April 27, 2017.

one on the left at the start of the workshop and one on the right at the very end. It should be noted that after drawing the first portrait, participants choose three words to describe their image and then dance or enact these words for a small group of people, taking time to use their images and explore meaning in them. Coleman's first portrait shows her inside a womb tangled in the roots of a tree. She is not connected with the earth, but rather smothered by it, and only the stars in the sky show hope of escape. Her posture is fetal, she is small in size and completely closed in on herself, relegated back to a time before she was part of the world. The second image, however, shows a remarkable shift in attitude. No longer trapped within a womb, her face is the central focus of the image. She breathes fiery air and the red circles around her throat connote her strong voice. Lines of energy radiate from her face and heart as if to show connection and communication with the world around her. Her mouth is open, rather than closed, and she even shows a slight smile. The expression of worry that plagued her first image is no longer present. Having seen hundreds of before and after images, and having drawn two sets myself, this kind of shift in representation seems to be the norm. Most participants start the workshop unable to express themselves and end the workshop significantly more open, connected to their own breath, and owning their own creative strength. But the drawing exercise as an example here is not meant to prove the efficacy of Halprin's workshop, rather to note the goal or the philosophical underpinning of a process that works toward transformation, toward a future self that breaks with the past in some way.

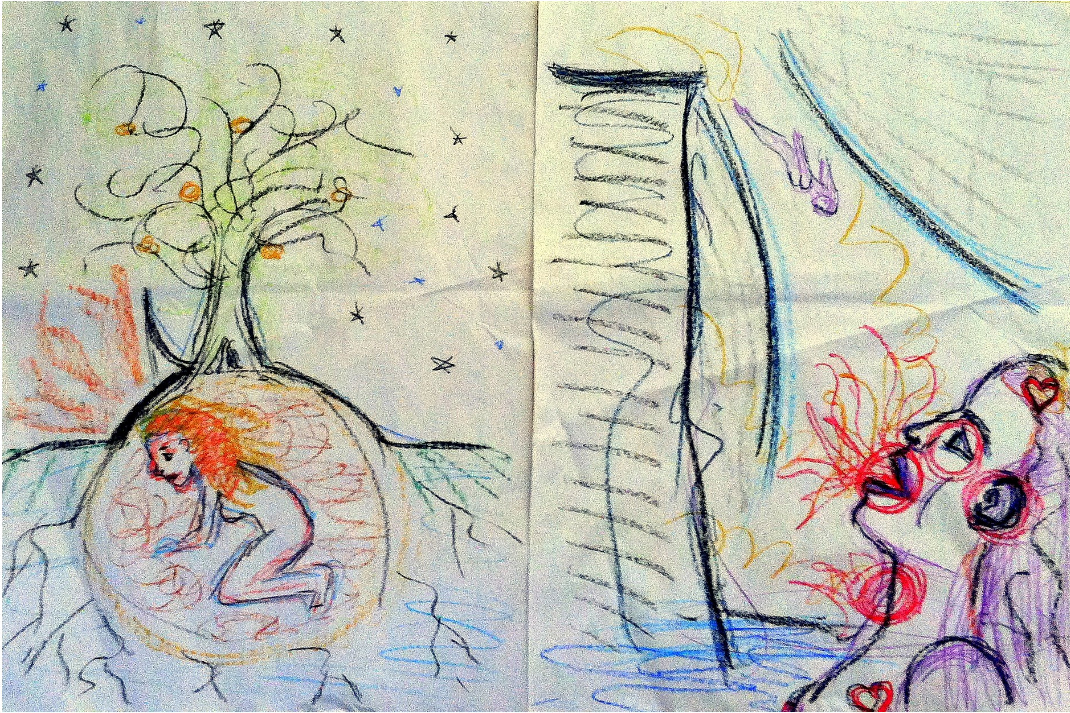

Figure 1.3: Elizabeth Coleman, *Art Animal*, 2012

A slightly more extroverted exercise Halprin works with is the practice of polarities such as contract/release, up/down, and open/close. In the below image of the original notes taken at the Esalen workshop, they show a connection between the physical and the emotional. When you stand with your head sunken down and your shoulders contracted, how is that a different emotional experience than when you stand with your head raised high and your heart beaming forward? These are the kinds of questions Halprin asks participants to explore. For example, Halprin asks the group to collapse the spine and then walk around the room muttering to oneself and others, seeing how this posture makes one feel emotionally and mentally. Then, she asks participants to walk around the room with their spines extended and to stop and have conversations with people. Participants are meant to become aware of the ways in which their posture affects their interpersonal relationships. This is not a training for artistic representation, but

rather a training for human interaction in the world. It is utopian in its effort to train bodies to behave more sociably with others, becoming friendlier and more confident members of society.

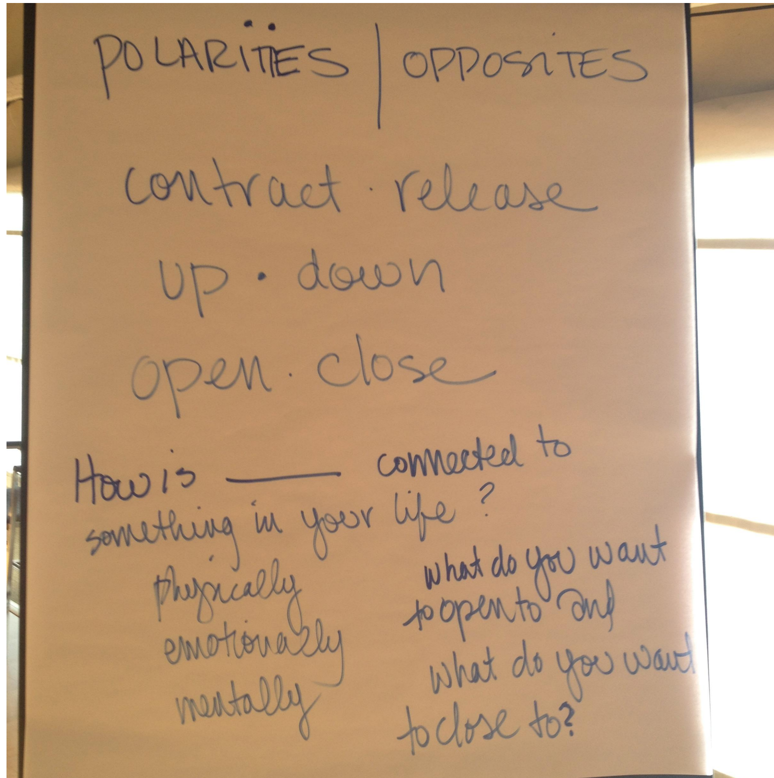

Figure 1.4: Official notes from Anna Halprin's Esalen workshop 2015

The workshop culminates in a performance where participants take on the role of performer and audience. The idea for this performance is to use the tools of interaction and awareness with the group to make short, fully improvised dances. The goal of the performance is share creatively with the community. On the Tamalpa Institute website, performance is defined as "a metaphor for coming forward, coming out, being seen, communicating with others with all of our senses. We meet stage fright and excitement, our inhibitions and breakthroughs, meeting the eyes of the world, connecting the personal story with the collective story. Can we stay present and authentic? How are the witnesses

moved?"[86] Ideally, the performer stays 'present and authentic,' meaning ego does not take over, but rather he or she performs in relation to the best interest of the group. But this is where the disconnect happens between the exercises and rituals of practice and the heightened phenomena of performance. In performance, the performer becomes self-aware of a persona he or she is trying to project, and the eyes of the audience affect his or her choices. Charisma and stage presence also affect the experience of the viewer. In this performance, some of the participants were trying to be funny and others tried to steal away all the attention. One woman got up on top of a chair and began making sexual sounds, clearly moving all attention toward herself. Was this authentic expression or the performance of narcissism? When practiced on a personal and interpersonal level, Halprin's method affects personal growth and transformation toward the betterment of community, but when performed for an audience, the human qualities of self-concern kick in and the methods no longer serve their purpose. This disparity is perhaps why some of Halprin's staged works have been overlooked, or as Gabriele Wittmann puts it, have been "problematic" and have not quite "worked artistically."[87]

A crucial component of the Esalen workshop operates through the social culture of the place itself. By holding workshops at Esalen, Halprin adds a layer of community to her process as Esalen is a utopian community setting in its own right. Halprin has been teaching there during the summers at since 1975. Founded in 1962, Esalen is a retreat center located in Big Sur, California. Since its inception, Esalen has hosted alternative educational workshops and is home to hot springs where people are free to walk around

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[86] "Our Tools," Tamalpa Institute website, accessed May 3, 2017, http://www.tamalpa.org/about-us/our-tools/.

[87] Schorn, et al., *Anna Halprin: Dance - Process – Form,* 94.

naked. There is a dining hall serving buffet food cafeteria style and people mostly eat together at communal tables. Most visitors sleep in bunk bed rooms or on sleeping bags next to each other. The site itself is stunningly beautiful: grassy lawns on cliffs overlooking the ocean. There is a garden from which the cooks get their vegetables. In short, the place is idyllic and highly community-oriented, even though it may be lacking in diversity.

When attending Halprin's workshop in the setting of Esalen, participants get an immersive experience of communitas in every aspect of living. Participants see each other naked in the hot springs, eat together, sleep in the same room, walk to class together, and then move through Halprin's exercises with a greater sense of who the other participants are as people. A temporary community is built, much like that of summer camp. In our time of globalization and technological advancements, community-formation is becoming much more disconnected from actual bodies and placed on much larger scales, such as through social media or video games. It is rare to be in a place where cell phones are not visible, even in schools. In this way, by holding her workshops at Esalen, Halprin suggests that her practice is intimately linked with an alternative way of being and interacting in the world based on face-to-face connection with people.

At the same time, the retreat at Esalen is a luxury in which many working people or people with families would not be able to participate. Shutting down and disconnecting from the world is not something everyone is able to do while still supporting themselves and their families, so access to this alternative way of life is extremely limited. Esalen is a place that must be sought out; it is difficult to get to and expensive to stay at. Very different from an urban landscape in which people from all walks of life can be

participants, Esalen is highly exclusive. Nonetheless, Halprin's books and dance scores are made accessible to those interested around the world, and practitioners who train with Halprin can then hold workshops classes in their own communities, rendering the practice much more inclusive and far-reaching than the Esalen retreat would suggest. But in creating a method that aims to augment daily life as opposed to fit into it, Halprin's practice, like therapy, is one in which the participant must have the time and money to spend on self-improvement. The techniques Halprin uses are meant for each participant to be better able to participate in and connect with the world, but even more so to connect with their own artistic expression. We might consider to what extent the practice promotes community-oriented or self-profiting ideals.

Participating in Halprin's workshops or her *Planetary Dance* does not impose a given technique onto the body but instead provides various ways outside our normal societal structures with which to connect. In other words, after having undergone multiple experiences working with Halprin, hers is not a practice that dictates how my body should move long term. There were no visual cues that led my body into a particular way of being. Instead, what I gained were tools with which to practice self-expression and awareness when drawn upon. The connections that were fostered through group exercises and dances became social interactions much more akin to real life situations than to mechanisms of performance. Very different from the concert dance artist whose main goal is to create a practice for the purpose of performance, of sharing and connecting with an audience, the value in Halprin's work lies in its attention to the daily lives of participants. The therapeutic and inclusive nature of the work reflects the desire to operate outside normal structures by striving toward deep connections that form a sense

of communitas. That said, the desire to become adept at self-expression is both a luxury and a performance of ego that does not always enhance community structures. Utopian ideals are thus consistently compromised by the self-aggrandizement or exclusivity that occurs in and around the practice.

Chapter 2: Choreographic Structures in the Work of Deborah Hay

My first encounter with Deborah Hay's work was through my own dance teacher, Eric Geiger (UCSD), who worked with Hay on the production of a solo and who uses Hay's philosophy as part of his teaching methods. As I read about words and phrases Hay uses in her workshops, they are familiar to me on a kinesthetic level from my experience dancing in Geiger's class. For example, Geiger asks students to "invite being seen" or to "practice non-attachment" or to "be here now," lines passed down directly through Hay and into my dance vocabulary. This is to say that Hay's influence reaches far beyond an audience viewing a work on stage, but has come to affect the way many people teach and think about dance. It is important, then, to study her philosophy for how people should move.

Deborah Hay is known amongst the dance community not only as a choreographer but as a mentor. Over the past half century, Hay has developed a practice that has influenced many of the important choreographers of our time. She has created numerous evening length works for the stage but has also developed her own pedagogical methods for training both dancers and non-dancers alike. Hay, like Anna Halprin, is well-known for her work with other dancer/artists through teaching them her methods for performance. To shed light on her work, Hay has written three books about her process entitled *Lamb at the Alter* (1994), *My Body, The Buddhist* (2000), and *Using the Sky: A Dance* (2016). I use Hay's own writing carefully with an understanding that her words are not a definitive account of her work. On the other hand, I suggest the importance of examining Hay's words due to the fact that language is a crucial component of Hay's practice. Hay's process and pedagogical approach are largely based on linguistic

directions in the form of questions or scores that can then be translated into movement. In order to address aspects of Hay's process and pedagogy, I will examine her Solo Performance Commissioning Project and her performance and score for the work entitled *No Time To Fly* (2010). In her Solo Performance Commissioning Project, Hay works with artists to develop their own performance of a solo work Hay has choreographed. In her work *No Time To Fly*, I examine both the performance and its score to look at the ways in which Hay's philosophy is manifested through her performances.

Literature on Deborah Hay and her work is not as prolific as one might assume based on Hay's influential status in the history of dance and performance. Though Hay has written extensively about her own practice and philosophy and there are only a handful scholars who write about her work. The article that most closely touches on the issues of this chapter is theorist Bojana Bauer's piece entitled "When Train(ing) Derails." This article is essential when thinking about Hay's practice for its articulation of Hay's performance work but also of her training philosophy as it relates to performance. Bauer writes about Hay's Solo Performance Commissioning Project to examine Hay's transmission of ideas not only on stage but through Hay's teaching.[88] But while Bauer addresses the relationship between Hay and those dancer/artists she works with, there is little attention paid to the actual tenets of Hay's philosophy and the score Hay uses to make work. Scholar and dancer Danielle Goldman also writes about the relationship between Hay's pedagogical practice and her performance practice, focusing on Hay's work *O'O* (2006) and beginning to touch on some of Hay's philosophy through first-hand

[88] Bauer, "When Train(ing) Derails," 75-78.

experience of a Hay workshop.[89] This chapter will further Bauer and Goldman's projects by delving into Hay's training philosophy to better understand her performance process.

There is not really a precedent for talking about Hay's work as utopian. In fact, Critical Correspondence contributor Nicole Bindler points out that Hay's work, geared toward asking questions rather than answering them, is specifically not utopian.[90] Hay turns away from dogma in favor of an understanding of lived experience and insists that while there are elements of her practice that might be similar to a Buddhist experience, she herself is not a practicing Buddhist and she does not actively do the kind of research necessary to form a dance practice out of the tenets of Buddhism.[91] Because of the open-endedness of Hay's work, the non-attachment to things and ideas she practices, it may seem difficult to categorize her work as utopian. However, Hay holds specific principles and a clear philosophy that she sees as the ideal way to dance and perform. These ideals are transmitted in various forms through her books, teaching, and performances and together make up a practice that suggests an ideal way of dancing. For example, Hay's practice focuses on future-thinking, utopian riddles and questions like *what if?* So when Bindler suggests that Hay's work is not utopian, we might think twice about it, noting Hay's well-formed philosophy and the implications of transmitting such a philosophy to a widespread community. It is therefore important to critique Hay's utopian ideals about how dancers should move. As Noble points out, "in one way or another, most utopian art

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[89] Danielle Goldman, "Deborah Hay's *O,O*," *TDR* Vol. 51, No. 2 (2007): 161-162, accessed 25 Apr. 2017, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/216105.

[90] Nicole Bindler, "Deborah Hay in Philadelphia," *Critical Correspondence,* (2013), accessed May 4, 2017, https://movementresearch.org/publications/critical-correspondence/deborah-hay-in-phil
adelphia.

[91] Deborah Hay, *My Body The Buddhist* (Middletown: Wesleyan, 2000), xxv.

postulates models of other ways of being."[92] This is exactly what Hay does when she suggests and even enacts a different way of being in the world. Susan Foster writes that Hay's "dances attempt to transform their location and the viewers' perceptions into a more harmonious environment."[93] As in Halprin's work, we see the utopian desire to transform bodies into something "better." Through a discussion of the non-dogmatic principles that Hay lays out (such as her question: *what if?*), we paradoxically find a codified method, a cohesiveness to both her practice and her performances that make her work specifically "Hayian."

In her Solo Performance Commissioning project, Deborah Hay uses a unique process to immerse dancers into their own field of conditions in preparation for performance. The official description of the project reads, "Dancers commission a solo dance from Deborah Hay. She guides and coaches them in the performance of the solo during an 11-day period in a residency setting. At the conclusion of the residency each participant signs a contractual agreement to a daily solo practice of the new piece, for a minimum of three months before their first public performance."[94] The idea is that dancers will repeat the choreography daily to arrive at a developed work that is ready to be presented in front of an audience. Participants in this project sign up to undergo a ritual assuming that by the end of the three months, their practice will have undergone a pivotal transformation. Through persistent, daily interrogation of the choreography, or dance score, dancers will journey into unknown territory to disrupt mundane experience. Hay's process allows the dancer to figure things out for him or herself during a period of

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[92] Noble, *UTOPIAS*, 14.
[93] Foster, *Reading Dancing,* 6.
[94] "Deborah Hay Solo Festival," accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.philadelphiadance.org/calendar/index.php?eID=5279.

struggle and vulnerability. By leaving the dancer without the guidance of a "master," the process is not rooted in visual achievements; in other words, dancers presumably do not learn their solos by mapping gestures from another body onto theirs. Instead, the process is one of negotiation between the body and space intended to generate original material.

While one could argue that the body cannot forget its history and technical training, Hay suggests that through persistence and repetition, dancers can learn to identify and release their own attachments. Bojana Bauer argues that Hay challenges notions of training, technique, and behavior, allowing the body to produce new ways of looking at memory and history.[95] Bauer begins her essay with an explanation of the habits a dancer acquires through training in various techniques, which never leave the body.[96] But in Hay's project, the dancer encounters the unfamiliar framework of being thrown into a void, a "generative threshold towards the unknown," a kind of repetition not based on reproducing images.[97] Dancers become disoriented in order to problem-solve on their own, like a baby would when navigating the world for the first time. Through the repetition of an encounter between body and space, participants re-train their awareness, shedding preconceived notions of an ideal form. And yet, I argue that this re-training is not devoid of its own style, its own repetitions and specificities. In what follows, I examine Hay's pedagogical practice via Hay's books and the 2015 documentary *Turn Your F^*king Head: Deborah Hay's Solo Performance Commissioning Project* by Deborah Hay and Becky Edmunds.

[95] Bauer, "When Train(ing) Derails," 74.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid. 78.

If Hay emphasizes the unknown and the shedding of habitual actions, what then guides the dancer into a place of knowing, into a mastery of Hay's method? Furthermore, what does Hay's pedagogical approach say about her philosophy of how bodies should move and behave in the world? An examination of pedagogy is crucial to our understanding of those choreographers who not only make performances but who also teach or train other bodies over the span of their careers and even create their own techniques and methodologies. In *Turn Your F^*king Head*, Hay provides access to that which is ordinarily reserved to the dancers: dance training and process. For this process, 20 artists learn a solo over ten days and are "coached" in the performance of that solo. The artists live together, eat together, and get to know each other through the process. They also watch each other's movements, dancing together in the space with Hay over the course of the project. Once the solo is learned over the course of ten days, Hay has artists sign a contract saying they will commit to a daily practice for nine months before performing the solo.

When watching the video recording of all the dancers dancing together in the same space, the dancers all appear to moving in a similar way and it is already immediately clear that the group dynamic functions through visual mapping and imitation. It is difficult to describe the physical actions of the dancers because they are not using the codified gestures or phrases of traditional dance. Instead, the dancers all move as though discovering their bodies for the first time. They are careful and curious and they aim to make shapes that they've never made or seen before. Each dancer is trying to be stranger than the next, finding ways to articulate the body that are foreign. Nonetheless, it is clear they are dancers, not only from the occasional passe or hip swing,

but from the grace and ease with which everyone moves; they maintain a rhythm that is never broken even with the strangest of gestures. Hay stands to the side giving constant directions for the quality of the dancing, and yet the dancers carry on in the same way over and over when learning each segment of the solo. In her dissertation entitled *Mobilizing the Score: Generative Choreographic Structures, 1960-Present*, dance scholar Alison D'Amato insists that Hay's process de-conditions the body of its normal learning habits when she says that "Hay reframes transmission as an interpretive, rather than an imitative, process."[98] From what can be seen in documentary, however, dancers not only imitate Hay's style, but rigidly stay within the limits of how the group is dancing.

This kind of group dynamic is common in dance practices where verbal cues intend to open up possibilities but a certain physical dynamic or style overlays itself onto the dancer's body. A prime example of this occurrence is in the Israeli technique called Gaga. In a Gaga class, the instructor calls out various verbal cues such as: there is honey on your feet, there is colored light shooting from one location in the body to another, there are bugs on your palms, elbows, and shoulders.[99] These visualizations would theoretically produce different responses, and indeed the first time I engaged with the material, I was moving differently from everyone else in the class. I soon caught on, however, and realized that there was a specific way of moving, a style or quality that everyone else was privy to. So while the directions for movement clearly encouraged difference, everyone in the room was dancing in the exact same way. Eventually I was able to mimic the style through visual and sensorial learning, paying more attention to the

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[98] Alison D'Amato, *Mobilizing the Score: Generative Choreographic Structures, 1960-Present*, (PhD diss., UCLA, 2015), 102.
[99] Dance class with Ate9 company member in Los Angeles.

aesthetic of my shapes than to the accuracy of response to the verbal cues. As examined by sociologists and philosophers, when people come together as part of a group, they tend to take on each other's characteristics. In his 1895 book on the group dynamics of a crowd, Gustave Le Bon argues that when people come together in a mass, "a collective mind is formed."[100] We might also consider the effect of visual mapping when power dynamics are at play, meaning that most dancers are trained at an early age to mimic the instructor. In a Gaga class, the instructor also dances, and so we might be persuaded to look to that individual as a leader in guiding our movement choices. While Gaga technique is unlike Hay's technique in many ways, it is still useful in shedding light on the group dynamic that exists within dance and more specifically, to articulate a dynamic that also exists under Hay despite her verbal scores.

The title of the documentary, *Turn Your Fucking Head*, refers to Hay's actual saying in which she tries to get dancers see differently in order to experience the body in a different way. If you keep turning your head, you will keep surprising your visual field, in turn suggesting new positions for the body. This is key to Hay's philosophy, which says that we've been choreographed so deeply by society, dance, and other outside influences and that we need to break down those choreographies or patterns of movement to find a new way of being in the world.[101] One of the ways in which this might occur is to constantly be reinstating the present moment. "Here and gone" is another phrase Hay uses, meaning that every moment we can find anew by simply letting it go. In this way, the language of codified or choreographed dance is exactly that which Hay urges dancers

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[100] Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: Study of the Popular Mind* (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1982), 13.
[101] Deborah Hay and Becky Edmunds, *Turn Your Fucking Head: Deborah Hay's Solo Performance Commissioning Project* (London: Routledge, 2015), DVD.

to move away from and in fact Hay worked for many years with non-dancers presumably in an effort to find an authentic expression of this kind of presence in the body. Hay even hesitates to use the word "composition," explaining to the group that this dance is impossible to achieve in the "right way."[102] And yet, during a practice performance of these solos, Hay very specifically coaches one man as jumps around the room to make his movements more unknown, less of a struggle, and to cover more ground more quickly.[103] With these notes one might presume that there is in fact a "right way" to perform Hay's score, despite there being no visual ideal to imitate. This particular dancer, after hearing these notes, collapses, frustrated after clearly not having performed right. This is evidence of the kind of training Hay's dancers undergo in order to be able to read her dance score. In other words, the training is not the de-choreographing of bodies as Hay has implied but the re-choreographing of bodies in Hay's own technique. For this re-choreographing, Hay gives constant directives and questions as dancers move, linguistic cues that are meant to bring the dancer into the present moment but that actually put instructions into the body from the outside in in order to mold the way in which dancers move. While D'Amato makes an important point about the shift in the way dancers learn material from mirror images to verbal cues, there is still an imitative element to the process.

In the film, there are often moments when dancers perform segments of their solo and the rest of the group begins to giggle or laugh almost as though, by coming to know each other through movement, they've created an inside joke. Even though laughing

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[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.

during dance performances is not typically an expectation audience members enter with, audience members who know Hay's work do tend to chuckle or laugh more frequently while watching a performance. The absurd or silly quality Hay encourages in her training has become a trademark of her work so much so that audience members have come to expect it, even when something is not really funny enough to laugh out loud. Not only does Hay train the dancers, she has also trained the knowing audience in how to view or react to her work. In a segment of *Turn Your Fucking Head*, the director makes a point to show the group, along with Hay, cracking up at something a performer did. Laughter is at once a spontaneous reaction to an unplanned action by the performer and at the same time a conditioned response. This kind of meeting of spontaneity or the unknown with that which is highly practiced is where Hay's work operates.

We have discussed Deborah Hay's method of working with dancers toward a score in order to provide open-ended yet highly guided choreographic material. While Anna Halprin uses her scores to allow participants agency in creating the dance, Hay tends to have more influence as choreographer in terms of the final product. For example, before casting Michelle Boule in one of her works, Hay insisted Boule attend her workshop so that she could learn Hay's methodology, her way of working.[104] Hay, then, argues that there needs to be an in-person training in order for her work to be carried out, as opposed to Halprin who will send a score around the world without any control over how people perform it. Hay's score does not exactly exist on its own, and yet it carries information not only regarding physical steps, but also emotional and communicative qualities.

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[104] Deborah Hay, *Using the Sky: a dance.* (London: Routledge, 2015), 59.

As a choreographer, Hay makes subjective decisions about who should be cast in her works. For her dance entitled *If I Sing to You* (2008), Hay records the reasons why she was drawn to each cast member by listing qualities like communication and charisma rather than any technical skills. She uses language like "she responded to my material with immediacy and risk," "She seemed able to plunge into and expose her psyche at the same time," "generosity, courage, and beauty filled the space around her dancing," and "generally absent of any visible ego when she danced."[105] She reveals that she was drawn to each dancer for different reasons, all connected to the dancer's personality more so than to her physical alignment or virtuosity. We can see these same values in Hay's written scores, which focus on the quality or psychological state of the performance as opposed to any set postures or sequences. The dance score is unlike a classical music score in that there is no way to predict or determine the exact outcome of the performance. Instead, the score directs the artist toward ways of moving, speaking, and being so that each artist's interpretation of the score is entirely different. In fact, Hay's Solo Performance Commissioning Project relies on the notion that each performance of a single score will be different as she teaches 20 artists the same score but assumes no two solos will be the same. Because of the various possibilities for performance that could occur with any one given score, the performers need not have the skill of mirroring or enacting technical skills such as turns or leaps, but instead must possess another, much more elusive quality such as the ability to take risks or the perceived absence of ego.

The score for Hay's performance entitled *No Time to Fly* uses a combination of words and imagery to guide the performer through a series of physical and perceptual

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[105] Ibid., 60-62.

actions. Sometimes the directions ask only for the dancer to think about something without pointing directly to a physical action, while other times the score asks the performer to carry out a physical direction but always with a shifting sense of perception. For example, instead of telling the performer to sing a specific song in a particular manner, Hay's score reads:

> I sing a wordless song that arises from and combines joy and sorrow into a single melody that resonates through my stilled bones. Barely suppressing a sense of personal history, my face reflects the transience of joy and sorrow.
> Note: I hear the song as my voice leaves my body. I am intentionally unguarded because I rarely allow myself to partake in unprotected experiences.
> Note: I am not translating the written language into movement, i.e., joy and sorrow. I actually aspire toward a bodily speechlessness by noticing my visual field, which includes what I can and cannot see, as well as minute associative instances that rise spontaneously.
> Note: I understand that joy and sorrow are always present. I do not have to instigate them.[106]

Hay's score includes open ended directions that are at the same time very specific. There are infinite ways to interpret the direction to sing a wordless song combining "joy and sorrow." And yet when a dancer begins to hum a sort of in-the-moment song, dance audiences might readily associate its quality with Deborah Hay. For example, in her trio *As Holy Sites Go*, the dancers also sing a song, more of a chant, that sounds unrehearsed, with no real words and no real melody. This kind of eruption into vocal performance, while open ended in Hay's score, becomes a trademark Hayian move, a practice one assumes Hay teaches her dancers to be able to do. In dance, it often occurs that dancers will mirror the choreographer or teacher in order to attempt to get the movement or

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[106] Deborah Hay, *No Time To Fly* (2010): 4, accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.laboratoiredugeste.com/IMG/pdf/NTTF_bookletD.Hay.pdf.

quality right. For this reason, the quality of the songs in Hay's work mark the work as Hay's, despite there being infinite ways in which a performer could carry out her directions. In other words, the score is not the sole impetus for the performance, instructions are also passed down through Hay's teaching.

Note: My choice to perform this material requires catastrophic acts of perception. I associate catastrophic with images of great loss. The magnitude and reoccurrence of choreographed behavior that I need to first recognize and then dis-attach from, again and again, is a personal loss of tremendous proportion.

My body is still while joy and sorrow wash across my face like a stream of instances. A full smile or frown is never fulfilled. When not streaming, my face may briefly return to normalcy, or it may sustain a single reflection of joy/sorrow for longer moments.

Note: I am not limited to my personal experience of joy and sorrow. It is a relief to know that it is in and about the audience, this theater, and the world beyond its doors.

Note: As I perform, I try to remove my tendency to embody the images I use to describe the movement material.

I sing a wordless song that arises from and combines joy and sorrow into a single melody that resonates through my stilled bones. Barely suppressing a sense of personal history, my face reflects the transience of joy and sorrow.

Note: I hear the song as my voice leaves my body. I am intentionally unguarded because I rarely allow myself to partake in unprotected experiences.

Note: I am not translating the written language into movement, i.e., joy and sorrow. I actually aspire toward a bodily speechlessness by noticing my visual field, which includes what I can and cannot see, as well as minute associative instances that rise spontaneously.

Note: I understand that joy and sorrow are always present. I do not have to instigate them.

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Figure 2.1: Deborah Hay, *No Time To Fly: A Solo Dance Score written by Deborah Hay*, 2010

While Hay's style clearly comes through in her work, there is also an element of spontaneity and presence that characterizes her scores. Each performer actually has to undergo a personal shift in perception and emotion, feeling "that joy and sorrow are

always present" and becoming "unguarded" in front of an audience. These notes pertain not only to the physical enactment of the score but to the internal state of the performer while enacting them. The performer is asked to carry out an action in response to his or her "visual field," a direction that puts the performer in the present moment and asks him or her interact with the surroundings, including the energy of the audience. In some ways Hay's score can be likened to a Jackson Pollock painting, in which there exists a practiced spontaneity that results in a very particular style. Pollock might be said to be flinging paint on a canvas, and someone else painting might interpret that action differently, but Pollock himself had such a rehearsed method that his canvases each reveal themselves as Pollock's. While the individual strokes may depend on decisions made directly in that moment, there is an overarching knowledge of the end result. And so any spontaneity is coupled with practice. This is similar to a Deborah Hay performance of a score in which there is infinite room for spontaneous action but also a clear vision of how the piece should look overall.

In Hay's performance of *No Time to Fly* in Austin in 2010, Hay performs the score herself even as she approaches 70 years of age. Because the score is open ended in terms of the exact movements and choices the dancer can make, this work can be performed by an artist of any age. In this performance, Hay moves cautiously and subtly, within the boundaries of what her own body can handle in the moment. She gestures almost like a mime, yet the gestures themselves are not always clearly communicative. Instead, she moves with a curiosity about both the space and her own body, focusing on her hands, then shifting focus to the floor, then shifting focus to her own balance, exploring different movement possibilities in the moment. This curiosity runs throughout

the piece, no matter what nonsensical gestures Hay makes there is something captivating about her presence, her attention to minute movements and her interactions with the space.

Figure 2.2: Deborah Hay performing *No Time to Fly*. Austin. By Rino Pizzi

Figure 2.3: Ros Warby performing *No Time to Fly*. Screen shot of video by motionbank (*Vimeo*)

At one point in the piece, Hay begins to sing a song that sounds heavy, loaded with lament, reminiscent of the songs one might hear in a temple. This is the part of the score when Hay is meant to sing a "holy" song. In the score, Hay writes the guiding words for this section:

> A holy site is completed the moment my hands or fingers touch overhead.
> I open my mouth and hear a holy song rise up out of me.
> Note: I am not a singer and cannot carry a tune. Nevertheless I call what I hear a holy song and notice the feedback from my whole body as it yields to that direction.
> Unable to sustain itself, a holy site collapses. My hands, still touching, drop before my eyes. I contemplate the symbolism of the gestural demise.[107]

When comparing the score with the video footage of the performance, this section is easily recognizable. Hay puts her hands overhead, sings a holy sounding song, and then suddenly throws her hands down, making a crashing sound, collapsing. The note in the score does not actually refer to the fact that Hay cannot sing, because in fact the quality of her voice is quite good. Instead, it is a note toward style: the song should sound raw and unrehearsed. In Ros Warby's 2011 performance of *No Time to Fly*, she too comes to a point in the score when the holy song is recognizable. Her hands go up over her head (though Warby's fingers actually touch while Hay's do not) then Warby sings a lamenting song (for a bit longer than Hay), and then she collapses her upper body (not as startling as Hay's crashing sound). While the exact gesture is somewhat altered from Hay's performance to Warby's, the quality is very similar. This is not a virtuosic performance of a song, but rather an unpracticed, somewhat shaky song, a song someone might hum when she is alone, not knowing what will come out next. The quality is

[107] Hay, *No Time to Fly*, 11.

unsure without sounding hesitant. So when Hay writes, "I open my mouth and hear a holy song rise up out of me," she actually has a vision of what this ought to be like and how it should not be. This is perhaps why she makes the note that she cannot carry a tune, which is really to say that the song should be performed *as though* one cannot carry a tune, regardless of whether they can or cannot, because the quality ought to connote a spontaneous eruption of song and a sense of curiosity within the performer, like the Zen mentality of being a beginner. This is connected to the fact that Hay chose one of her performers because she said she performed with no ego, implying that Hay is drawn to certain qualities (unpretentiousness, graciousness) and not to others (virtuosity, ego). So while the score and even the practice are very open-ended, Hay's instructions, whether written or taught or passed down through seeing her perform, are actually highly specified.

So far I have examined Hay's work by looking at the relationship between Hay's process and her performance to argue that while her process is open enough to move away from traditional codified technique, it is also highly specified and should be considered a technique of its own. Despite the gaps in Hay's values versus her work put into practice, there is still within her work a striving toward finding a better way to use the body and to communicate human expression. In what follows, I examine Hay's philosophy from her books in relationship to *No Time To Fly* as performed by Australian choreographer and dancer Ros Warby in order to examine the utopian qualities that reside in just that effort toward betterment, regardless of whether Hay's practice actually achieves everything it sets out to do. I have argued that Hay's practice, while seemingly open-ended and non-imitative, is actually highly specific and stylized. Through that style,

Hay's performance opens up a space for creativity by giving agency to both the dancer and the audience.

Warby's solo, like many of Hay's works, presents a stripped down stage, simple costuming, and no external music other than the sound of Warby's voice. There is no sense that anyone is backstage pulling strings or controlling the dancer's cues, which in turn gives Warby agency to make choices as she dances. Warby moves with the same curiosity and comfort with the unknown that we have discussed throughout this chapter, in a style that is decidedly "Hayian." She enters the stage, performs her solo, and then leaves, all with a simplicity that places emphasis on the relationship between the dancer and the space around her, including the audience.

While Hay is not a practicing Buddhist, she has often made clear the influence of Zen Buddhism on her work, which I argue also translates to an audience's experience of the work. For example, Hay often asks dancers to consider Koan-like questions, questions that cannot be answered but that might guide the body through an exploration. In one of her most iconic questions, Hay asks, "What if 'I' is the reconfiguration of my body into fifty three trillion cells at once?"[108] This question is not conducive to an answer - Hay says her "body is bored by answers" - but rather a question an artist might pose to her body in order to experience the world in a different way. In Warby's solo, she is not performing strenuous movements in order to impress the audience, or moving aggressively in order to send the audience a message, but is instead moving around the stage with ease and gentleness, which suggests a certain humility in the act of asking questions. Bauer notices that in Hay's work, the dancer's choreographic training is

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[108] Hay, *My Body, The Buddhist*, 1.

revealed to the audience through the ways in which the dancer moves, yet the structures of choreography that ordinarily prevail in such a context are no longer present and so the movements are not posed toward any choreographic end.[109] By this description, the dancer might enact a bodily position referencing the expertise or virtuosity of her past training, but that position out of context does not serve a choreographic purpose. In fact, Warby often lifts her leg high into the air or performs movements that an ordinary person would not be able to perform, yet because these movements are disconnected from their original function, they read more as bodily fluency than as a display of mastery. In other words, the leg lift is just as arbitrary as the awkward bend of the torso, and all movements are subsequently equalized.

Figure 2.4: Sesshu Toyo, ink and wash painting, 15th century

[109] Bauer, "When Train(ing) Derails," 4.

Similarly to her stripped down movements, the stage on which Warby dances is bare, leaving more questions than answers as to the meaning of the work. In a Zen ink painting, empty space is not actually meant to be empty, but to represent a poetic space between elements of the landscape in which the viewers can use their imaginations. In Warby's performance, the empty space of the stage becomes a poetic realm in which Warby can play and the audience can imagine possibilities. In this way, without visual cues, the audience is brought into the creation of the work by being given agency to define both the space and the unpredictable and non-aggressive (banal, Hay calls them) movements of the dancer.

While not everyone will seek out the score for Warby's work, it is in fact published online and easy to access, meaning presumably one could watch this performance with an understanding of the instructions given by Hay. While one need not track each movement with its corresponding note in the score, the score does have an effect on how the work is read. Within the score there are numerous places where the audience is meant to influence Warby's experiences or actions in a way that implicates the audience in the creation of the work. One example of this in the score for *No Time To Fly* is as follows:

> Note: I deliberately create this space within a space, separating me from the audience.
> An ancient voice quietly advises me to remember the audience as well as the space beyond my tightly contained space....
> In response to the guidance received, I... notice at once how the inclusion of the theater and my audience enlarges my dancing. It is like a real opening, and I begin again.[110]

[110] Hay, *No Time to Fly*, 3.

This section of the score occurs right at the beginning of the piece, just after the entrance, immediately setting up a relationship between the dancer and the audience. It is not that Warby is meant to interact with individual members of the audience, but that she acknowledges the presence of the audience, perhaps the energy of the audience, and allows that perception to influence her dance. She receives feedback from the audience and then responds to the audience in the form of the dance. These instructions imply that the audience is part of the making of the dance, affecting the shapes and qualities of Warby's movements. In another section of the score, Hay writes, "...I manage the choreographic tools I need to maintain both my interest and that of the audience." This direction is meant to inspire a certain generosity in the dancer to think about how her movements are being perceived by others. Because of the word "interest," this direction is not meant to suggest that the dancer should entertain the audience, but rather that the dancer should remember that the audience is also part of the work, that she is not dancing for herself. As the dancer considers the audience in the making of the dance, the audience is meant to be brought into the making of the work, as opposed to watching it as an outsider. This performer audience connection causes a kind of utopian empathy. In her *Choreographing Empathy,* Susan Foster argues that every choreography has a specific way of dictating how bodies will respond kinesthetically, suggesting that dance inspires those watching it to have an experience of bodily empathy.[111] As the dancer asks questions like *what if?,* the audience moves along with his or her sense of curiosity in a shared experience of questioning. But while the Hay's goal is non-ego, as identified in Hay's casting criteria, in actuality the "Hayian" style I have described is distracting from

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[111] Susan Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*. (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.

the kind of authentic experience of empathy between the performer and the audience. In other words, audience members might be so focused on the stylistic qualities of the dancers that they are unable to undergo the connection between audience and performer Hay strives toward in her scores.

I have argued that Hay gives agency to both the dancer and the audience through her performance score, but this open space for creativity also applies to her training methods and her influence on other choreographers. In her SPCP, Hay does not aim to create a company of dancers that stay dancing with her forever, but rather teaches them her principles and then lets the choreographers go off on their own to continue their own choreographic practices. In this way, her style stays in choreographer's toolbox but is just one of many tools from which these artists can pull. In fact, Hay is often called the Choreographer's Choreographer because she has been instrumental in mentoring so many other important artists. Choreographer Miguel Gutierrez performed as part of Hay's work *O'O* (2005). In a Walker Art Center video interview about the process entitled "Dancers Discuss Working with Deborah Hay," Gutierrez talks about his experience working with Hay. Gutierrez was 35 years old during this time and already had his own practice, yet he recalls that working with Hay would change his understanding of dance forever.[112] After working with Hay, Gutierrez continues to make his own works independently, works that may use some of the knowledge Hay passed down but which ultimately look and feel completely different. Another choreographer who continues to perform and choreograph independently, Michelle Boule, also recalls her experience working with Hay. Boule

[112] "Dancers Discuss Working with Deborah Hay," *Walker Art Center* (2012), accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.walkerart.org/channel/2012/dancers-discuss-working-with-deborah-hay.

explains that Hay gives choreographers a certain freedom because she values their role as artists in their right.[113] Through her method of asking questions and her use of the score, Hay is able to create boundaries for discovery without overriding the artist's own voice. Following their work with Hay, artists go on to develop their own styles, methods, and arguments, and this is a crucial point about Hay's work. Rather than becoming engrained within dancers' bodies, Hay's philosophical boundaries actually encourage constantly letting go of material and choreographies in a way that makes room for new patterns and behaviors. So while dancers may dance like Hay when performing Hay's work, her style, unlike ballet which stays in the physical body, can easily be de-habitualized from the body and turned into something new.

Because Deborah Hay has influenced so many important artists as well as the field of dance as a whole, it is valuable to examine her ideals about how the body should move and behave. By looking at Hay's work from a holistic perspective, I have defined Hay's work as utopian in its effort to shape the way people, particularly artists, think about and experience their own bodies. Her goals for bettering the dancer's body involve open-ended questions and linguistic guidelines that leave the body able to make choices in the moment, a structure that is meant to open up creative possibilities for dancers, choreographers and audience members alike. But within this creative structure there exists a tension between Hay's linguistic cues and their enactment, between Hay's philosophy and her practice, between the score for her performance and the performance itself. For example, while Hay rejects ego, she herself is a charismatic leader who selects who can and cannot dance in her work and who, in her SPCP, suggests a 'right' way to

[113] Ibid.

answer her supposedly open-ended questions. She also spreads her own style of movement onto the bodies of others through the group dynamic, which produces a "Hayian" style of movement. One might question whether utopian goals of authenticity and non-ego can function with the presence of an authoritative leader. When a charismatic leader with specific goals for how bodies should move inflicts those goals onto the bodies of others, there will be a sense of hierarchy in which dancers aim to get things right. Out of this relationship between dancer and choreographer, the choreographer develops a codified style that falls short of her goal to shed choreographies and habitual patterns. For an audience, this tension between style and communication is challenging. When an audience watches a Hay work, do we see the residue of Hay (ie Hay's style) or can we have an authentic experience of her choreographic questions (*What if 'I' is the reconfiguration of my body into fifty three trillion cells at once?)*? Deborah Hay's utopian ideal to better the human body through shedding habitual choreographies and asking unanswerable questions is not a de-choreographing but a re-choreographing of the body. Translated to an audience, there exists in Hay's performances both space for empathy and creative agency but also a distinct and codified style. Hay's utopia thus remains in tact within her linguistic philosophy, but is complicated when put into practice.

[Part Two] Chapter 3: Social Dynamics in the Work of luciana achugar

Uruguayan born, New York based dance artist luciana achugar's utopia strives to be (unlike More's utopia) post-civilized, unsocialized, and female centric. Achugar writes her name without capitals in an effort to remove hierarchy.[114] There are no principal dancers or company structures within her group of dancers, which means everyone including achugar performs together for the duration of the work. Achugar has a mission, a strong sense of what she wants her community to look like along with rules and structures to determine the way her dancers should move and behave. These rules are often in place to create more freedom, such as the care achugar's dancers are required to take when interacting with audience members, causing a sense of inclusion, or the practice of unraveling the classically trained body as an anarchic gesture. Achugar's practice is largely improvisational to encourage movement of the body that is primal and responsive. In ballet, dancers leave the earth, upward bound, upright and light. In achugar's style, dancers are grounded and raw. They are connected to their pelvic floors and they often perform naked, with few boundaries dictating how the body should move. In ballet, dancers have set roles, usually male and female, but also hierarchical roles with leading dancers versus those in the corps. In achugar's method, interaction and attention to other dancers is crucial, and so connection becomes more resonant than stardom. Achugar's dance practice, which she calls 'the pleasure project,' involves a set of values dictating how dancers should move and behave as a group. The pleasure project is valuable in its ability to critique social norms through questioning personal and collective

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[114] Michele Steinwald, "Luciana achugar: Reclaiming Pleasure and Revealing Labor (Equality)," *Walker Art Center* (2013), accessed 19 Apr. 2017, http://blogs.walkerart.org.

boundaries. Out of the utopic qualities of the enacted practice, we find a deeper understanding of 'the good place.'

Luciana achugar's *Otro Teatro* is an ongoing project that has been adapted for various locations, venues, dancers, and audiences. For her project entitled *An Epilogue for Otro Teatro: True Love*, achugar works with groups of dance artists to train them in the technique she has developed called The Practice or 'the pleasure project.' This technique involves a response to people and environment, it is improvisational, group-orientated, and takes on a certain responsibility for and interaction with the audience. Relationships between achugar and her dancers are built over a long period of time, and while some come and go, the community remains. The practice, then, grows and expands over time; it takes new members and keeps the old. The same goes for her audiences. Those who have seen her perform this work have an understanding of the duration and movement ethos of the work, and so feel more inclined to participate, more comfortable with engaging, and have a deeper understanding of its goals. The works I will discuss here are three iterations of *An Epilogue for Otro Teatro: True Love*, all three of which I have witnessed live in person in New York City. The first is a rehearsal for *An Epilogue for Otro Teatro: True Love* at a studio space in Brooklyn in 2015, the second is a performance of this work that took place at Gibney Center the same year, and the third is an outdoor performance of still the same work that took place at the River to River festival in 2016.

At achugar's rehearsal in Brooklyn, a group of dancers prepared for their three-hour long rehearsal by doing the usual stretching, warm ups, and catching up. Achugar gave some instructions, saying visitors could sit or stand, participate or not. I wondered to

what level we were encouraged or allowed to participate. The rehearsal began with dancers fully clothed moving in the space however it pleased them. One was lying on the floor, another looking at herself in the mirror, another mimicking the movements of someone nearby. The movements themselves seemed immediately unchoreographed, yet the dancers clearly knew exactly how they ought to be moving. In other words, the technique does not involve memorized gestures but as with Halprin and Hay, achugar's style is present throughout. Moments arose when two or more dancers synced up, creating duets or trios within what might otherwise appear chaotic or disorganized, signifying to audiences that there is indeed a method behind the composition. A dj in the corner played loud house music, keeping a steady and persistent beat, clearly a guiding force for the dancers' improvisatory choices. Even as I sat still at the edge of the space, it was clear I was used as immediate material for dancers to respond to. Everyone in the room - the dancers, the choreographer, the dj, and the audience - was a participant. Over the course of this rehearsal performance, the dancers began fully clothed in their own dancewear, some become fully naked, and by the end they re-dressed themselves in costumes. Three hours passed, and so by the nature of the duration of the performance, the audience was taken on a journey. During this time, the audience became well acquainted with the bodies and styles of each performer: whether a performer got undressed, how he or she undressed, whether the performer came into contact with other performers, who grouped together, who required more attention at any given time. It was the dynamics of the group that took precedent as the content of the work, and for this reason one became acutely aware of one's own body in the room.

Achugar's movement practice involves a particular set of values around the body. Her workshop description reads, "We will practice being in pleasure and giving our bodies a voice. A practice of growing a new body, as one would grow a plant; a utopian body; a sensational body; a connected body; an anarchic body; a body in pleasure… with a flesh & bones & guts & skin brain… with eyes that see without naming, they see without knowing."[115] Who gets to experience this "anarchic" body? Does the audience empathize with the performer and in this way become part of the "new body"? Or, does the audience member, a participant him or herself, become "a body in pleasure"? As opposed to traditional performance of dance on a stage, achugar's performance requires a certain level of participation and implication on the part of the viewer. Even if the viewer is simply sitting on the sidelines, he or she is still made visible as part of the performance. No one is a mere spectator. This work offers multiple levels of engagement for each individual audience member, but also, like many contemporary works, asks more of the audience than a general public might be willing to give. If participation or even cooperation is expected of the audience, who is the work for? Unlike traditional dance, the audience is expected to be more specialized, to some degree versed in contemporary performance practices.

[115] luciana achugar, "Workshop with luciana achugar: Growing a Body," *Gibney Dance* (2015), accessed April 19, 2017, https://gibneydance.org/event/workshop-with-luciana-achugar-growing-a-body/.

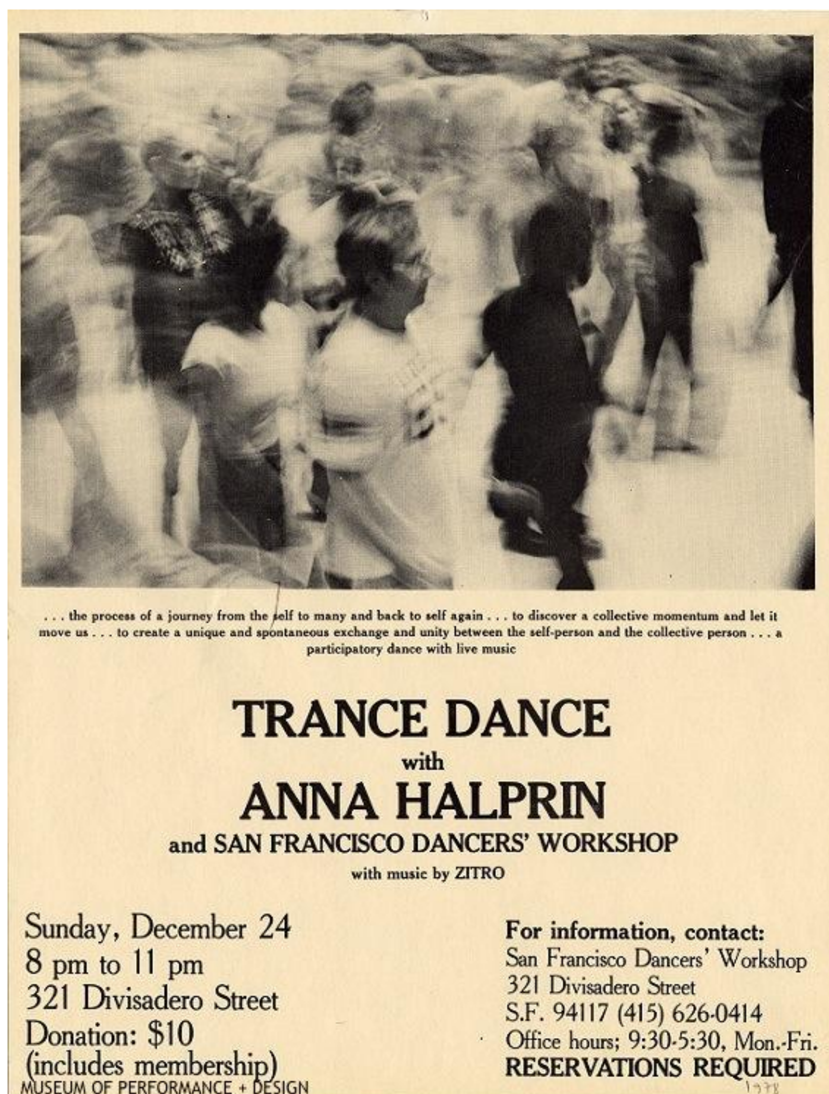

Figure 3.1: Anna Halprin *Trance Dance*, flyer

The group mentality in dance is as old as the form itself if we think about dance rituals in cultures around the globe. But we might also look back to Anna Halprin's work in the 1960s in which she was pushing boundaries of group exploration in her works such as *Trance Dance*, which was also three hours long. In the above poster, we see an ad for a performance in which the audience is invited to be part of a "participatory dance with live

music," a precursor to achugar's *Otro Teatro* in which the audience can choose to join in with the dancers as a dj improvises the music. Both Halprin and achugar use the word journey to describe their hope for a process of self and group discovery that occurs during these three hour long rituals, and in both works the choreographer steps aside to let the power of the group dynamic take over.

The audience for *Otro Teatro*, which for the rehearsal consisted of myself and a former achugar dancer, takes its cues from the actions of the performers. After about half an hour of watching from the sidelines, the other spectator in the room took off his clothes and began dancing with the group. He became indistinguishable from the core group by dancing and interacting with them using the principles of The Practice he had come to know as a former achugar dancer. Perhaps the dancer felt more inclined to participate because it was a rehearsal, rather than a performance. Or, perhaps achugar had given the dancer alternate instructions. Or maybe inherent within the practice is always inclusivity. In achugar's invited dress rehearsal, and later the performance, it is the choices and reactions of the audience that ultimately shift the work into its fullest extension. In fact, achugar's intentions around the piece reveal just how much the audience is a crucial part of the work. She says that "in the studio, a lot of it is imagining the eyes of the audience. A lot of it is a projection of what that moment will be, when we meet."[116] In other words, the audience is an essential component of work even in its early process. Achugar takes this one step further saying, "I considered at one point that instead of doing this piece, I would come in and talk the audience through a completely

[116] Nikima Jagudajev, "Luciana Achugar: Resisting Capitalism Through Pleasure." *BOMB Magazine* (2014), accessed May 4, 2017, http://bombmagazine.org/article/1000086/luciana-achugar.

participatory experience where I would take them through the practice; invite them to come on stage and guide them through a "class" and have them practice with us. In a way that feels like the true realization of what I'm trying to do."[117] In this statement, achugar reveals her desire to lead the audience through an experience unlike that of traditional theater, whereby the participants are asked not to view the work, but to perform in it. Even though I did not dance per se, in watching the rehearsal process of *Otro Teatro* the feeling that I too was being watched by the performers was tangible. My gaze shot back at me as dancers approached me or made eye contact with me and I was undoubtedly implicated. On the other hand, the performance did not exactly "invite" me in or "guide" me through, so perhaps achugar's alternate piece would take the work a step further in her goal of inclusion.

In the introduction to her book *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance*, Susan Kattwinkel offers some reasons why artists use audience participation in their work, including the audience feeling as though they are "creating and expressing common sentiment along with the performers and each other,"[118] as well as "a simple undermining of traditional theatrical expectations and behaviors along with the class structures of those traditions."[119] Achugar's work involves each of these aims in an attempt to both have a communal experience with the group as well as disturb traditional theater-going expectations, such as through the extended duration of the performance. While there are aspects of the work that achieve Kattwinkel's description of the goals of audience participation, there is also an aspect of the work that maintains

[117] Ibid.
[118] Susan Kattwinkel, *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), x.
[119] Ibid.

traditional dance structures. No matter how the audience influenced or inspired the dancers to move differently, the dancers nonetheless maintained a similar style of movement and a cohesive structure amongst themselves. True of most forms of dance, dancers tend toward appearing in a similar style and behavior as those around them, whether in keeping with a specific technique, the style of a choreographer, or in continuation of a historical precedent. Mirrors in dance class are often used for exactly this purpose: to encourage dancers to double check that their bodies are in fact doing what was asked of them by comparing themselves to others. If achugar perpetuates the group mentality in which all the dancers move similarly, in a particular, recognizable form, then the "body" she refers is a group body, a community of like-minded individuals moving toward a set of established goals. But in looking at historical groups (political, religious, cult), it becomes clear that within communities of people, hierarchies emerge and individuals gain power. In this case, for example, achugar remains the choreographer, her name is what draws in audiences and her say is the final word. The work, in a practical and material sense, belongs to her. The goal of "a brain that melted down to the flesh" implies that the practice is meant to equalize bodies and achugar's mission statement reveals "the fantasy of erasing hierarchical power structures to allow the collective experience of the group to become the content of the work."[120] But as the dancers move in achugar's brand of technique, the hierarchy within the group and the disconnect between dancers and audience remains to some degree in tact.

While achugar may not fully be able to remove hierarchy, she does undermine other traditional dance structures, such as the inclusion of a sense of otherness within the

[120] luciana achugar, "Mission," accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.lachugar.org/mission/.

group dynamic. In classical ballet, dancers are chosen based on their weight, their height, the way the lines of their bodies are formed. The women may not be too curvy or too tall or too muscular. Even in modern and contemporary dance companies we see a tendency of choreographers to choose dancers who appear more physically fit than the average person, mostly young and attractive. Achugar does not abide by these standards. She chooses dancers who may be very tall, older, non-white, queer, heavyset, or shy. There is diversity within her group, a group made up of men and women who do not necessarily fit within the traditional standards of the dance community. Rather than sameness being the driving force behind those selected to participate, it is difference that marks this group. While an older gentleman might be off in the corner exploring some small movements independently, fully dressed, two young women might be writhing on the floor naked at the other end of the room. As the dancers present themselves for an audience for three hours, dressing and undressing, their difference becomes a central focus of the work. Achugar thus explores a range of human experience, rather than displaying a homogenous group to fit traditional notions of aesthetic balance; her utopia is one of tolerance.

I have discussed audience participation and group dynamics in the rehearsal process for *Otro Teatro*, arguing that the audience is a crucial part of the work but questioning achugar's ability to completely remove the traditional hierarchical structures of performance. To further explore the social dynamics within achugar's work, I look at two distinct performances of achugar's *Otro Teatro: True Love*. What sets these performances apart is both their different cast members as well as their locations. The first performance, which I call Gibney, was a performance at the Gibney Center for

Dance in NYC, a large dance studio. The second performance was held as part of the River to River festival in NYC at South Street Seaport, which I call Seaport for short. The most notable difference between these two performances is the environment, one indoors and one outdoors, a factor that changes the nature of the work and its implications. By examining both iterations of *Otro Teatro*, we unearth the underlying structures of achugar's work in an effort to gain a better understanding of the social dynamics and spatial presence of her performances.

The Gibney performance was set in a large dance studio where the audience sat or stood around the periphery and the dancers performed around the center of the space. The performance took place over the duration of three hours, at the beginning of which time all the dancers and audience members were fully clothed and somewhat reserved in their movements, but by the end of which time, some of the audience members were dancing with achugar and the other dancers, most people fully or partially undressed, dancing wildly. The light in the room was dark and colorful, a disco ball adding to the club-like atmosphere of the dance. The dj once again in the corner played loud house music that made dancing, or least tapping one's foot, irresistible. Even still, some of the audience members left before the three hours were up, presumably either because they could not commit to the extended time frame or because they were put off by the content of the work. As the remaining group danced together, with few boundaries for interactions, I sat on the sidelines wondering if anyone felt as uncomfortable as I did, worried about

unwanted interactions, put off by the sweaty smells of strangers. Even achugar herself acknowledges that this work can be extremely challenging for audiences.[121]

After the show was over, when asked how she felt it went, achugar said she had lost control of the group, losing authorship over the work.[122] During rehearsal, it appeared as though a group of people gathered together and were free to explore as they wanted under the guidelines of the practice. During a performance, achugar becomes "the choreographer" and "the author." In other words, as a practice, the group dynamic among like-minded individuals is enacted in a way that is closer to achugar's hope of removing hierarchy and experiencing the collective. But as a performance, the stakes are high and achugar herself becomes the center of the work. She presents to an audience a representation of what *her* utopia might look like from a point of view of an artist who is operating within a market that requires authorship. This is a commonality in most utopian thought, in which there is always one author's utopian point of view being held, to which everyone else must conform. Yet one of achugar's main utopian goals is non-hierarchy. Paradoxically then, the work strives both for authorship and a lack thereof, but ultimately remains bound to a dance economy in which the choreographer receives both the artistic credit and the funding.

A literary utopia entails a series of rules and restrictions for which members of society must sign a social contract. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, these rules include, for example, sleeping only eight hours a night and not engaging in any "luxury" or "idleness"

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[121] Jagudajev, "Luciana Achugar."
[122] This was a private conversation that took place immediately following the three hour performance, and so achugar's own opinion about the success of her work may have changed.

during their free time.[123] But this place where everyone follows the rules only exists in the realm of fiction. Once people inevitably break the social contract, the utopia falls apart. When achugar's audience members joined the group of professional dancers without a knowing or understanding of the social contract (The Practice), chaos ensued. As a participant in this chaos, I would say it not only fell short of achugar's utopic ideals for the group dynamic, but it also presented a problem of safety, which I would argue falls into the realm of dystopia, of danger, of the 'bad place.' Sitting even at the edges of the room, I was unsure whether someone was going to make unwanted contact with me or with others in the group. When people are dancing naked together, there is a potential for unwanted contact. As utopian scholars like Sargent have argued, when radical utopias are enacted on societies, dystopia often emerges.[124] When achugar's work turns from representation (trained professionals enacting a practice) to real life (members of the public dancing without prior knowledge of the practice) the work leaves the realm of the small community and enters into the public without the safety of a social contract.

In a review of *An Epilogue for Otro Teatro: True Love*, Erin Bomboy from the Dance Enthusiast takes a somewhat negative tone when discussing the issue of authorship and hierarchy. She writes, "One daring audience member joins the fun, and the cast welcomes her. The rest of us sit and watch, watch and sit, stupefied into inertia. With no permission to blur roles, the hierarchy remains unchallenged."[125] In fact, achugar herself has not worked out exactly how much participation she desires from the audience, in

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[123] Claeys et al., *The Utopia Reader*, 78.
[124] Sargent, "The Necessity of Utopian Thinking: A Cross-National Perspective," 1.
[125] Erin Bomboy, "Impressions of luciana achugar's 'An Epilogue for Otro Teatro: True Love,'" *The Dance Enthusiast,* (2015), accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.dance-enthusiast.com/features/view/luciana-achugar-true-love.

favor of a principle of the unknown. But while achugar sees this as a mechanism of liberation, Bomboy reads it as exclusivity. Theodor Adorno writes, "If a work, without its author necessarily intending it, aims at a supreme effect, it cannot really tolerate a neighbour beside it."[126] In a work that strives toward utopian ideals, Bomboy's alternative perspective within the work pushes her into inertia. Adorno's diagnosis of conflict thus sheds light on Bomboy's reaction. When a public experiences the work, its "supreme effect" causes intolerance.

Within this conflict of intolerance is precisely where the work becomes challenging by forcing the audience member to identify him or herself in a room full of people and make choices such as staying or leaving. What might we learn about people and performance based on our experience of agency? A group of naked and clothed people dancing together without inhibition no matter what size or color or shape or age... this is a forum for a different kind of social engagement. Those who were like minded stayed in the room and those were put off or could not stay for the duration of three hours left. The chaos of this performance is the moment when the stage altogether disappears and the protection of professional versus amateur is no longer present. When dance becomes challenging, it is an exciting moment to stop and think about what exactly offends or angers one about bodies dancing, and then consider how one's own subjective reading comes into play. It is in my own fear of an unknown situation that challenged me about this work. When my otherness became so potent, when all the audience members except me joined the group, I felt isolated in my desire for normalcy, for clothing, for

[126] Theodor Adorno, "Commitment" in *UTOPIAS*. Ed. by Richard Noble (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 46.

separation between audience and performer, for passive, traditional viewing. Achugar's struggle is to both maintain authorship of her work and at the same time show a non-hierarchical group dynamic that proposes a new type of body, both totally free and totally connected with everyone else. The unboundedness of these circumstances translated into a dance of the unknown, in which even achugar herself could not know what would happen.

As a real life situation, the Gibney performance was potentially unsafe for both the dancers and the audience. But pushing the boundaries of dance and art, this work achieved a complex interaction between audience and performer that brought attention to the social dynamics of the space. The environment of the dance studio for the Gibney performance inspired members of the audience to feel as though they were in a private space with rules that do not apply to the outside world. This subversion is similar to structures set up by bars or brothels or raves in which the social codes change and what is normally considered wild or disgraceful is normalized and accepted. The dancers or community members who wanted to partake in the practice enjoyed the freedom of being surrounded by like-minded people in this subcultural environment, and whether newcomers or regulars, the space was open for anyone to join in. Strangers taking off their clothes and dancing together, in effect, becomes normalized through achugar's performative gesture within the confines of an enclosed, private space.

Achugar confronts failure after Gibney as a result of chaos. In Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*, failure is seen as an important contribution to our

understanding of culture.[127] Halberstam argues that "under certain circumstance failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world."[128] In other words, failure is of value for its ability to dismantle normative and "conventional understandings of success."[129] The fact that achugar felt she had lost control over the performance also means she attains her goal to create a non-hierarchical environment and dismantles typical measures of success, such artistic authority, to exist in a realm of unknowing. The potential discomfort of audience members like myself reveals the existence of normative structures of interaction and juxtaposes it with the subversiveness of publicly performing pleasure. Failure is thus crucial to the utopian success of the work.

Figure 3.2: Nikima Jagudajev, Jennifer Kjos, Molly Lieber, luciana achugar, and Oren Barnoy in *An Epilogue for Otro Teatro: True Love.* By Scott Shaw

[127] Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure.* Durham: Duke UP, 2011.
[128] Ibid. 2-3.
[129] Ibid. 2.

In the above image from *Otro Teatro* at Gibney, we see five dancers, including achugar, naked, dancing in front of the mirror that reflects an audience sitting or standing around the studio's perimeters. Not pictured is a dj playing loud house music for the duration of the work as well as a few other dancers. While a photo might capture just one second from a three-hour long performance, it is worth pausing to characterize the performance through these moments in time so that we might understand something about the group dynamic. In this image, achugar herself is completely naked, while her other dancers are more or less clothed. She mirrors the movements of one her dancers, looking as though they are about to clap hands. Behind them, two dancers stand up against the mirror, mid movement. Nikima Jagudajev on the left, wearing blue pants, lies on the floor removed from the movements of the rest of the group. Disco lights bounce of the floors and the walls and a club-like purple light saturates the room.

This shot was probably taken earlier on in the performance, before any members of the audience joined in as it shows a clear separation between the performers and the audience. And yet, none of the dancers were engaging in movements that any of the audience members could not perform. They were engaged in the non-technical, joyful activity of dancing in a club. The audience is positioned in an unusual way for a dance performance, with some people sitting, others standing, one even reclining on the floor, much like Jagudajev. The atmosphere is relaxed, informal, and "chill," as Bomboy recalls.[130] This is the moment in the performance when viewers are watching the professional dancers. Many of the audience members can see themselves in the mirror and so the direction of awareness turns back on them. The music is incredibly loud, the

[130] Bomboy, "Impressions."

beat pulsing, there simply is not any way around feeling it within one's own body. How would I dance to this music? Am I tapping my foot? Does my body want to move? One older man's response to these questions was to get up off the floor, undress, and dance wildly for the rest of the performance. This was not an uncommon response at the showing I witnessed. Why do people, including achugar, want to get naked in public and dance?

First, it is important to make a distinction between the terms naked and nude in a discussion of dance practices. The difference between the naked and the nude is a classic art historical conversation that over the years has elicited various definitions. In traditional terms the nude female, for example, is often a mythical creature: hairless, imaginary, and unthreatening. Alexandre Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* reclines over the waves of the sea as little angels fly above her. She is pale, hairless, and does not make direct eye contact with viewers. There is nothing embarrassing or out of place on her body, instead she fulfills patriarchal Western ideals of how a subdued lady should look and behave. In turn, her nude body is not shocking, it is refined, otherworldly, and delicate. The converse to Cabanel's idealized nude, for example, is Edouard Manet's *Olympia*. Olympia was shocking in her day because unlike Venus, she does not operate in a mythical realm, but in the real world. Olympia is a prostitute - her skin described as dirty and sickly.[131] She stares directly out at the viewer. She is not a passive, idealized female but a naked woman prepared to entertain her next visitor. The reception of this work proves that in relatively recent past, there is a distinction between the naked woman and the nude.

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[131] T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1984), 96.

It was historian Kenneth Clark who most notably made the distinction between the nude and the naked in his 1956 book *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*. As a form of art, the nude denotes an elite body, poised and perfected, "a body re-formed."[132] This is an essential distinction in art terminology because it denotes the naked body as a form of high art that could be appreciated in the most polite settings. A painting or a sculpture of a *nude* body is still very much cloaked in its artistic interpretation and its standards of formalism. This, Clark argues, is quite different from the naked body, which is instead a state of being "deprived of our clothes" and therefore 'uncomfortable' and ashamed.[133] But Clark was writing in a time when performance art was not widely accepted. In the 1950s and 60s, we see the emergence of performance art and of post-modern dance, both forms employing the live unclothed body as a defining feature. So how important is this semantic distinction and can we continue to use Clark's seminal definition in describing the art of today?

Patricia Gay's 2011 thesis addresses the naked body in American contemporary dance, arguing that the terms nude and naked when applied to dance should be used interchangeably to mean the unclothed body.[134] But doing away with a distinction that our language has specifically accounted for is actually detrimental in the study of dance. It would mean that an unclothed dancer on a stage viewed from a distance in a structured Modernist piece carries the same meaning and elicits the same kind of reaction as an naked dancer brushing up against an audience member while eating fried chicken.[135]

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[132] Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1972 (orig. 1956), 3.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Patricia Gay, *The naked truth: an analysis of nudity in American Avant-Garde dance of the twenty-first century* (Thesis, Florida State University, 2011), 2.
[135] Antonio Ramos performance at American Realness 2016, New York City.

While in everyday vocabulary both performances can be said to “contain nudity,” one dance follows in a polite formalist tradition with clear boundaries between audience and performers whereas the other pushes against the norm and tries to operate outside of what its audience might consider comfortable. In this way, it is not useful to conflate all unclothed bodies, but rather to discuss the nuances reflected in the intention and tradition out of which these works arise. In order to avoid confusion, I will employ the term *naked* to refer to any unclothed body and the term *nude* to refer only to that special category of nakedness in art that preserves polite formalism and does not push against tradition but rather operates very much within it. Achugar, her dancers, and the audience, become naked when they take their clothes off.

Getting naked in public can be read as a show of dissent, as a protest for gender and racial equality. In fact, there has been a resurgence of women practicing this gesture in recent years, particularly with the Free The Nipple campaign, for which women believe they should be able to show the nipple in public or through social media. Achugar, through her nakedness, through her fully grown underarm and pubic hair, participates in the movement aimed toward freeing the body of sexual objectification. On the other hand, achugar does not deny her sexuality, rather she directs it toward empowerment. Achugar herself states that she intentionally chooses to be naked because of she is pushing past the notion that older bodies cannot be sexual.[136] At one point in the performance, she climbs on top of a huge speaker and begins to writhe on top of it. At another point, she and other naked dancers, typically women, have close interactions that could very well be read as sexual. I therefore look at achugar’s nakedness as a form of

[136] Jagudajev, “Luciana Achugar.”

gender acceptance. In manufacturing discomfort, achugar's work strives toward tolerance of otherness.

Figure 3.3: luciana achugar, *An Epilogue for Otro Teatro: True* Love. By Scott Shaw

In the above photo, achugar and two of her dancers embrace. Achugar is not wearing pants, only a bra, and her dancers' clothes are only very loosely covering them up. Achugar appears sweaty, the hair on her head tousled, and her eyes are closed. This is not an aggressive embrace, but an intense one. There is almost confusion as to whose limbs belong to whom. Here we might turn to achugar's text on her website about the mission of her practice:

> A practice of growing, growing a body of work, growing a collective body with all the dancers, collaborators and participants as audience, and growing myself a new body; a utopian body; a sensational body, a connected body; an anarchic body, that is full/filled with pleasure; with love and with some kind of magic, mystery
> ………………………………with a brain that melted down to the skin,

> the flesh, the bones, the guts, and the crotch... and with eyes that see without naming and see without knowing.[137]

Her eyes indeed closed, "with eyes that see without naming and see without knowing," achugar in this embrace makes the case for her mission. Experiencing the intimacy of a naked embrace, resting her head on a dancer's shoulder, using the group for support of weight: these are signals of connectivity. It is not often that a choreographer puts herself in such a place of vulnerability with her dancers in an improvisational setting. In order to receive her, her dancers must be trained in acceptance, awareness, collective understanding. This is the brain of which achugar speaks, the "brain melted down to the skin...and the crotch." Right down to the bare "crotch," this photo exemplifies the kind of liberated mindset required to participate in this practice.

If the mindset to participate requires openness to a sweaty, naked embrace, then it is only natural that much of the audience would fear this kind of connection and leave, which in fact they did. Even Bomboy refers to the exclusive nature of the work.[138] While it is certainly not the first time in history for this kind of behavior to be explored, it is nonetheless a radical gesture to physically stand in public naked in an embrace. This might be particularly shocking as it is a group of three, where any signs of a heteronormative relationship or a traditional kind of love story is removed. Jill Dolan writes about utopia in performance as providing "hope" for a "better future.[139] This embrace is full of hope that whatever sex or nationality or religion, the mind can melt down and humans can relate to one another through their bodies. In his book *Together*, Richard Sennett characterizes the 2013 US climate, stating, "Today the United States has

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[137] Achugar, "Mission."
[138] Bomboy, "Impressions."
[139] Dolan, *Utopia in Performance,* 2.

become an intensely tribal society, people adverse to getting along with those who differ…"[140] Since 2013, the situation has become increasingly heated, with race and gender conflict stirring up everything we thought we understood about the values of the country. In fact, when Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton went in for their second debate, they could not even shake hands before the event, signaling that the differences are just too great to cooperate. A group embrace - bare, raw, naked - sends a strong message of acceptance in a time of division and strife post 9/11.

Within the private space of a dance studio, the Gibney performance got wild, almost out of control, as people lost their sense of normal boundaries. The "post-civilized" body was enacted, but with a lack of clarity about social codes. In the public space of the Seaport performance, however, which was done in the streets, much clearer boundaries were made evident. Rather than bodies getting naked and making contact with each other, the dancers instead broke social norms more subtly through behaving joyfully, sexually, and collectively. Throughout the performance, loud music encouraged people walking down the street to come join the group, and some even began to dance with the dancers. The tone of the piece was subversive, yet family friendly, a combination of elements that make performance in public places so important. South Street Seaport is a peculiar site for work that is so culturally critical, and so it adds a layer in the utopic story of *Otro Teatro*, the same work that occurred at both the rehearsal and the Gibney sites.

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[140] Richard Sennett, *Together: the rituals, pleasures and politics of cooperation* (London: Penguin, 2013), 3.

South Street Seaport is a little area in which the streets are clean and the population is mostly tourists and business people. There are nice restaurants with outdoor patios and the area is segmented from its surroundings with cobble stoned walking streets. People gather in the central area to lounge and drink beer. This sets the stage as a micro American utopia in itself, a place set off from the rest of the city to provide a relaxed and comfortable setting in which to hang out and shop. When a performance is held outdoors in public, there are a number of different ways a site is chosen. Sometimes, as in the case of achugar's work, the site is chosen as a host location for a festival or series of events and the artist is asked to perform there. The performance is thus transplanted to the location as opposed to being designed for the location, so it is not exactly site-specific. Nonetheless, how does site affect the meaning of achugar's work? We might call this Seaport performance a juxtaposition of worlds: the world within achugar's piece and the world of South Street Seaport. The layering of these two worlds acts as contrasting versions of utopia. South Street Seaport is meant to attract consumers and tourists, people who have extra money to spend. *Otro Teatro* is a world made up of people who value human interaction, "using dance as a ritual of becoming and an occasion for communion with the audience."[141] In one moment during the Seaport performance, achugar climbs on top of a car and begins to hump it. This is outside of normal street behavior, and in some cases might seem inappropriate, but represents the kind of bodily freedom that achugar's work strives for. The moment is both sincere in its joyful and humorous expression of the body as a sexual being, and also critical in its commentary on our society, our obsession with cars and other shiny things. Achugar's

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[141] Luciana achugar, "Otro Teatro," accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.lachugar.org/otro-teatro/.

half naked dancers, dancing wildly in the streets to blasting house music, humping cars and interacting with passersby, agitates a site that is normally reserved for the consumer. Indeed there was some agitation; a member of the audience let her children dance on someone's car, the owner of which promptly urged them to stop. Appearing like something akin to a flash mob or a protest rally, the Seaport performance temporarily re-formed its surrounding landscape into a site of opposing values. If the Gibney performance was about the social dynamics within a group of people, the Seaport performance is about social dynamics of people and their relationship to place.

Figure 3.4: luciana achugar, *An Epilogue for OTRO TEATRO: True Love*, Front St. between Beekman St. and Peck Slip, River to River 2016. By Darial Sneed

The image above shows a view of the Seaport performance of *Otro Teatro*, which also occurred over a period of three hours. Because this work was set outside on the street, people could come and go as they pleased. Or, as is evident in the photo, audience members could talk to their friends, take photos or videos of the performers, or even

watch from across the street. Store fronts and pristine buildings set the backdrop for a sweaty, gritty dance in which achugar herself is lying face down on the street. The dancers have dirt on their skin and some are barefoot, half naked. Lying on the ground dirty, there is a sense that the dancers do not belong here, shopping in these stores, eating in these restaurants. What we do not get from the image is that there is loud house music playing out of speakers, attracting people to come over and watch, and causing some people to dance in place. What we see here is a spectacle, made particularly evident by the amount of people holding up their phones to record the scene. One woman in the orange top stands up front and center to record the dancers, perhaps in an effort to capture the juxtaposition of the scene. What are *they* doing *here*?

Choreographers like Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs were performing in the streets as early as the 1960s, but while their work was mostly silent and minimal, achugar's work is loud and flashy. In the street dances of post-modernism, "Clothing, behavior, and the parameters of performance would be outwardly as close to civilian life as possible."[142] Ordinary movements such as walking or sitting were to be performed in ordinary circumstances, off stage. But in achugar's work, the movements nor the setting nor the demeanors of the dancers is anything ordinary. Just by looking at the above photograph, one can clearly make out the difference between the audience members and the performers. The juxtaposition of the pristine, public, atmosphere with the dirty, loud, sexual performance complicates achugar's work, making it appear both celebratory (house music, sparkly costumes, liberated movement style) and also subversive (loud

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[142] Marcia B. Siegel, "Dancing on the Outside," *The Hudson Review*. Vol. 60, No. 1 (Spring, 2007), 2, accessed April 19, 2017, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20464678.

music, abnormal/hyper sexual gestures, interactions with audience members, some nudity). This is very different from the subdued attitude of the 1960s Judson choreographers, whose goals were to remain ordinary and "unperturbed" by the chaos of their NYC surroundings.[143]

Most notably, this image shows the congregation of a group of people around achugar's performance, drawn in perhaps by the loud music or the sparkly costumes, but gathered nonetheless as a group, that essential component to achugar's work. In her article about the art of flash mobs, Jane Tumas-Serna claims that this kind of social gathering reflects a cultural need to get back to a time in which human interaction, as opposed to the "alienation present in modern industrial social institutions,"[144] was prominent. Achugar's work gathers people together for a connective activity of and about the body, but many people reacted by pulling out their cameras, like the woman in the orange shirt front and center recording the scene on her cell phone. In achugar's attempt to build a collective mentality through liberated movements and house music, the spectacle took over and audience members enacted their habit of documenting (presumably) for social media. Perhaps the combination of human interaction with the distancing of the camera is a signal that audiences are connecting with the work in a different way, reading the work critically within its environment. In documenting and potentially sharing the scene, audiences are forced to frame the work, to ask questions of the work they might not ordinarily ask, and place themselves in relation to the work as they share it with others. In this sense audiences may use potentially alienating

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[143] Ibid.

[144] Jane Tumas-Serna, "Flash Mobs: Art, Cyberspace and the Sonorous Community." *LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES.* Volume 50, No.4 (Winter 2004), accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.lituanus.org/2004/04_4_1Sernas.htm.

technologies in order to gain a deeper understanding of their own position within the work. So while achugar may indeed desire human interaction, the audience seems to desire a different experience.

Figure 3.5: luciana achugar, *Otro Teatro: True Love,* River to River Festival, New York 2016. By Samara Kaplan

In this final picture from the end of achugar's Seaport performance, the progression of the piece is evident in the way the audience has intermingled with the performers in the street and some of the performers have stripped down to underwear. Achugar herself is topless, breast exposed, and barefoot. We see clothes strewn across the street, an audience member in khaki shorts with his shirt removed, and other audience members with their arms up clearly dancing along as part of the group. There is a woman

in a yellow skirt standing near the sidewalk who wears a big smile on her face and appears as though she clapping her hands. Others on the sidewalk participate in their own way, smiling, raising one arm, or filming the scene. The separation between performers and audience has become fuzzy as more audience members join the dance. What is pictured here is not a minimal, "everyday,"[145] subdued Judsonesque street dance, but a raucous celebration, a party, an occasion. This celebratory aspect is what gives people permission to join in. Because the focus is on the group as opposed to any individual dancer, and the physical boundaries of the space are not totally delineated, the more the merrier. Inclusivity, rather than exclusivity, characterizes the three hour long work, which evolves over time. So what is everyone celebrating? Achugar's Seaport performance celebrates tolerance in much the same way as the Gibney performance achieved. This utopic quality, for achugar, is evident in the evolution of the work from a small group to a larger one, from fully clothed people to half undressed ones. The "democratization"[146] of the dance connects it to its predecessor in choreographers' works such as Yvonne Rainer or Lucinda Childs. In the program notes for the Gibney performance of *An Epilogue for Otro Teatro: True Love*, achugar writes, "...more than any other work I've made before, this work is not mine but ours."[147] The utopian ideal that everyone can have a part in the dance brings the focus once again onto the group dynamic as the content of the work itself.

As we can see from the participatory and collaborative nature of achugar's work, it is not merely a fiction, a representation, a work of art, but also a method ingrained into

[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] luciana achugar, *An Epilogue for Otro Teatro: True Love.* Program Notes. Email. 2016.

the bodies of her dancers and some of her audience members, that has a life and community outside the realm of representation. The work is not produced for the stage, but practiced over years and reworked for various people and contexts, making it a living, continuous practice. Dance or performance practices are not necessarily translated through paint or lens or text, but inscribed onto bodies that live through the time and space of every class, rehearsal, and performance. The contemporary ballet company Random Dance is known for overworking its dancers to a point of physical injury, and the company Monica Bill Barnes is known to produce a female figure highly masculinized through the building up of certain muscles. These practices have an effect on the development of human bodies. But the way choreographers train dancers in their methods has been overlooked by scholars and critics. So what kind of body does achugar's practice advocate? In what follows, I explore the formation of a dancer's body in pleasure.

When watching achugar's work, there are dual forces at play causing the dancers to move, their own agency and the group mentality. First, there is an immediate sense that each dancer is supposed to move through his or her own journey throughout the entire dance. For example, one dancer might come into the practice feeling particularly tired and sore, in which case we might find that dancer slowly easing into the performance by lying on her back stretching, repeating one movement, or even being still. On the other hand, someone who has a lot of spare energy might start with a prance or even a run, or might immediately fall into synchronization with others. The range of physical territory permitted is thus a large one, allowing for bodies to sense what they need in the moment. This is not to say dancers simply come into the room and move as they please. Rather,

they ease into a state of awareness of themselves and their environment that gives them a heightened understanding of their movements. This improvisational technique does not appear to have much connection with the traditional forms such as ballet or modern dance. Feet need not be pointed or flexed, the belly need not be drawn in, the chin or the backside might jut out. In this way, the physical shapes of the body are not dictated by rules or standards. Yet, we see in the adaptability, grace, and skills of the dancers that many of them, though not all, have had a formal training. And despite the lack of formal technique employed in achugar's work, it is clear that the group has nonetheless undergone an intense training with achugar herself. This "training" is achugar's technique or practice and while drawn from various influences, it is ultimately her own production. The difference between a practice and a process, is that whereas a process might change from work to work, a practice is an ongoing, underlying investigation or method that carries through each performance. So achugar's practice in a general sense has more to do with conceptual ideals than with physical ones (set choreography, refined shapes, and so forth).

Yet with the freedom of the movement to exist as each dancer chooses, there is a consistency to the way these dancers move because of both the group mentality that arises and because of the music. The beat of the loud house music pulses in way that unavoidably causes people to move their bodies. In fact is it part of achugar's mission to make the music so powerful people have to experience that urge to dance. Within the music, there are also common movements associated with house music that the dancers will draw from. Often times throughout the performance it very easily appears as a club scene in which everyone is pulsing to the same beat. This sonic heartbeat for the dance

guides the movement of the dancers so that they all generally look like a cohesive group. But I would also argue that the dancers move similarly because of what I call the group mentality in dance. This group mentality stems from the structure of one teacher and many students, one choreographer and many dancers. Achugar's own technique is actually her own style of movement inscribed onto the bodies of her dancers, like the Hayian style discussed in Chapter Two. The freedom of moving from one's own internal and external awareness is thus coupled with an aesthetic sense of what the group ought to look like, based on achugar's style, which calls attention to the pelvis, the voice, repetition and interaction, among other things. We can both describe and recognize achugar's work, and also see that the work is not set to specific physical choreography. In fact, we see this structure in all utopic or religious communities, a higher order to things that dictates behavior and ideals. But what if all the rules achugar employs are actually meant to open up the possibility of a shifting, malleable perception?

In the interview "luciana achugar in Conversation with Michèle Steinwald," achugar herself says that when watching her performance for the first time, the hope is that the audience, not knowing what they will see, will have the experience of a shift in perception.[148] But achugar's technique not only operates outside the expectations of the viewer, but also the dancers, and even achugar herself. This goes back to the conversation after the Gibney performance when achugar says lost control of the room. This is not a typical problem for a dance performance. In fact, dance is expected to be perfected, rehearsed, timed, and because of the expectations laid out by the ballet tradition, there is

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[148] "luciana achugar in Conversation with Michèle Steinwald" *Walker Art Center* (2014), accessed May 4, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1FIDJWp6mQ.

very little room for mistakes. But through her technique, which values the removal of boundaries, achugar sets up an environment that allows for the unknown to occur based on interactions amongst the dancers and the audience. The meeting of audience and dancers opens up the possibility for a shift in perception. The group dynamic becomes the content of the work.

It is important to examine the various settings in which this practice takes place as the work crosses over between arenas: public/private, dance world/art world, dancers/non-dancers. In the rehearsal space, a boundary of common understanding amongst participants is set up so that dancers can experience a practice that enables a specific kind of openness creatively, sexually, and socially. The work is private, only invited guests who have prior knowledge of the practice are invited in, and the pressure of performance is removed. This means that dancers can turn inward on themselves and get closer to enacting some of the utopic goals of the practice. Reaching an unusually vulnerable state is more likely achieved in a safe space by a group of like-minded professionals, as opposed to what happens when the practice is made public.[149] For dancer Nikima Jagudajev, the practice within the studio was often therapeutic (though not always easy), and difficulty arose when introducing the work to a public:[150]

> For a while I engaged with the work as therapeutic and it felt super important. It was a way of connecting to a sexual (but non directional) power of my body, allowing for a rekindling of suppressed sexual energy with less shame then usual...What was being asked of us was to reach an abnormally vulnerable state, but a safety net was never really established. As a result, self care and dealing with one's own safety and protection became very important and often difficult.[151]

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[149] Nikima Jagudajev, email correspondence, 2016.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

Jagudajev expresses a crucial problem inherent within this practice, the presence of both extreme freedom and a need for boundaries. Like the experience of the viewer/participants at the Gibney performance, in which she performed, safety becomes an issue within the work once the work leaves the rehearsal space and enters into the public. In the rehearsal and the Seaport performances, participants sensed the boundaries of professionalism and public decorum, where in the Gibney performance those were absent. For example, during the rehearsal version, Jagudajev approached me and got very close to where I was sitting to begin the very drawn out repetition of a pulsing gesture. This was the most powerful and memorable experience of the entire performance and as Jagudajev explains in the above quote, was a highly vulnerable, sexual gesture that was not pointed anywhere but within the dancer. I did not feel threatened and the dancer did not feel threatened either because we were both on the same page with an understanding of the practice and of contemporary dance in general. I knew she was a trained professional and I had trust in the practice, and she knew I was a curator who had been exposed to this type of work. However, during the Gibney performance, there was a moment towards the end of the performance when I felt I needed to back away from the action and sit behind an object (maybe a fan, I cannot remember) so that I would be out of the way should someone run by me or try to approach me. Did the performing audience know anything about The Practice? There was a sense of trust in the rehearsal space and a strong sense of distrust in the Gibney space, even though in the rehearsal the interaction between myself and the dancer was much more intimate than any interactions during the Gibney performance. It appeared as though boundaries of trust were

established in the rehearsal amongst all participants, whereas boundaries were muddled or even lacking in the Gibney performance.

For dancer Jagudajev, a lack of boundaries crosses over into all aspects of the practice, and becomes a central quality of the work. She says, "As the work desired a stripping of boundaries, a lack of boundaries became - to varying degrees - our way of life."[152] Jagudajev refers to achugar's dance practice not as her work or as separate from her life, but as her "way of life." She also refers to the practice as therapeutic, sexually expressive, and vulnerable, implying that her mind/body undergoes an actual shift through the work of this practice outside the realm of dance. From the dancer's point of view, she is being asked to publicly make herself available and vulnerable with no limitations to how much audience members can interact. Achugar herself will intervene when necessary, but in a room full of people, this may not be entirely safe. For Jagudajev, "personal protection" was at the forefront of her concern:

> Many people retreated in order to protect themselves from the demands and contradictions of such a process. Many of us didn't know how to fully take care of ourselves in such an environment, and this was never really discussed. In a way it was discussed all the time, but never developed into concrete answers. We all had tactics of protection, but inherent in luciana's proposal is a desire to perpetually dive into the unknown.[153]

In this, Jagudajev says the dancers needed to develop mechanisms for self-preservation in order to continue to carry out achugar's practice. The extreme state achugar asks her dancers to achieve leaves "open windows through which one might fall."[154] Thus in stripping away boundaries, achugar reveals the need for more boundaries. This renewal

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[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.

process forces participants to confront normative behaviors and re-evaluate the necessity of socially constructed notions such as personal space or fear of nudity.

Figure 3.6: Molly Lieber and luciana achugar in achugar's *An Epilogue for OTRO TEATRO: True Love.* Photo: Scott Shaw

In the above image, we see two dancers, Molly Lieber and luciana achugar, closely intertwined during the Gibney performance. Achugar is pantless and both dancers are wearing very little, as this is a point later in the performance after dancers have taken off their clothes. Here we might look back at Jagudajev's statement where she reveals that the practice encourages "a rekindling of suppressed sexual energy with less shame than usual." Through witnessing performances and viewing images of the work, as well as through conversations with achugar herself, it is clear that sexual expression is a crucial component of the work. In a conversation with achugar, she expressed that a kind of grounding, sexual movement from the pelvis was important to her movement.[155] This sexual expression is linked with achugar's understanding of a body in pleasure. We recall

[155] Studio visit with luciana achugar, 2015, NYC.

the moment in the Seaport performance when achugar begins to hump a car, and the almost humorous response of a body in such extreme pleasure atop an inanimate object we often associate with economic class and status. Achugar defies boundaries of public decorum through the performance of sexual pleasure.

In an interview with Michèle Steinwald, achugar says she is not interested in presenting work with "one truth," but rather that she is interested in making work that is complicated, as in real life.[156] So, she asks in an interview with Jagudajev, "How do I find the method to make the kind of work I am doing?"[157] For achugar, improvisation is the way in which she can remain in touch with a state of "pleasure."[158] A body in pleasure for achugar seems not to be reliant on wealth, status, gender, or race, but rather on the animalistic qualities, like sexuality, that reinforce the aliveness of our bodies. Achugar explains, "This practice, doing it day after day builds a specific kind of body, so as you age, you have it as a history. You have built something, literally in your cellular tissue and in an energetic way. It is in your cells, not just in the mind or in the body memory, and it affects how you move."[159] The practice achugar teaches to her community of dancers is not meant to be learned, performed, and discarded, but rather it is meant to be a way life. Indeed as Jagudajev points out, the work opens up some extremely intimate aspects of the self, as in a form of therapy. Like a therapeutic method, achugar's practice claims to remake or rebuild the body into something different, presumably better. Here, the work strays from representation and becomes real life.

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[156] "luciana achugar in conversation with Michele Steinwald."
[157] Jagudajev, "Luciana Achugar."
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

I have argued that achugar's utopian ideals do not always manifest as such when enacted on real bodies. But out of these utopian efforts, achugar is able to set up social circumstances that push the boundaries of our cultural norms in order to ignite new possibilities for interaction, sexual expression, and vulnerability. Achugar's work contributes to utopian thought through its ideals of a liberated and collective body, but also reinforces the impossibility of utopia because of issues like hierarchy and personal boundaries. Within the most challenging aspects of her work, we gaze back on ourselves, re-evaluating what it means to be part of a social environment.

Chapter 4: Queer Utopia in the Work of Miguel Gutierrez

Unlike luciana achugar, New York based dance artist Miguel Gutierrez does not define his practice as utopian. However in at least one interview, Gutierrez refers to a kind of "utopian proposal," particularly in reference to his mentality toward casting.[160] He also cites Jose Esteban Munoz's book *Cruising Utopia* as one of his major influences. If utopia "refers to a better place, a place in which the problems that beset our current condition are transcended or resolved,"[161] Gutierrez's work pushes toward utopia insofar as it models his ideals for a better future. As noted previously, Noble attempts to differentiate utopian art from non-utopian art, explaining that "in one way or another, most utopian art postulates models of other ways of being."[162] We have seen this modelling in achugar's work, in which she proposes a radically different kind of bodily display and human interaction. Gutierrez's practice exercises our capacity to engage with queer culture and potential futures through aggressive and defiant self-expression. Through examining his practice, we find his argument about how bodies should move and behave in society.

Gutierrez's performances address issues of queerness outright. In the performances I have witnessed, he has passed out pink nail polish to audience members, dressed in female clothing, shown gay porn, danced with his boyfriend, and sung opera wearing lipstick while crying. In fact, his position as a gay male dancer could not be more directly present in his work. What differentiates Gutierrez's work is both a strong self-expressive

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[160] Rennie McDougall, "Miguel Gutierrez in conversation with Rennie McDougall on 'Age and Beauty' at New York Live Arts," *Culturebot.* (2015), accessed April 19, 2017, http://www.culturebot.org/2015/09/24482/miguel-gutierrez-in-conversation-with-rennie-mcdougall-on-age-and-beauty-at-new-york-live-arts/.
[161] Noble, *UTOPIAS*, 12.
[162] Ibid.

component and a collaborative mentality. In achugar's work, dancers come in and out of *Otro Teatro* because the roles are non-specific, meaning anyone who is selected and willing to engage with achugar's practice can perform in the work. In Gutierrez's work, however, often times we see roles in which it would be difficult to imagine anyone else dancing their part. This is perhaps due to the collaborative nature of his work whereby the content is produced based on the dancer's personality and personal contribution. Many of Gutierrez's works feature himself, a role that, if replaced by another dancer, would be completely altered. There is value given to the personality of each individual performer in the form of collaboration.

Gutierrez's work, like the others discussed in this dissertation, does not adhere to concrete notions of proper form or balanced composition. Rather, his work attends to intellectual and embodied values. In what follows, Gutierrez explains that his rehearsal practice does not involve mastering choreographic scores, but instead focuses on "talking" as one of the driving forces behind making work:

> Not once in my career as a dance artist has a single person outside the field asked me "What does a rehearsal look like for you?" The public fantasy entails, I believe, hours and hours of selfless exercising, straining for a perfect ideal in body and choreographic form. For certain corners of the dance world this may be true but for me, this has overwhelmingly not been the case. What is truer to what happens is a situation where I share time in a room with a bunch of collaborators and we alternate between dancing, making repeatable movements on our own or practicing weird improvisational structures and talking, lots of talking, about what we're doing and what we're trying to do.[163]

[163] Miguel Gutierrez, "Notes on Idleness and Labor," accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.miguelgutierrez.org/words/notes-on-idleness-and-labor/.

In a Gutierrez rehearsal, the "choreographer" does not hold the traditional position of dictating when or how dancers move, but rather shapes or forms the work based on collaborative exercises with participants. Conversations about goals or "what we're trying to do" become a central focus of the practice. In this way, the ideals of the practice are not within the codified structures of physical gestures or compositional rules, but rather in the conceptual foundation of the performance, asking the question "how can we express ourselves as we are?" This utopian question makes space for a personal and individual dance, one that values the positionality of the dancer.

Novelist Walter Mosley suggests that instead of aiming toward a place of perfection, we ought to embrace our imperfections in striving toward what he terms the "untopia."[164] This untopia accounts for the human need to be "unruly" with "time to play and room to move."[165] Gutierrez does not aim to portray a perfectly structured society, but rather his work aims to expand our notions of humanity and our perceptions of beauty, creating a certain chaos that provides "room to move." This unutopian desire allows for difference, as opposed to striving toward perfection. While the term *untopia* may not be as useful in thinking about our current governmental systems, and may also just be another word for utopia, it is useful to consider as distinct from our western canon of utopias that typically do not account for chaos and difference.

Gutierrez's most recent work, a trilogy entitled *Age and Beauty*, directly calls itself a "queer piece" and makes reference to addressing a "queer futurity," a significant concern of Gutierrez's entire oeuvre and a reference to Munoz's *Cruising Utopia*. Munoz

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[164] Walter Mosley, "Utopia? Forget About it. Time for 'Untopia,'" *The Nation*. (2016), accessed April 19, 2017, https://www.thenation.com/article/utopia-forget-about-it-time-for-untopia/.
[165] Ibid.

says, "Certain performances of queer citizenship contain what I call an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifyingly heterosexual present."[166] This "anticipatory illumination of a queer world," glimpsing of a queer future, is exactly what occurs in Gutierrez's work. In the opening lines of his performance *Age & Beauty Part 1*, Gutierrez reveals that his piece is influenced by queer theorists and their notions not only of sexuality but also of time and relationships between people. While *Age & Beauty* is aggressively queer in many ways, critics of *Age & Beauty* shy away from this topic, elaborating on statements spelled out in the program notes as opposed to opening up their own experience of the work. One *Dance Enthusiast* author focuses on the concept of "aging" while another sums up her article with the trite if not meaningless statement that "Age and Beauty is about life."[167] But these reviews miss the confrontational aspects of Gutierrez's work that make it so important, specifically his exploration of queer bodies and behaviors that look toward a potential future. I focus on Gutierrez's most recent trilogy of performances *Age & Beauty* to bring forward a discussion of his utopian ideals. I examine *Parts 1* & *3* as providing a queer lens toward a more tolerant society. Through aggressive political and sexual actions, Gutierrez's practice manifests a "queer futurity."

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[166] Munoz, *Cruising,* 49.
[167] Gia Kourlas, "Review: In 'Age & Beauty,' Miguel Gutierrez Ponders the Personal and the Professional," *The New York Times* (2015), accessed April 19, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/21/arts/dance/review-in-age-beauty-miguel-gutierrez-ponders-the-personal-and-the-professional.html.

Age & Beauty Part 1: Mid-Career Artist/Suicide Note or &:-/

Figure 4.1: Miguel Gutierrez, *Age & Beauty Part 1*. By Ian Douglas

Age & Beauty Part 1 is the first in a series of three queer performances by Miguel Gutierrez. Just under an hour, the work begins with a long movement sequence, followed by solos, and a then a finale during which Gutierrez sings loudly with a loop machine. Compositionally, the work is traditional; it begins with a catchy opening sequence, moves into character exploration, and ends with a grand finale. But in terms of content, the work operates outside of conventional dance norms by breaking the fourth wall and exploring gay male sexuality. In his article "All the Possible Variations: The Intimate Maximalism of Miguel Gutierrez," Ryan M. Davis argues that the work is utopian in its "refusal of definitional limits with an ecstatic rupture of the gallery's well-mannered

containment."[168] Davis refers to the Whitney performance, which took place in a gallery, whereas I saw the same work in a theater. I agree with Davis's argument that Gutierrez's *Part 1* is utopian because it breaks open boundaries regarding context but I take his argument further by suggesting that Gutierrez's *Parts 1* and *3* are utopian because they push the limits of the theatrical experience in order to manifest a queer future.

Gutierrez begins *Part 1* with an informal monologue to introduce himself and his dancer Mickey Mahar. He asks the audience to turn off their phones and refrain from texting. His tone is light and funny and a little bit sassy. He introduces the work as the first in a suite of queer pieces, then discusses his intellectual influences. This opening section is in typical Gutierrez fashion, speaking casually and directly to the audience before launching into highly energetic performance. Traditionally in the west, dancers do not tend to speak, at least not before dancing. Talking about the work is reserved for the post performance talk, once dancers have returned to their street clothes. Recently in dance, however, more and more choreographers are being educated and encouraged to talk about their work as any visual artist would, referencing theory and clearly explaining the goals of their work. In order to properly frame his work, Gutierrez introduces it to the audience himself, referencing Jose Esteban Munoz and Jack Halberstam, two famous queer theorists, in an effort to ground his own work in an intellectual if not academic realm. In effect, he is telling the audience that his traditional dance steps like jetes and pirouettes are going to be less important than his ideas about gender and sexuality.

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[168] Ryan M. Davis, "All the Possible Variations: The Intimate Maximalism of Miguel Gutierrez," *Theater.* 45.1 (2015), 29, accessed April 19, 2017, http://theater.dukejournals.org/content/45/1/11.abstract.

Once the introduction has finished, Gutierrez and Mahar begin a synchronized, choreographed dance, facing the audience. The music is fun and upbeat and the gestures mirror this feeling, appearing almost like a cheerleading routine. The dance moves are jazzy, pop and feminine, as Gutierrez and Mahar swing their hips, shimmy their shoulders, gesture toward their male organs, and conduct "booty drops a la Beyonce."[169] Gutierrez wears a slight smirk as he looks out to the audience. Gutierrez wears a hot pink womens one piece bathing suit and white and pink makeup on his face. Mahar wears a large t-shirt and gym shorts and also wears makeup and sparkles on his face, as well as a pink sweat band. After rigorous dancing they both stop and stand facing the audience, hold hands, and simply stare out at each member of the audience. This moment lasts an uncomfortable amount of time, the entire duration of the song that has been playing on repeat. They very slowly turn their gaze toward each other, their heads move closer together and by the end of the second round of the song their faces have inched closer together and they appear to be kissing.

[169] Ibid., 28.

Figure 4.2: Miguel Gutierrez, *Age & Beauty Part 1*. By Eric McNatt

This segment, beginning with the synchronized dance number and ending with the kiss, sets the sexual tone of the work. Gutierrez is muscular and curvy, he has a beard and body hair, but wears a pink ladies one piece bathing suit. Mahar on the other hand is skinny and hairless, wearing a t-shirt and gym shorts that hang off his boyish, lanky body. Dancing together side by side, the contrast between Gutierrez and Mahar is stark. Even their facial expressions are different: Mahar is expressionless while Gutierrez smiles flirtatiously at the audience. Gutierrez draws attention to the difference between he and Mahar, to a masculine/feminine binary, in order to defy gender roles. Munoz argues that a queer space emerges when the masculine and the feminine "cohabitate" without effort

to hide or conceal biological sex.[170] In other words, Gutierrez does not shave his legs or beard, but rather allows his masculine body and feminine costume, gestures and behaviors to coexist. As Judith Butler says, "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself…"[171] Gutierrez queers his body in order to open up possibilities for new ways of being in the world by playing with the notion of gender and sexuality as constructed.

Pushing the queer space further, this duet represents the problematic stereotype of the homosexual relationship between man and boy. There is no question about the sexual nature of Mahar and Gutierrez's relationship on stage. Gutierrez not only depicts queerness, but the kind of queerness that might make audience members uncomfortable. At one point in the performance, Gutierrez sticks his hand up Mahar's shorts towards his buttox. The two dancers tumble around stage together, Gutierrez's hand still attached to Mahar's rear end. He pulls away Mahar's shorts and we see his dance belt, something we typically are not meant to see. 45 year old Gutierrez plays an aggressive role toward the boyish 25 year old Mahar, once again affirming their difference. Gutierrez clearly holds the power, both as a performer and as the older, more established choreographer. What does it mean for the audience to witness the kind of stereotypical relationship that runs so deep in our cultural thinking? In his book *Disidentifications*, Munoz makes the utopian suggestion that "it is through the transformative powers of queer sex and sexuality that a queerworld is made."[172] By resisting the logics of white heteronormative sex, Gutierrez

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[170] Munoz, *Cruising,* 76.
[171] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 137.
[172] Munoz, *Disidentifications* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1994), 23.

creates a space for a "minoritarian counterpublic sphere."[173] What might seem wrong or abnormal to many who abide by traditional American cultural standards is made acceptable in the counterpublic space of performance.

During his solo, with one strap off his shoulder, Gutierrez faces the audience aggressively with his legs spread. Overtly sexualized, legs apart and exposed out of his skimpy pink bathing suit, Gutierrez confronts the audience with a gesture that connotes desire. Recalling the very same gesture in paintings like *L'Origine du Monde*, we might think of a viewer or painter's gaze directed at the model or subject. But in the liveness of this gesture as Gutierrez performs it, his gaze is turned outward back onto the viewer, as if the objectification is reciprocated. At one point in the performance, Gutierrez and Mahar repeat a series of phrases at the audience, including the question, "Do you wanna fuck us? Do you? Do you wanna fuck us? Do you?" Gutierrez asks the audience if he has made himself sufficiently objectifiable, but through this aggression demystifies himself and Mahar. Once the subject becomes knowing, he shifts the power dynamic between audience and performer, taking control of his sexuality. Moreover, this question gets at the age-old problem of dance in which the dancer's body becomes fetishized. But the dancer typically does not acknowledge this fetishization, and so Gutierrez's questions come as a shock. It is through this confrontation with the audience that Gutierrez creates a queer space that does not previously exist.

Gutierrez often makes these shocking statements in his performances to create a queer space. During a performance lecture entitled FUCKMEGUNTERBRUSGUNTERBRUSMEFUCK in Vienna, Gutierrez says:

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[173] Ibid., 5.

> I went to Kaiserbündl, the gay sauna, and had sex with strangers like I've done all over the world whenever I travel, and I called my boyfriend from a payphone and cried about something cuz I was always crying about something in that relationship, and I went impulse shopping for clothes somewhere near Mariahilferstrasse and I looked at my body in the mirror in between trying on shirts and decided that I looked too fat so I thought I should go jogging as if it's something that I do all the time but in fact I do not ever jog because I have bad knees so after about half a kilometer I was in so much pain I had to limp around the Rathaus park and think about how I was going to get back to the hotel.[174]

In this excerpt, Gutierrez again confirms stereotypes about gay men and femininity, saying he cries a lot, goes impulse shopping, and thinks he's too fat. But furthermore, he reinforces the stereotype that gay men are promiscuous and incapable of monogamy, revealing that each time he travels, he has "sex with strangers" despite having a boyfriend. Gay baths have been associated with the spread of AIDS and have in the US largely been shut down over this controversy.[175] In American culture, the gay bath is considered counter to the heteronormative lifestyle of monogamous marriage and sex in the bedroom.[176] But in appropriating these stereotypes, Gutierrez defies political correctness in favor of aggressive self-expression, in a sense arguing that femininity, promiscuity, and non-monogamy can and do exist. Gutierrez is confrontational because he says things that are not polite to say in order to take them out of secrecy, thereby creating a space for them, whether or not any of the things he says are actually autobiographical.

Gutierrez's version of utopia, his idea about how people should move and behave in the world, is characterized by aggressive political and sexual action. In other words, he

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[174] Miguel Gutierrez, "FUCKMEGUNTERBRUSGUNTERBRUSMEFUCK," accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.miguelgutierrez.org/words/fuckmegunterbrus/.
[175] Ralph Bolton et al., "Gay Baths Revisted: An Empirical Analysis" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (1994), 255, accessed May 4, 2017, http://glq.dukejournals.org/content/1/3/255.short.
[176] Ibid., 258.

confronts audiences with his expression of queerness directly, often times saying or doing things that may seem shocking or impolite. The body he presents is an extreme body, often physically exerting itself to the point of exhaustion or stripping bare for the sake of these ideals. In looking at Gutierrez's workshops, we find the groundwork for this kind of dancer to emerge. For his workshop entitled "Queer Choreographies: Whatever the Fuck that Means," Gutierrez proposes an exploration of what it means to call oneself of a queer performance maker in the following course description:

> As a description of a kind of art, discourse, and political/cultural position, the word "queer" is really having its moment. It can mean identity or strategy. In my own history I have witnessed the evolution of this word as a slur to its "reclamation" as an intersectional identity by queer activist groups in the early 90's to its incorporation into academic discipline to its current resurgence with young artists who self-identify as queer performance makers. What does it mean in relationship to performance? If we are thinking about variance or alternative means of communication, isn't dance always queer? In this workshop we use queerness as a lens for explorations in performance, time, composition and conversation, working with the shifting valences and meaning that the idea of queerness holds. Throughout the week our strategies will fluctuate between obvious and obscure, somatic and constructed, and something else entirely.[177]

In this workshop, Gutierrez asks what it means to be a queer performance maker, but does not give a sense of what the participant will actually be doing. He implies that the participant will be part of the group that considers themselves queer art makers and so will work with "queerness as a lens" as opposed to a method. Value is placed on the positionality of the dancer in a particular time and place as opposed to any technique or skill that may be acquired. This mode of teaching places value on questions as opposed to answers, bringing forth participants' ability to think critically about their cultural context.

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[177] Gutierrez, "Queer Choreographies: Whatever the Fuck that Means," accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.cnd.fr/camping2015/gutierrez.

While the language itself is not aggressive or confrontational, as Gutierrez's performances tend to be, the kind of body being trained here is one that speaks for itself in a space that allows for ideas of queerness to flourish and expand. Through creating the freedom for self-expression, Gutierrez nurtures artists to build queer futures.

Gutierrez's pedagogical methods relate closely to his performance practice, providing insight into his intentions for his relationship to the audience. The above workshop description asks the very questions that Gutierrez himself considers in his *Age & Beauty*, related to queer performance. In both the above statement and *Part 1*, Gutierrez values the performance of queerness over the enactment of any traditional dance technique. The point is not virtuosity of form or composition, but rather a form of self-expression. Because Gutierrez does not rely solely on the distancing mechanisms of traditional dance elements, such as codified movements, the audience is brought into close proximity with the artist himself and in doing so he implicates the audience in a conversation. For example, before Gutierrez and Mahar enact their kiss, they stare out into the audience very seriously, looking at each audience member as if to make sure everyone is paying very careful attention to what they are about to do. Meeting eyes with the performers, this moment becomes an exchange in which everyone is a participant. This is reminiscent of a technique Gutierrez teaches in a workshop. He has half the workshop sit on the floor watching the other half of the group simply stand and stare. He challenges the standing group to feel different levels of performativity—changing stances, eyes open or closed—in order to experience what it means to be performing themselves. In traditional terms, we might call this a lesson in stage presence, but more than that it is a way of teaching heightened communication and sensitivity between

audience and performer. In this way, he asks the audience to be an active participant in conversation around queerness. He wants the audience to watch two men kissing, in some senses asking the audience to reflect on how this scene might make them feel.

The confrontational nature of Gutierrez's actions - the kiss, the spread legs, the ass grabbing - bring his work into the realm of future we are not yet in. Meant to be uncomfortable for a certain audience, Gutierrez performs his ideals about how men should be able to behave in the world, using the theater or gallery as a forum for these projections. Once audience members witness Gutierrez's shocking actions, their threshold for discomfort becomes lowered. *Part 1* depicts a queer world with social codes that are different from the ones under which we currently live. I have argued that it is through aggressive self-expression and confrontation with the audience that Gutierrez is able to make a space for his utopian ideals. Gutierrez makes the vulnerability of what might usually be a private encounter, or an encounter at a queer bar, visible to the public, thereby breaking down boundaries.

Age & Beauty Part 3: DANCER or You can make whatever the fuck you want but you'll only tour solos or The Powerful People or We are strong/We are powerful/We are beautiful/We are divine or &:'///

Figure 4.3: Miguel Gutierrez, *Age & Beauty Part* 3. By Eric McNatt

In *Cruising Utopia*, Munoz looks at utopia as the glimpses of a future that is not yet here.[178] It is the emotion "hope," he argues, that allows us to see into this future space, particularly for minoritarian subjects.[179] *Age & Beauty Part 3* is decidedly futuristic in tone, an aspect of the piece audience members can understand from simple cues like text and sound, but that also resonate in other ways, such as atypical casting, expressive choreography, and audience interaction. Gutierrez writes, "the piece is an opportunity to envision a new future dripping with lamentation, aspiration, melancholy,

[178] Munoz, *Cruising*, 97.
[179] Ibid., 97-98.

fantasy and doubt."[180] While the work certainly moves through these descriptions, I argue that the future Gutierrez suggests is a utopian one in which there is hope that those who are different or queer or other come to be accepted. As in *Part 1,* in order to accomplish this, Gutierrez uses an aggressive, confrontational style.

Gutierrez's casting choices are crucial to the content of the overall work. Because collaboration is an important part of Gutierrez's process, his casting choices are significant and generally not interchangeable. In *Part 3*, the cast consists of Miguel Gutierrez himself, Ezra Azrieli Holzman, Ishmael Houston-Jones (choreographer), Alex Rodabaugh (choreographer) and Jennifer Rosenblit (choreographer). Gutierrez's casting represents older and young, various cultural identities, male, female and gender neutral, large and small, queer, and in relation to typical dance casting, just generally other. The conversation around casting is rich across fields like performance studies and ethnic studies, particularly in the 1980s and 90s, but those conversations focus primarily on non-traditional casting as the "casting of ethnic, female, or disabled actors in roles where race, ethnicity, gender, or physical capability are not necessary to the characters' or play's development."[181] These studies tend to focus on race and gender but shy away from a discussion of queer inclusion, or the casting of people who might be considered other within a specific context. In western contemporary concert dance, the tradition has been to cast similar looking body types and ethnicities and to stick to the confines of gender roles. But in our current era, scholarship around non-traditional casting should open up to include people who may be considered other in a multitude of ways to reflect the art that

[180] Gutierrez, "Age & Beauty Part 3," accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.miguelgutierrez.org/pieces/age--beauty-part-3/.
[181] Angela Chia-yi Pao, *No safe spaces: re-casting race, ethnicity, and nationality in American theater* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2010), 10.

is being produced.

Figure 4.4: Miguel Gutierrez, *Age & Beauty Part* 3. By Ian Douglas

Gutierrez casts people who are representative of the world in which he lives and his casting decisions are more important than his concern with technique. At one point in *Part 3* there is a long segment where the dancers improvise while crumpling up plastic. What stands out in this section is not dance technique but rather the dynamics between the people on stage. As the dancers pile on top of one another and the tone becomes aggressive and sexual, we wonder whether it’s okay for the child to be involved. Just at that moment, someone comes to take the child away, focusing attention on that child/adult dynamic. Traditionally in dance, the women tend to be small so that the men can lift them or support them, but in Gutierrez’s *Part 3*, the female dancer is quite large, putting her in a role of strength and power as opposed to putting her in a position to be

lifted up or held by the male dancers. This is Gutierrez's argument about people in a larger sense, which comments on the sexism not only in the dance world but in everyday life. The fact that it is still out of place for a woman to be cast in such a role signifies how traditional our perspective on gender still is. What is important here are the qualities determined by relationships between dancers and how they interact as opposed to the gestural or stylistic movement. It is stage presence and diversity that mark Gutierrez's casting choices.

In his 1989 article, Richard Schechner questions the terms of non-traditional casting. In 1989, the climate he describes within the dance and theatre world is a "particularist" one in which groups of people form companies (gay, black, Jewish, Chicano) and in which gender roles are clearly delineated.[182] In 2016, the company structure is largely the same, though many artists have broken out of this model to make dance a more collaborative process. If there are no historical roles to fill, such as in the restaging of classical ballets, artists are free to suggest new types of people without the danger of turning the role into a parody. Schechner describes non-traditional casting of productions in two ways, either that the race and gender of the actors are not perceived or where "some kind of social and/ or aesthetic comment, framed by the world of the artwork, is expressed by means of the casting."[183] In the end, he proposes that there be a flexible model "that allows for situation-specific decisions regarding when to use, when to ignore, and when not to see race, gender, age, and body type."[184] While in 1989 this was not yet the world in which Schechner lived, in 2016 Gutierrez's *Part 3* exercises a

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[182] Schechner, "Race Free, Gender Free, Body-Type Free, Age Free Casting." *TDR* 33.1 (1989): 4, accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145934.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid., 10.

freedom from traditional casting not by breaking casting rules but by changing them altogether, creating new stories based around the actual people he works with as opposed to hiring them to fill a role. Through this process of collaboration, Gutierrez gives a voice to the individual identities of his performers.

At the beginning of *Part 3*, child performer Ezra comes on stage and simply stands and stares, much like Gutierrez and Mahar do in *Part 1*. Ezra goes by the pronoun they, so the choice of this particular child is important, as audience members were not quite sure which gender to assign to them. One reviewer misidentified Ezra as 'he' before one of the dancers made the correction online.[185] This gender neutrality is unusual in concert dance, particularly in traditional dance contexts. In ballet for example, gender roles are clearly delineated. Even when an all male cast performs a piece, as in Matthew Bourne's work, gender assignment is clear. We saw in Gutierrez's *Part 1* that he dressed as a woman but kept is male attributes, blurring the gender lines. Ezra takes this action a step further, being both child and gender neutral, and representing the kind of person we are seeing more and more of in society. When Ezra stands in front of the audience, just staring, Ezra asks to be seen.

The act of simply staring, of establishing presence, is perhaps most iconic in Marina Abramovic's 2010 exhibition *The Artist is Present* at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. For this piece, Abramovic sits in a chair across from each visitor without speaking or gesturing but just simply being present. This performance had multiple different responses from those who sat across from the artist, ranging from those who were moved to tears to those who were completely unconvinced. Those who were

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[185] Bomboy, "Impressions."

unconvinced said that those who were so moved by the artist's presence were simply awe struck at meeting a celebrity artist, at the spectacle of it all. Amelia Jones writes an article on this work, revealing her experience as part of this spectacle, "... not an emotionally or energetically charged interpersonal relation, but a simulation of relational exchange with others" including that of the photographers, the audience, the museum staff and so forth.[186] Then, there are dozens of portraits of all kinds of people sitting in front of Marina with tears streaming down their faces. If a student of art history meets Abramovic and understands the rich history she is encountering and is consequently moved to tears, is this not an authentic experience? What Jones and others do not account for is the fact that there can be multiple experiences of the same act based on the viewer's positionality. Abramovic uses confrontation with the audience to open up a space of implication and conversation.

This moment of confrontation in Abramovic's work is not unlike the moments in Gutierrez's work where his performers encounter the audience in a two way dynamic in which the audience has agency to gaze back at the performer. This confrontation turns what might ordinarily be a traditional theatrical viewing experience into an active one where the viewer considers his or her own reaction to the presence of the performers. Why we see such polar responses to confrontational moments is because of the nature of human interaction. It is less important to figure out the proper or most intelligent response to the interaction between viewer and performer and more important to understand the range of questions, reactions, and experiences that occur from a simple

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[186] Amelia Jones, "The Artist is Present: Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence." *TDR.* 55.1 (2011): 18, accessed April 19, 2017, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/414677.

gaze and acknowledgement of someone else's presence. In the case of Ezra's confrontation with the audience, my own reaction shifted and changed throughout the section, but ultimately made me more aware of my own experience of compassion watching a child perform. Ideally, casting a gender neutral child would open people's minds to the possibility of connecting with someone they might not have otherwise encountered.

This aggressive pushing of ideals that Gutierrez does so consistently through his work is also present in his overtly sexual choreography. At one point one of the male dancers, wearing nothing on the bottom but a dance belt, goes over to one side of the audience and kneels down with his ass in the air, exposing himself. In the context, say, of a strip club, this kind of gesture is expected by the audience because there is a social code that determines the types of gestures that are appropriate for that setting. In an experimental dance context in a concert dance theater, the lines are blurrier, even for the seasoned dance viewer. What is Gutierrez trying to convey through this aggressive choreography? I would argue that Gutierrez is trying to make his audience uncomfortable so that they can reflect on and discuss that discomfort, ultimately moving things forward. Discomfort ultimately challenges viewers to consider the world from a different perspective. In my own experience, watching Gutierrez's work over the years has made me more open-minded to different ways of living and behaving. For example, in Gutierrez's work *myendlesslove*, I witnessed Gutierrez attach his mouth to the sex of his dancer on stage. This is how it appeared anyway, and after the performance I was confused at what I saw or did not see. This aggressive sexual act on stage was in my mind meant to exhibit that which our culture has a hard time acknowledging: gay sex.

And so by confronting the act itself, my position as a viewer forever transformed as I lost the expectation of comfort I had previously had in thinking that dance performance would stay within the bounds of polite presentation. Just as I sat in the corner of achugar's *Otro Teatro* with my wool coat on, I felt like an outsider being shocked by the goings on on stage. But this discomfort that comes along with confrontational choreography is where Gutierrez makes his impact. In *Part 3*, when the dancer sticks his ass in the air in front of the audience, Gutierrez is causing discomfort to spark a new perspective. Of course, not everyone will be uncomfortable as there are audience members who, like Gutierrez, identify with this overtly sexual behavior. Nonetheless, Gutierrez's work is challenging even to the most well-versed dance viewers.

During *Part 3,* the audience sits on all four sides of the stage, making them mostly visible to everyone in the room. Toward the middle of the piece Rosenblit, sweaty and disheveled from dancing for 20 minutes already, goes over the audience and lies herself across them. Unexpected and largely unwanted by the audience members, this gesture is extremely invasive. In the video footage of the piece, you can see a woman shake her head as if to say "no." Rosenblit avoids this particular viewer and then lies down across the people next to her. For any sweaty person to come touch a stranger is difficult, but for a large, scantily clad Jen Rosenblit wearing a lot of face paint, this is an extremely uncomfortable setup. Sitting in the audience, I wondered what I would do if she had come over to me. Would I have been able to say no? Would this have hurt Rosenblit's feelings? I marveled at the tolerance of those audience members who played along and I identified with those who did not. One little gesture, this act stood out long after the moment was over, the rest of the audience wondering if they too would have to interact

with the performers. Gutierrez uses choreography to cause discomfort in the audience, but uses audience interaction to cause another level of self-reflection. On the one hand, it is not really ever okay to pressure someone into physical contact. People have all sorts of various histories and boundaries that cannot be known at the time of interaction. While watching the piece, and even afterward, as an audience member, I was actually angry at this bit of choreography. I thought it put people on the spot in a way that was rude and potentially unhealthy or harmful to the viewer and Rosenblit herself. But in all my anger and discomfort, I was forced to consider the situation from the dancer's perspective. The actual act of saying no to someone in this situation, or even the thought, makes people consider their own level of tolerance. How far is too far? It seems that in order to push boundaries, you have to actually push peoples' boundaries, and in this way, this moment was successful. Gutierrez does not present easy work, but rather poses confrontational situations that are potentially extremely uncomfortable.

Gutierrez is part of a category of art that causes discomfort in addition to pleasure. Undoubtedly his work aims to please in many ways. He plays catchy songs using a loop machine, dresses in fun costumes, and is funny and charismatic. But there is a level of his work that operates on causing viewers to push out of their expectations or comfort zones, and this is the part of Gutierrez's work that is utopian in that it looks toward creating a future a place that does not yet exist in which sexuality is free and open and people are accepted for it. The displeasure that may be felt during the performance is ultimately meant to lead toward expanded notions of pleasure in the future. What is considered ugly or out of place on the stage should likewise be reconsidered in our narrow vision of what constitutes beauty. In an interview with Frederick Luis Aldama regarding art and

discomfort, Aldama argues that "the ugly and discomforting is not *in* the object, it is *in* the relation between the subject and object."[187] This relational dynamic has the potential to function as a mechanism of change, of shifting perspectives and relations. Indeed the first time one witnesses Gutierrez's work is a very different experience from the fifth time and so forth. Discomfort turns into expectations which then become comfortable, carving out new boundaries for relating to dance.

The relational concept of understanding an artwork is heightened when the audience itself becomes part of the object. *Part 3* makes the audience a focus of the piece by having audience on all four sides of the stage. So when Rosenblit makes her move, or when Rodabaugh bends over, everyone in the audience can see the exchange and reactions on the faces of the viewers. In a review in the Brooklyn Rail, Jaime Shearn Coan talks about the women sitting next to him during *Part 3*:

> I know nothing about the sexuality of this woman, but as the show began, discomfort and disapproval exuded from her as clearly as warm breath on a cold night. I felt her body go first rigid, and then fidgety. My proximity to her reaction served to defamiliarize what was in front of me. Looking out from what I imagined as her perspective, I saw something strange, something queer.[188]

From this text, we understand the positionality of the writer, someone clearly familiar with queer dance and as it turns out also a part of queer culture. But in causing discomfort, Gutierrez is able to make these seasoned eyes see something new, and at the same time he shocks those who are not used to his overtly sexual style. And so the

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[187] Frederick Luis Aldama and Herbert Lindenberger, *Aesthetics of discomfort: conversations on disquieting art* (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan Press, 2016), 19.
[188] Jaime Shearn Coan, "The Evolution of the Queer Dancer," *The Brooklyn Rail* (2015), accessed May 4, 2017, http://brooklynrail.org/2015/11/dance/the-evolution-of-the-queer-dancer.

audience is taken into a future they had not yet known, a queer futurity as Munoz would say, a glimpse into that which is *then* and *there*.

Toward the beginning of the work, the entire cast comes together in a group to sing the words "do you worry about the future?" over and over. This powerful moment addresses the audience directly with the word "you," and comes right after a solo by the gender-neutral child dancer, making a strong statement about the unclear future of our world that may resonate with some more than others. The tone of the song is haunting, suggesting a world in which there may be cause for concern, especially for those who might be considered misfits or outsiders. Yet the configuration of the dancers in this moment is hopeful. They all sit close together, supporting one another despite the fear inherent in their words. On some level though, these words might be taken as, "do you worry about the *queer* future? What might a queer world look like and is it something that seems threatening to you?" The woman above who was immediately uncomfortable might indeed worry about a future in which this kind of open sexuality is made acceptable. The disquietude that arises from Gutierrez's aggressive pushing of values is precisely where the work functions, as a vehicle for change. Self-reflection arises out of the discomfort of witnessing non-dancerly bodies, explicit sexuality, and unwanted interactions. It is not the *here* and *now* that interests Gutierrez, but the possibility of a *then* and *there*.

Through casting choices and aggressive choreography, Gutierrez's *Part 3* requires the audience to exhibit tolerance, not only through their gaze but also through their interactions with the performers. The notion of tolerance is a crucial part of our history as a society that prides itself on freedom of culture and religion. Tolerance is an idea

claimed by both Left and Right.[189] But in recent times, post 9/11 and with the election of Donald Trump for president, we are seeing an outright rejection of tolerance, a fear of tolerance for its potential to change the world the way we know it. Trump was elected president despite (or because of) his racist, sexist and xenophobic promises, promises that rallied people behind intolerance. Gutierrez presents unexpected and uncomfortable situations in order to test the limits of what an audience will remain engaged with, therefore providing a negative in order to make room for the possibility of a positive. In a divided country where the LGBTQ community is still undergoing prejudice, this work to push people forward is important.

While the concept of tolerance defies singular definition due to its widespread and multivalent usage,[190] it is useful in understanding the utopian goals of Gutierrez's practice. Gutierrez writes a poem, "I am perfect and you will love me and everyone in this room is in this fucking dance."[191] But looming between the lines of this poem is a fear of the very opposite: I am not perfect and you will not love me and everyone in this room isn't in this fucking dance. With the lines and their implied negation, we see the space between performer and audience, the fear that audiences will shut down, judge, and walk out. And indeed in the video footage of *Part 3* we see a woman shake her head 'no' when Rosenblit tries to sit on her, showing the agency of audience members to decide not to go along. But within the confrontation of the performance, and the choice to push through and stay and watch, comes an expansion of tolerance toward that which was initially uncomfortable or foreign or strange. Gutierrez's *Part 3* exercises peoples'

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[189] Wendy Brown, *Regulating aversion: tolerance in the age of identity and empire* (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 2008), 3.
[190] Ibid., 3.
[191] Gutierrez, *When You Rise Up: performance texts* (Brooklyn, NY: 53rd State Press, 2009).

tolerance toward that which is queer, and in doing so opens up a future space. For Gutierrez, utopia is a place where difference is celebrated.

Conclusion

In researching four choreographers, I have asked the question: how are utopian philosophies manifested in current U.S. dance practices and what are their effects on both participants and viewers? This question came out of an interest in studying aspects outside the work on stage so that whole practices could be better understood not only through the lens of the choreographer or the audience member/critic, but through the dancers themselves and those who actively participate in each practice. When studying any kind of bodily technique, be it yoga, Tai chi, or dance, we find that there are a set of ideals around the body that influence that body in a real-world way, not just on a stage or in a studio. The choreographers chosen for this study have in common specific sets of values around shaping the world through dance. For Anna Halprin, her goals might be as grand as world peace. For Miguel Gutierrez, he employs the queer body in order to manifest greater acceptance. While philosophically these values are utopian in their effort to make the world a better place, in practice they turn into something different, as all utopias tend to do. It is important to ask how choreographic philosophies are implemented and what their effects are because these practices are disseminated onto the bodies of others, both dancers and in some cases audience members.

Chapter One explores the non-traditional, highly influential practice of choreographer Anna Halprin. Halprin has created not only a style of dance but a therapeutic movement practice that aims to influence the entire way in which bodies inhabit and interact with the world. Movements involving increased awareness, which anyone can do, are turned into therapeutic gestures that aide in the participant’s ability to perform with increased confidence, mobility, sociability, and sensitivity. The practice is

therefore not relegated to staged performance but rather affects the participants in a more holistic way. Finding ideal ways to move and behave in the world through dance make her practice utopian. As a method for artistic output, this practice also translates as utopian in Halprin's work *The Planetary Dance* in which participants of all backgrounds and ages come together to dance for world peace, a utopian goal. The dance is more like a ritual than a recital in that there is no idle audience and no technical display, which makes it highly community-oriented. The dance is also performed all over the world, making it an attempt to affect real change throughout communities. All around her and throughout the world, Halprin aims to make the world better through dance in a way that is outside normal political structures.

In Chapter Two on choreographer Deborah Hay, we look again to a figure who has created both a practice and a performance style which she disseminates to new generations of dancers. The way Hay and others discuss her practice suggests that dancers should undergo an unraveling of their habitual patterns. For this reason, Hay even liked to work with non-dancers who did not already have the imprint of dance language on their bodies. In order to better achieve the utopian goal of shedding habitual patterns (of dance, gender, and so forth), Hay often works with a written score that does not communicate choreography as movements, styles or gestures but as actions and qualities. Despite the effort to move away from mirror-image training, participants are not un-trained but rather re-trained in the Hayian style of movement. I looked at Hay's Solo Performance Commissioning Project in which both the group dynamic and the knowledge of Hay's own movement style became visibly clear throughout the process. I also examined this transfer of bodily language in Hay's work *No Time to Fly*, which was

performed separately by both Hay and Ros Warby. An analysis of their two performances indicated that while the score was open enough to allow each dancer to make her own choices in the moment, the instructions, because Hay works so closely with each performer, appear to be highly specified. Nonetheless, Hay's utopian goal is clear within the work: to give agency to both the performer and the audience.

Chapter Three moves into a discussion of a more contemporary artist, luciana achugar, who, like Anna Halprin, builds a practice that can be performed as a group or participatory ritual thereby changing the role of the audience. Achugar, like the other choreographers discussed here, does not have a company but rather an evolving group of dancers she tends to work with. This chapter focuses in on one particular work entitled *Otro Teatro: An Epilogue for True Love* because this work builds on achugar's larger philosophy and it changes over time, with different dancers, and across venues, yet always addresses achugar's core philosophical principles. Through an exploration of her practice, we found that one of achugar's main concerns is the removal of boundaries for the way bodies ought to look, behave, interact, and perform. This utopian goal of shedding boundaries means that her dancers often become nude, perform sexual gestures by themselves or with others, and interact with audience members or invite them to participate. Achugar's dancer Jagudajev reveals that despite the therapeutic aspects of the work, her own sense of safety within boundaries was never established, resulting in a challenging balance between full participation and self-care. In this effort to examine boundaries, I also looked at the difference between a rehearsal, a performance in a dance studio, and a performance outdoors in a public space, for which it became clear that each new setting allowed for a new set of interpretations and interactions with the work.

In the final Chapter, Miguel Gutierrez's work comes into focus as prime example of Jose Esteban Munoz's utopian queer futurity in its attempt to break down established modes of intolerance. Gutierrez's practice does not only involve arbitrary or refined movement sequences, as in traditional dance techniques, but rather sets forth a practice of the embodiment of social values. I used his performance *Age & Beauty Parts 1 and 3* to discuss these values and their implications not only as a representative art form but as a practical solution for social justice. His non-traditional casting choices are just one example of Gutierrez's mission to expand not only dance but the theater-goer's experience of the form. He casts people who might identify as queer in a number of ways, being gender-neutral, black, gay, and so forth, and then forcing the audience to interact with these nontraditional bodies even so far as to come into physical contact with them. Gutierrez thus forefronts the particular people he chooses to perform with as opposed to their technical ability in terms of traditional dance languages in order to send a clear message that his work is about imagining future possible worlds in which queerness is, at the very minimum, tolerated. Gutierrez's work is thus a physical embodiment of Munoz's queer theory that suggests performance can provide a glimpse into that which is *then* and *there*.[192]

Each chapter revolves around one choreographic work in order to both open up that work through a discussion of its underlying ideals but also to use that work as an example of the ideals set forth in each artist's philosophy. In this way, the dissertation contributes as the documentation of a history, a critical perspective, and a continuation of the conversation around utopian performance. Scholars like Jose Esteban Munoz and Jill

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[192] Munoz, *Cruising*.

Dolan tend to look at the staged performance works themselves and the ideals they project as opposed to the manifestation of choreographic values from conception to practice to performance and beyond. This study does not take the performance as the end-all product, but rather sees the performance as just the tip of the iceberg to a much larger practice. In each case study, we find gaps between the choreographer's philosophy, practice, and performance, but nonetheless find value in their striving toward utopian betterment.

These four artists are understudied in the field. There is some writing about Anna Halprin and Deborah Hay either written by themselves or written as a kind of exploration into the practice rather than a critical text. Luciana achugar and Miguel Gutierrez are similarly understudied in the field because they are still mid-career artists at the time of this writing. But it is important for dance scholars to study living, working artists as well as historical figures because the liveness of performance and the first-hand interaction with choreographers is crucial to gaining a deeper understanding of the work. Though it is essential that we study living choreographers to see or participate in their work live, because I have been working in close proximity to these artists, there have been limitations to my study. I often discuss my own personal reactions as a viewer/participant that could be seen as unique experiences. In achugar's work, for example, I clearly had a singular reaction to her Gibney performance, everyone else had either left the room or joined in with the dancers. But in each of my viewing or participatory experiences I tried to keep an awareness of my position as a researcher so that I might see the work from multiple perspectives. In the case of achugar's Gibney performance, I held a middle ground as an observer while staying true to my reaction to the work. This kind of

perspective is important to the field of dance studies in which there is an emphasis on social interaction through bodily training and the performance of that training. A unique perspective can open up or change the meaning of a work that, like achugar's, is inherently a social experiment. So while I did not attempt to take an objective stance as a convincing tactic, in return I provide an experiential glimpse into what it was like to be present as a viewer/participant as a contribution to the historical cataloguing of these choreographers and their practices.

At the beginning of this research, I hypothesized that the utopian philosophies would not turn out to be utopian when put in practice, based on the common understanding of utopia as the impossible place. I did not think that dance was special in its ability to foster pure and ideal social experiences. In this way, I viewed each work with some degree of skepticism, despite my personal view that these four artists make some of the most important and meaningful dance work in the U.S. What I learned from in-depth studies of these choreographic practices is that aspects of dance practice on a small scale do have the ability to affect the daily lives of participants (dancers or viewers), whether positively or negatively. I was particularly surprised by the extremely vulnerable account that dancer Nikima Jagudajev provided that was ultimately complicated but exemplified the kind deep effect that a bodily training can have. I also found that seeing Gutierrez's work over and over again over a period of some years exposed me to a culture I had not previously been exposed to and made me ask myself questions that I had never asked before. Would I have been comfortable if a dancer had come to sit on my lap? What is the proper way to address someone who identifies as gender-neutral? Through interaction and exposure, my tolerance was expanded. These are

just a couple examples of the ways in which my initial hypothesis was deepened through the research process.

Notable connections between the artists came into focus through the research process that are worth mentioning here. Halprin, Hay, achugar, and Gutierrez all have an interest in performing the group ritual through their works in which they turn the potential audiences into full-fledged participants, usually to some kind of ritualistic music (drumming, EDM, and so forth).[193] This interest in participatory group performance is not just a coincidence but a deeply important aspect of these practices that aim to make a real change in the world. It does not seem enough to rely on the empathy of audience-viewing, but instead these artists create situations in which audiences are asked to physically engage in various ways. With each of these artists there is also a thread of the Hayian ideal to shed dance or societal training as though it were in some way damaging, in order to re-form the body anew, most blatantly in achugar's display of public nudity and sexuality. We also see the role of the choreographer clearly coming into focus as a charismatic leader. In Hay's documentary, groups of dancers sit without moving at all to listen to and absorb Hay's philosophy. Like Hay, Halprin has a similarly engaging quality that draws people to her. These are not choreographers hiring dancers for a company, but rather leaders in a community who people flock to. I chose these four choreographers because they had some specific criteria in common, such as long term practices and non-traditional choreographies, but more and more connections between them continue to emerge.

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[193] Anna Halprin's *Planetary Dance* (1987-present), Deborah Hay's *Circle Dances* (c. 1970), luciana achugar's *An Epilogue for Otro Teatro* (2015-16), Miguel Gutierrez's *DEEP AEROBICS* (2011-present).

Throughout this dissertation, I have made the case that contemporary dance practices can been seen as utopian philosophies about how bodies ought to move and behave. Through an examination of these philosophies, I have argued that utopian ideals in dance practices are complicated in that they provide alternative ways of being in society but often fall short of accomplishing exactly what they set out to do. In other words, while the philosophies themselves remain utopian, their implementation tends to push singular ideals too far. For example, in Halprin's striving for world peace, her methods can impose on other cultures. In Hay's desire to unravel bodily trainings, she essentially re-trains the body in her own likeness. In achugar's effort to remove boundaries, she highlights the need for boundaries in order for people to feel safe. In Gutierrez's creation of a world that is tolerant of queer people, his aggressive methods can often turn people off. These ideals work to shape the lives of participants toward values that *strive* toward betterment, inclusion, tolerance, and authenticity and are therefore important to study, particularly in an era where social issues can no longer be ignored.

Moving forward, it is not necessary to name each dance practice as utopian or not utopian. But this term is useful as a way to critique dance philosophies that aim to implement a set of values long term through practice and to link these practices with the notion of a philosophy. What is important to take away from this study is that dance performances are not necessarily isolated processes but part of a larger practice that influences and shapes both dancers and participants in daily life. This is different from an artistic practice where an artist might pursue research on one topic for one series and then move onto a different topic for another work, leaving the previous subject or even style in

some ways complete. Instead, these dance practices are more akin to physical practices like yoga, where the values are meant to be embodied long term. The gap in literature is an examination of these practices as philosophies without taking for granted their embodied effects. Dance is not only representational, it is also real life. As the field continues to develop, there is room to study concert dance practices in-depth without prioritizing the “staged” dance event. The practices off stage are just as meaningful as the performances themselves as they help to shed light on current belief systems within and outside of mainstream thought. In the case of these four artists, we actually see their alternative values inching closer toward the mainstream, as in the focus on queerness in Gutierrez’s work, one of the most pressing conversations in the U.S. at the time of this writing. That in his workshop he trains dancers how to look at and connect with audience members shifts his performance from a representational art form into a social one. What kind of body does the choreographer intend to create and how does this affect an audience/participant in different ways?

Through my research, I have had the opportunity to search for meaning in dance practices as a dancer, viewer, and critic. Each of the practices I have chosen to discuss in this dissertation has been essential to my understanding of the potential of dance to transform people. I worked with Halprin and Gutierrez directly as a workshop participant, Hay’s writings and teachings were passed down to me through other teachers, and I returned time and again to achugar’s performances because they kept challenging me to reconsider my preconceived notions about dance. In this way, each of these practices has personally moved me. Because I study other choreographers’ versions of utopia, I have often been asked the question: what would my ideal practice look like? The idea that

dancers have the cultural (if not financial) freedom to embody various perspectives from many different artists encourages a greater sense of empathy. The movement toward artistic autonomy and away from codified traditions means more kinds of bodies can be seen dancing. And the advent of the Dance Studies scholar and MFA programs in dance mean more self-awareness, more critical discourse, and a deeper understanding of the implications of a shared practice. Empathy, inclusivity, and discourse are for me the utopian qualities that can arise from dance practices as they continue to multiply.

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