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Decolonizing Alliances:

Afro-Asian Choreographies by David Roussève/REALITY and

Ananya Chatterjea/Ananya Dance Theatre

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

by

Alessandra Lebea Williams

2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Decolonizing Alliances:
Afro-Asian Choreographies by David Roussève/REALITY and
Ananya Chatterjea/Ananya Dance Theatre

by

Alessandra Lebea Williams

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor David Delgado Shorter, Chair

This dissertation demonstrates how diasporic practice experiments with cultural forms of communities of African and Asian descent for decolonizing purposes, or radically transforms systemically oppressive politics on nation, race, gender, and sexuality. Through case studies of two transnational dance companies known as the Los Angeles-based REALITY and Minneapolis-based Ananya Dance Theatre and their respective choreographers David Roussève and Ananya Chatterjea, I discuss how choreographies are grounded in exploration of communities living outside boundaries of racial, ethnic, and national origin and an enduring engagement in dance forms and traditions for the purposes of crafting stories about challenges

faced by communities of African and Asian descent. Since the late 1980s, Roussève/REALITY has experimented with identities of the African diaspora through utilizing contact improvisation, jazz, Euro-American modern dance, West African-based movement, and Hip-Hop to emphasize experience in terms of gay black men's losses to AIDS and black women's stories of sexual violence. Representing these black cultural forms and histories alongside the Asian diaspora, Roussève and REALITY connect experimentations in black cultural forms with Asian performance practices in contemporary Indian and Indonesian dance. Since the mid-1990s, Chatterjea has experimented with South Asian identity by engaging with the Indian dance forms of Odissi dance, Chhau martial arts, and yoga to connect the environmental, gender-based violence experienced by South Asian women to persons of Asian and African descent. Also representing stories in cross-cultural formation, Chatterjea and Ananya Dance Theatre align experimentations with Indian dance forms with an African American theatrical jazz aesthetic. To examine racial formations across African and Asian cultures, I utilize a methodology of: dance and film analysis; life history interviews; observations of dance rehearsals, live performances, and films; dance critiques; and autoethnography of my connections as a researcher with the artistic works under scrutiny. This research contributes to gender and sexuality, diaspora, dance, and performance studies.

The dissertation of Alessandra Lebea Williams is approved.

David Gere

Shana Redmond

David Delgado Shorter, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

To my mother and family,
teachers and mentors, and
artistic practitioners of social justice:

Gratitude.

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- *Horidraa: Golden Healing*, Ananya Dance Theatre, O’Shaughnessy Theater, Saint Paul, MN 2016
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Introduction

I have grounded my research on David Roussève and his dance company REALITY currently based in Los Angeles, California and Ananya Chatterjea and her dance company Ananya Dance Theatre based in Minneapolis, Minnesota in order to argue that alliances across communities of Asian and African descent get constructed through choreographies that continuously explore specific cultural forms and histories, with ongoing attention to politics of sexuality, gender, race, and nation. Roussève works in the dance forms of Euro-American modern dance, contact improvisation, jazz dance, and Hip-Hop performance and Chatterjea with the Indian dance forms of Odissi dance, Chhau martial arts, and yoga. Roussève creates both dance and film works that delve into the lives of persons of African descent by connecting the marginalization of gay black men's stories of mourning and human loss to black women's memories of sexual violence. Chatterjea develops dance productions that connect the impact of globalization in lives of South Asian women and women of diverse African and Asian heritages. Showing how understandings of race and culture get shaped across communities of color, Roussève/REALITY links its dance and film aesthetic to Asian performance practices in contemporary Indian or Indonesian dance and Chatterjea associates an Indian dance aesthetic with African American performance in the company's choreographic works. Through REALITY and Ananya Dance Theatre, this dissertation focuses on how dances highlight transnational women of color and queer of color choreographies, are constructed with detailed concentration on gender and sexual politics in a series of multiple productions, and gradually accumulate Afro-Asian connections in order to create decolonizing alliances.

On the subject of concerns for gender, dance, and politics in African American and South Asian communities, Ananya Chatterjea's book *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies through Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha* analyzes the progressive, avant-garde choreographies of women of color artists Zollar and Chandralekha and she does so through their respective explorations of African American history and performance and classical dance and other Indian cultural forms. Although these choreographers differ according to technique and the national ideologies associated with their specific dance forms, Chatterjea connects their distinct practices through her lens of the "postmodern" as, first, a term that requires a new focus because it has been primarily deployed to discuss European American dance forms and, second, a term that becomes exemplified as radical through works by women artists of color. She discusses how Zollar's choreographies such as *Batty Moves* incorporate modern dance in moving the body as a whole, while also undercutting these movements with sharp and percussive sequences. *Batty Moves* emerges out of the new formulation of the postmodern being discussed by Chatterjea because the work does not react to or merely negate the modern but rather develops an empowering politics of "learning to love and value one's physicality and a calm assertion of one's need to have control over how one is represented."¹ Through her analysis of *Angika*, Chatterjea examines how Chandralekha aligns the multiple Indian forms of yoga, Kalaripayattu, martial arts, and Bharatanatyam to weave together the multiple connections and references from which classical dance forms originate. She posits that Chandralekha refuses to reiterate the metanarrative of the divine origins of classical Indian dance and "ruptures the claims of purity that frame classical dance." Zollar and Chandralekha's postmodern works illuminate

¹ Ananya Chatterjea, *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies Through Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha* (Middletown: Wesleyan, 2004), 187.

Chatterjea's concept of the "politics of defiant hope" as their choreographies make a fundamental commitment to "will change into being" through developing a powerful process for social transformation in dance.² Through her analysis, I have understood how shifting attention to particular women of color choreographers redirects the terms of the postmodern from prioritizing Euro-American dance forms to the ways that artists do not merely break away from the absolute, essential constructions of the modern, but create fundamental platforms of empowerment by re-envisioning the history of bodies of color and movement form. *Butting Out* provides a model on which to rely as it concerns a women of color approach to postmodern dances rooted in South Asian and African American communities.

Dance theorists such as Brenda Dixon-Gottschild and Marta E. Savigliano have also restructured the terms of the postmodern. In *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance*, Dixon-Gottschild defines the postmodern according to Africanist presences, or frameworks of Africa and the black diaspora that emphasize irony, nonlinearity, self-referential sequences, overlapping dance moves, and paradox.³ She intends to unveil Africanist presences that have been "invisibilized" as a result of racial subjugation. As Dixon-Gottschild "brings Africanist sources to light," my research also positions the artistic contributions of communities of color at the forefront of the analysis as a means to reveal how artists of African and Asian descent continue to shape and innovate the postmodern.

Also, integral to dance and postmodern studies has been Marta E. Savigliano whose own assessment of the dance form known as tango and her own self-reflexivity as a scholar from Argentina where tango originates has led to critiquing postmodernism from the lens of "a female

² Ananya Chatterjea, *Butting Out*, 42.

³ Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 51.

Latina Other from the South” of the globe.⁴ Her positionality sets up a problem in terms of anthropology because of her posit that “Third World Women” challenging imperialism are chastised because “there seems to be no legitimate place for our conflictive, unfit protests.” She seeks to “unlearn” how tango offers an initiation into the male world of patriarchy and intends to resist the academic discourse of the postmodern that she argues reproduces the colonial by becoming increasingly obsessed with the exotic other. Postmodernism develops this conflict associated with seduction through its disbelief in human agency and its way of reestablishing an absolute Other. To remedy these problems, she relies on postcolonial scholarship in order to call on postmodern thinkers to challenge imperialistic thought and to be an “intellectual engaged in an ongoing decolonizing process among many other revolutionaries.”⁵

Savigliano brings into her critique of postmodernism the decolonizing framework of postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon who defines the colonial circumstance as reproducing a dichotomy between the Algerian and French, a divided world of native and settler that is forced on an entire people. Frantz Fanon discusses the colonial position in *The Wretched of the Earth* through his inquiry into the Algerian revolution against the French imperial power in the mid-1950s and early 1960s. He theorizes decolonization as a substitution of one group of persons by another that speaks to the smallest requests of the colonized, and most drastically, an entire shift in the social order from the bottom up in its quest to radically transform the structure of the world.⁶ According to Savigliano, such postcolonials or proponents of decolonization are the

⁴ Marta E. Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 211.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 230–233.

⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Translated by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1963), 29.

others of postmodernism because they push postmodern theories to post-imperialism and “promise some (political) action.” As much as her analysis discusses how dancing bodies of Argentina, and more broadly dance forms rooted in the South, get exoticized as passionate and seductive bodies in postmodern thought, her inclination toward postcolonial theory as integral to shifting the postmodern paradigm also points to a trend in dance studies: the use of postcolonial thought to redirect the course of postmodern limitations and to place emphasis on challenging imperialism. Chatterjea also picks up this practice to discuss the postmodern choreography of women of color as she refers to “that dialectical reorganization of intelligences and sensibilities that Fanon talks about” in the *Wretched of the Earth*.⁷ Here, she brings forth his formulation of the colonial structure as a dichotomous condition between the native and settler, a system only drastically transformed by focusing on how the masses, or the great majority of disenfranchised persons in a society, change their circumstances by creating a shared initiative. She considers him “one of the few postcolonial scholars to work through embodied phenomena as an integral part of his theorizing” that is “permeated with that sense of how the body is a vital site where oppressive and resistive power plays criss-cross and how phenomena such as colonialism evidence themselves in and through the body.”⁸ The use of postcolonial theory in dance studies to reframe postmodern thought reveals how Chatterjea and Roussève’s works respond to a larger call for decolonization or an end to binary politics that prohibit a radical restructuring of history.

If I extend approaches to postmodern women of color dancing bodies and choreographers to discuss queer of color methods, it becomes evident how scholars have found ways to focus on a discussion of sexuality. Part of the work of “alternative postmoderns,” or Chatterjea’s account

⁷ Chatterjea, *Butting Out*, 155.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

for artists who disrupt essential constructions of culture and traditions, entails being grounded in the need for Eurocentric historiography to evaluate sexuality as socially constructed.⁹ To show how women choreographers of color critique such historical phenomena, Chatterjea discusses how Chandralekha and Zollar's works engage in spirituality as a sensual act, thereby exemplifying how alternative postmoderns critique social categories and understanding how heteronormativity deepens the essentialized configuration of culture and the prevalence of Eurocentric categories in postmodern dance. I hope to extend such emphasis on how choreographers resist a politics in which heterosexuality serves as the conventional norm for the expression of desire through my interest in queer sexuality as not only vital to theorizing, but the starting point from which to choreograph radical works in postmodern dance. This aim does not greatly diverge from the feminist politics that Chatterjea suggests when I specifically analyze how choreographies of gay men continuously rely on women's stories to discuss experiences of sexuality. Women of color choreographies and gay men's dances find a complex position at the intersection of choreography and racial and gender politics: while Chatterjea defines the politics of defiant hope through the choreographic works of women of color whose productions emphasize a devotion to radicalism in creativity, sexuality theorists such as David Gere take interest in effeminacy as "conscious strategy of defiance for gay men."¹⁰

More specifically than defiance, spirituality provides an example of linkages between women of color and queer practice in dance. Gay men's choreography can focus on the choreographer's role in turning effeminacy into a spiritual shift in power dynamics, while

⁹ Chatterjea, *Butting Out*, 141–2.

¹⁰ David Gere, "29 Effeminate Gestures: Choreographer Joe Goode and the Heroism of Effeminacy," In *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 364.

women of color artists have discussed spirituality as based on sexuality and through refusing to prioritize heterosexual desire. According to Chatterjea, choreographer Chandralekha emphasizes female sexuality as “self-realization and spiritual awakening” rather than “heterosexual love where female sexuality is elaborated and performed strictly in relationship to male sexual love,” making the “inevitable reciprocity of male-female and of love and sexuality” absent in her work.¹¹ While this anti-heteronormativity is primary in choreographies that radicalize women’s stories, reshaping gender and sexual codes linked to the gay male body is integral to queer men’s dances. Gere uncovers the “spiritual transcendence” in gay men’s choreography as “essentially contiguous with sexual ecstasy, with the result that spirituality may be read into many gestures coded as effeminate.” Gay men’s choreography clarifies his description of the transcendence of the effeminate body whose relations made with women in performance unsettle the boundaries between male and female biology. Such an account becomes vital to my inquiry into choreographies because Gere’s analysis contributes to his larger argument that gay men’s bodies and bodies visibly living with HIV can develop activist works in informing us about homophobic-based oppression.¹² I suggest that as queer men of African descent develop a radical women of color politics in their dances that challenge homophobia, they can also accomplish the type of decolonizing possibilities of women of color choreographies.

A focus on choreographies rooted in an American context call for particular attention to the settler colonial conditions of the U.S. While postcolonial analysis in dance studies has led scholars to radically restructure the terms of the postmodern toward the problematic structure of its framework and categories, an inquiry into settler colonialism further pushes the postmodern to

¹¹ Chatterjea, *Butting Out*, 148.

¹² David Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 11.

comprehend colonization as an ongoing process. Settler colonialism operates as “an inclusive, land-centered project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan centre to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminative Indigenous societies,” according to settler colonialism theorist Patrick Wolfe.¹³ Discussing the particular position of non-indigenous queer of color persons in this settler colonial structure, Scott Morgensen argues that racially diverse and transnationally queer resistances to imperialism invisibilize indigenous people and perpetuate forces of settler colonialism by regarding queer politics as nonindigenous.¹⁴ Based on Wolfe and Morgensen’s accounts, the task of queer artists of color functioning within settler colonial dynamics in the U.S. is to refute any politics that lead to eliminating native societies. Further analysis of Wolfe’s work suggests a broader position for non-indigenous artists of color when he offers an account for the integral role played by the southern plantation. To meet the increasing demand for slave plantations in the South in the 1830s, examines Wolfe, an American modernity was founded on the forced removal of Cherokee communities in the catastrophic “Trail of Tears.”¹⁵ Historically interwoven into the land dispossession of native people, then, is the disembodiment of persons of African descent as property. Wolfe describes how native communities have been subjected to blood quantum policies and black persons judged according to the rule of “one drop” of African-descended ancestry, but that the larger problem involves the targeting of these groups.

¹³ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 no. 4 (2006), 393.

¹⁴ Scott Lauria Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 3.

¹⁵ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 392.

I aim for my exploration of radical postmodern artists of the settler colonial U.S. to be defined as choreographies based on an anti-heteronormative agenda that poses questions about the targeting of people of color. While previous dance scholarship has critiqued the postmodern and prioritized decolonization through postcolonial theory, my call for a radical postmodern aesthetic in dance places emphasis on settler colonial analysis. Analyzing the works of choreographers of color through settler colonial theory requires a different attentiveness than a postcolonial focus, because I place emphasis on the enduring radical politics of choreographers in order to respond to Wolfe's posit that liquidation functions as a perpetual element in society. I choose to examine, for instance, how choreographers establish dance series such as Ananya Dance Theatre's Environmental Justice Series (2006–09) and REALITY's Creole Series (1989–92) as central to my feminist methodology of making connections to research and more broadly as part of how artists of color resist settler colonialism through ongoing dance projects.

I organize this dissertation into three larger Parts, each with a set of smaller chapters. For all three Parts, my research methodology consists of four specific areas: choreographic and film analysis to evaluate themes, technique, production, and the structure of dancers' stories in the work, life history interviews as a result of multiple recorded dialogues with choreographers as well as their artists and collaborators, autoethnography in interpreting and analyzing the relationship between my history and the research context, and archival research through interrogating dance critics' reviews. Part One is titled "Defining Diaspora from the Early Formations of Choreographic Work" and intends to discuss how choreographic work develops from cultural and historical circumstances of race, nation, culture, sexuality, and race. In the first chapter of this larger Part, I focus on the emergence of David Roussève's company REALITY in the latter 1980s in order to examine formations of diaspora in African American cultural

practices. I speculate that African diaspora in this context emerges in two ways. Roussève interviewed his grandmother, a former Louisiana sharecropper whose labor on cotton-picking farms leads Roussève to explore her memories of poverty, childhood relations and racial experiences as a person of Creole identity or mixed racial heritage. When founding the dance company REALITY, Roussève crafted written texts and choreographed in multiple artistic forms of communities of African descent in dance and on film in ways that associated the numerous layers of black femininity and labor with a reinterpretation of his own stories of sexuality, race, and gender as a gay, black man such as losing loved ones to AIDS in the latter 1980s. His film *Pull Your Head to the Moon: Stories of Creole Women* in 1992 also formulates this intersection across queer persons and women. Here, African diaspora is a narrative and movement practice that shapes blackness through structural inequalities and survival.

In the second chapter of the broader Part One “Defining Diaspora from the Early Formations of Choreographic Work,” I then discuss the context of South Asian diaspora performance based on Ananya Chatterjea’s classical Indian dance training as well as how the Ananya Dance Theatre company was founded through intersecting Chatterjea’s stories in the South Asian diaspora in the U.S. alongside the experiences of women of both Asian and African descent. Chatterjea trained principally in the classical Odissi dance form with her guru, Sanjukta Panigrahi. Later, she decided that instead of staging classical repertoire, she desired to create contemporary Indian dance with a focus on women’s movements and social conditions. When she formed the dance company Ananya Dance Theatre in Minneapolis, MN, she aligned the Odissi practice with yoga and Chhau martial arts as a means to link experiences of persons of South Asian descent with stories of race, gender, and sexuality among women of African and Asian descent. Ananya Dance Theatre continues to deepen its concentration on crises faced by

communities of color through black feminism, as demonstrated through collaborations in theater work that specializes in jazz practices and new ideas about gender, race, and queer identity. South Asian diaspora and performance in this context becomes a constant study of South Asian communities alongside the lives of diverse women of color.

For both chapters of Part One, I utilize life history interviews with choreographer and founding company artists to discuss how the terms of diaspora unfold in the formation of a dance company that highlights the intersection across social categories. In *Doing Cultural Anthropology*, Michael Angrosino describes how life history researchers currently focus on how narratives are constructed and utilize archival documentation to support this data because life history interviews illustrate the ambiguities and challenges of memory.¹⁶ Angrosino posits that researchers employ this technique to transform the historical record with different stories about race, ethnicity, gender, ability, class, and sexuality. I incorporate an analysis of multiple thirty to ninety minute interviews with not only choreographers Chatterjea and Roussève, but also dancers of REALITY and Ananya Dance Theatre (written as “theatre” rather than “theater” to follow the company’s official name), and artistic collaborators with their companies such as theatrical director, co-choreographer, dramaturge, or cinematographer. Such interviews help me to frame choreographies under specific cultural histories and practices in order to understand the position of dancers within artistic works and to fully comprehend the production process.

Also, to illustrate a different set of possibilities for life history work, I seek to reexamine the dynamics of an artist’s personal lineage as central to the making of choreographic work rather than merely analyze this story as historical evidence. I utilize autoethnography to discuss

¹⁶ Michael V. Angrosino, ed., “Conducting a Life History Interview,” in *Doing Cultural Anthropology: Projects in Ethnographic Data Collection*, second edition, (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2007) 38.

how my research launches from a place of relationships with choreographies by Chatterjea and Roussève. Autoethnography is a method in which the researcher interprets and analyzes their own personal experience and history as integral to their study of culture. I connect my own grandmother's history of sharecropping labor in the American South and how the recorded dialogues that I held with her led to creating a performance deeply informed by my studies with Roussève at the University of California, Los Angeles while I was a Ph.D. student there. As an artist in Ananya Dance Theatre beginning in 2006, I discuss how my initial viewings of the company's early works led to my becoming an apprentice and participating in dialogues with company artists and community activists in Minneapolis about anti-pollution efforts. From this standpoint, my research contributes to the methods of dance studies scholars such as Avanthi Meduri who utilizes a method of subjective reflectiveness in her analyses of classical Indian dance in order to investigate her concerns about choreographic practice without an interest in neutrality and to allow her questions to be rooted in her personal background.¹⁷ When Meduri moves through the questions that were unsettling for her as a young dancer, she poses questions about the dual worldviews of tradition and modern femininity held by Indian dancers as well as the ways that practitioners and scholars redirected the course of an age-old temple dance practice in order to produce a "respectable" dancing body of the Indian dance form known as Bharatanatyam around the 1930s.

Part Two is titled "Dancing Politics in a Long-Term Series" and examines enduring choreographic inquiries into histories of race, gender, and sexuality by outlining the foundation for my analysis of REALITY and Ananya Dance Theatre's process of making numerous dances to create a choreographic series. In the first chapter of Part Two, I discuss how Roussève

¹⁷ Avanthi Meduri, "Bharatha Natyam-What Are You?," *Asian Theatre Journal* 5 no. 1 (1988): 2.

established his Creole Series of these seven different dances *Pull Your Head to the Moon: Tales of Creole Women*, *Mama Goes to the Moon*, *Colored Children Flyin' By*, *Had Me Somebody But I Lost Her Very Young*, *Tellin' You My Dreams from a Cloud Sailin' By* parts one and two, and *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams*, all staged from 1989–1992. I posit that Roussève's ongoing choreographic process highlights a politics of interrelating queer of color stories with women of color lives. Roussève reinterprets interviews with his grandmother so that her stories of cotton-picking labor and memories of sexual violence lead Roussève to search for healing from gay black men's losses. Beyond the Creole Series and over the course of twenty years, his Dream Series (1993–5), Love Series (1996–9), dance *Stardust* in 2013, film *Bittersweet* in 2005, and his 2013 film script *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* also deepen this practice of connecting black women and queer black men, albeit through the cinematic apparatus that emphasizes the editing of images over the meaning-making of bodies. From archival sources, dance reviews and critiques increase my understandings of the diverse readings of his choreography. When dance critics recognize the Africanist elements of REALITY choreography but fail to comprehend the connections in the dance, I prioritize an analysis of intersectionality to emphasize how linkages across race, gender, and sexuality become inseparable in the body. For film analysis, I undertake analysis of film content and its relationship with choreography by revealing how the cinematic apparatus becomes a mechanism to enhance inquiries into stories of queer persons of African descent. Films such as *Bittersweet* reveal the need to connect theories of dance and film with critical race theory and feminism because of the use of narrative in Roussève's work.

In the second chapter of Part Two “Dancing Politics in a Long-Term Series,” I examine how Ananya Dance Theatre has continued to delve into Indian-based practices to interrelate histories of communities of color in stories of social accountability. Ananya Dance Theatre's

Environmental Justice Series of three dances *Pipaashaa: Extreme Thirst*, *Daak: Call to Action*, and *Ashesh Barsha: Unending Monsoon* from 2007–9 builds the company’s politics of highlighting social challenges in West Bengal, India as well as indigenous communities in the U.S. Chatterjea’s frequent journeys between India and the U.S. and her reflections on shared environmental conditions, such as pollution, inform the vision of the Environmental Justice Series while the company’s collaborations with community activists and theatrical directors greatly enhance the choreography’s focus. Through the method of dance analysis, I explore how the company’s philosophy of technique, resistance, and the energy and vitality of the ensemble bring forth their politics of connecting with a community’s environmental challenges. With broader discussion of the company’s next choreographic series known as the Quartet Against Systemic Violence Against Women of four dances from 2010–13, I deepen my assessment of how the company structures its broader political interests in gender issues. In this section, reviews of Ananya Dance Theatre that suggest, for instance, Chatterjea’s deployment of ensemble work refuses to offer an entry place for audiences lead me to encourage a more critical approach to evaluating how traditions get utilized in the South Asian diaspora to highlight solidarity among diverse women of color.

Part Three is titled “Decolonizing Alliances in Afro-Asian Choreographies” and focuses on how dance productions can create solidarity across communities of African and Asian descent through attention to artistic form. I examine how Roussève/REALITY connect its multiple dance forms to Asian performance practices and how Chatterjea and Ananya Dance Theatre interrelate Indian dance practices to African American theater. The first chapter of Part Three discusses how Roussève’s dance *Saudade* in 2009 expands on his exploration of African diasporic forms by highlighting Asian cultural forms through the classical Indian dance form known as

Bharatanatyam. The second chapter examines how the film *Two Seconds After Laughter* in 2012 interrelates Roussève's enduring focus on queer of color experiences to Indonesian dance. For this section, I examine the available production materials such as Roussève's own interviews with his co-choreographer Sri Susilowati as well as my own interviews with Susilowati and editor and photographer Cari Ann Shim Sham. The third chapter analyzes Ananya Dance Theatre's *Moreechika: Season of Mirage* to demonstrate how the company expands on its choreographic explorations to establish Afro-Asian relationships through collaborative work in an African American theatrical jazz aesthetic. Here, I use definitions of black jazz theater as a nonlinear, gestural, improvisation-based form to discuss how linkages across this aesthetic and contemporary Indian dance lead to investigations of global capitalism. To analyze the relationship across Afro-Asian diasporas in REALITY and Ananya Dance Theatre, I explore possibilities for radical intersections across sexuality, gender, race, and nation. I theorize the possibilities embedded within Afro-Asian choreographies that experiment with dance forms to create solidarity across multiple histories of oppression. I include an analysis of diaspora as the decolonizing potential to be rooted in specific cultural forms while building alliances with aesthetics rooted in different histories of nation and culture. All chapters utilize choreographic analysis to account for how gesture and movement create political commentary. Through observing live performances, recordings, and dance reviews, I examine cultural and social meanings of gestures, movement phrases, and dance styles to discuss the multiple contexts of race, sexuality, and nation embedded into choreography. This analysis of actual dance sequences and bodily articulation offers a vital expression of how diaspora gets constructed and continuously revised to express very specific conditions. Attending live performances of artistic works allow me to understand audiences' responses to the work, both during the performance as

well as in post-performance dialogues. Observing their rehearsals lead to critical awareness of their creative processes while viewing their works repeatedly on video help me to develop a more detailed comprehension of their artistic productions.

Through examining formations of diasporic practice in African American and South Asian postmodern dance, the structure of multiple dances in a choreographic series to deeply examine diasporic conditions, and decolonizing alliance-making in Afro-Asian choreographies, this research contributes to studies of gender and sexuality, diaspora, and dance. My assessment of Roussève's focus on intersecting, for instance, gay black men's losses to AIDS and black women's stories of sexual assault have led to broader discussions of the potential for coalitions across anti-patriarchal and anti-racist movements. Through analyzing Chatterjea's focus on Asian and black women's experiences of racism and sexism as integral to how the company comments on social processes, I bring focus to the potential for cross-cultural studies of gender. My inquiry into how artists choreograph within specific African or Asian cultural forms and intersect across these aesthetics shows how the terms of diaspora get defined according to racial and cultural differences. These intersections impact the field of dance studies that has argued for decolonizing alliances, because I illustrate how solidarity in communities of African and Asian descent can trouble certain categories. This transnational inquiry contributes to Marta E. Savigliano's definition of "World Dance" as defying problems of category to actualize a potential for decolonizing alliances.¹⁸ I hope to bolster calls for an end to absolute ideologies of race and sexuality by focusing on ways of delving into culturally-based experiences for the purposes of creating new alliances with the radical political struggles of diverse communities. In an era of increasing transnational flows of ideas and migrations across national borders,

¹⁸ Marta Elena Savigliano, "Worlding Dance and Dancing Out There in the World," in *Worlding Dance*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

communities can continuously recreate culture to connect with others. I conclude by positing that this research on choreographies by David Roussève and Ananya Chatterjea can have larger implications in studies of African and Asian diasporas, performance, and gender and sexuality.

Part One: Defining Diaspora from the Early Formations of Choreographic Work

Part One is divided into two chapters and utilizes theories of diaspora to discuss how cultural and historical conditions of race, nation, culture, sexuality, and race are embedded within the formations of choreographies. My focus on dance productions of choreographers David Roussève and the REALITY dance company and Ananya Chatterjea and Ananya Dance Theatre respond to the problem outlined by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur as the risk associated with the term “diaspora” losing specificity when deployed to describe all mass movements across nation, regions, and territories.¹⁹ As Braziel and Mannur suggest that diaspora studies shift away from discussing how identities are constructed to examining how diasporic subjectivities are “practiced, lived, and experienced,” I focus on how the choreographic practices of Roussève and Chatterjea emerge from their creative reflections on communities of African and Asian descent, and as persons living outside a racial and national place of origin.

In Roussève’s work, I discuss how an investigation of the lives of the African diaspora surfaces in the practices of narrative, movement, and film. I trace Roussève’s own emergence as a choreographer through his upbringing in Houston, Texas, collegiate studies of dance and theater at Princeton, participation in experimental and postmodern dance theater works in New York, and founding of his dance company REALITY in the late 1980s. To discuss underlying tensions with spectatorship of Roussève’s works, I use concepts in dance and African American studies to define the terms “modernity” and “postmodern.” I later use phenomenology to discuss some of the gaps in awareness of culture in modern dance representations. I investigate how contact improvisation becomes subversive to comprehend the precise location of Roussève’s choreographic works in the experimental postmodern realm. As Roussève interviews his

¹⁹ *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 7.

grandmother, a former sharecropper in Louisiana, and reinterprets her memories alongside his own stories as a gay man from the post-*Brown v. Board of Education* American South of racial integration, I discuss this process as a cultivation of diaspora that can be associated with black feminist concepts such as Audre Lorde's "biomythography" that delves into experiences of race and nation for the purposes of highlighting queer black women's survival of systemic oppression. I incorporate historical and dance analyses of persons of African descent in order to clarify how Roussève's artistic work connects with discussions of black labor in the South as well as the expression of freedom in African American modern dance. To broaden the usage of familial stories beyond an understanding of autobiography and discuss how choreographies and narrative work contributes to documenting the stories of black women in the larger history of the American South, I include an analysis of my own interviews with my grandmother who was also a sharecropper in Louisiana and how I turned such memories into performance. REALITY emphasizes the emotional dynamics of narratives through Africanist experimentations with Hip-Hop dance, contact improvisation, Euro-American modern dance, and West African-based movement and through using vocals of black women artists to connect with civil rights. Stories about gay black men and laboring in the South get reconfigured through the filmic medium, because Roussève bases his first film *Pull Your Head to the Moon...Tales of Creole Women* in 1992 on the dance that he had made two years earlier of this same title. Roussève's collaboration with film director Ayoka Chenzira leads me to provide more attention to editing techniques.

In Chatterjea's work, I examine how an analysis of the everyday realities of women of the South Asian diaspora comes forth in practices of classical Odissi dance and collaborations with artists that specialize in theatrical improvisation of the African diaspora. I outline Chatterjea's formation as a choreographer through her training in classical Odissi dance in

Kolkata, West Bengal, India, her studies in India and the U.S., artistic works on women's livelihoods and critiques of feminism in the mid-1990s, and formation of Ananya Dance Theatre in 2004. As Ananya Dance Theatre was founded in Minneapolis, Minnesota with artists of African and Asian descent who examine their own histories and daily experiences of racial and gender disenfranchisement in the workplace and search for a radical woman of color subjectivity, the work of this company requires a discussion of diaspora that links up with black feminist theories such as bell hooks on resistance to cultural hegemony. This chapter integrates classical Indian dance scholarship with theories of diaspora so that I can discuss how the potential for connecting South Asian histories with women of diverse racial subjectivities exists within Ananya Dance Theatre's aim to intersect multiple Indian dance forms. To show how the expression of feminism and anti-oppression expands beyond this dance company and into the awareness of audiences, I include an autoethnography of my interpretation and analysis of my initial viewings of the company. Ananya Dance Theatre's philosophy of technique, resistance, and ensemble energy through its expression of Odissi, yoga, and Chhau becomes the foundation from which its choreographies highlight solidarity across diverse women's lives. Here, I provide a general account of the formation of these three Indian forms with a focus on how their histories connect with choreographic representations in *Bandh* and *Duurbaar*. The company's stories get inextricably linked to black feminism through its collaborations with jazz theater artist Laurie Carlos who brings forth an alternative focus on oppression that supports the company's evolving ideas about race, gender, and sexuality. I expand on my discussion of Indian cultural forms with an analysis of the theatrical jazz aesthetic and black feminist frameworks on intersectionality.

I. African Diaspora Performance: An Experimentation with Women and Queer of Color Narrative, Dance, and Film

I sat down and talked to my grandmother about her life way back when. My work at that point was autobiographical, sort of performance-arty, about being African American, and (about) trying to treat difficult issues, such as self-hatred and denial of the culture, with humor and respect. When I started talking with her I realized the parallels--that obviously those issues are timeless. She dealt with losing people she loved to oppression and not wanting to be black. I got inspired and decided to make her the center of a work, which grew into seven works that follow different parts of her life.²⁰

The dances and films of choreographer David Roussève demonstrate how African diasporic performance emerges through an exploration of racial oppression endured by women and queer persons. The term “diaspora” broadly refers to the dispersion of persons across the globe as a result of involuntary and voluntary migrations and for this analysis of David Roussève, I use it to discuss creative practices that illuminate the complexities of gender and sexuality in the lives of persons of African descent. Since the late 1980s, Roussève and his dance company known as “REALITY” have produced evening-length dances and short films that reinvent his own experiences as a gay man of African descent who grew up in the American South, lost loved ones to AIDS, engaged in debates about gender, race, and sexuality during travels abroad, and aspired for a career in acting as a gay black man in New York City. As broadly explored in the quote above, Roussève intersects these narratives rooted in his own autobiography alongside reinterpretations of his grandmother’s stories of laboring as a cotton-picker in Louisiana. When he “sat down and talked to my grandmother,” he conducted a series of interviews with her about memories of poverty as well as sexual violence. Roussève then turned elements of her story into written texts that would be performed as part of seven dance productions that make up the Creole Series from 1989–92. This practice of connecting black women and gay men’s stories leads to a

²⁰ David Roussève, interview by Frankie Wright, “Grandmother of Inspiration: David Rousseve Delved into His Family’s Past to Relate His Choreography to Today's World,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 1992, http://articles.latimes.com/1992-04-06/entertainment/ca-454_1_black-dance.

feminist and queer of color practice of challenging racial and gender subordination. Such stories come into fruition through experimentations with jazz, Euro-American modern dance, contact improvisation, Hip-Hop, and West African-based movement. As a result, Roussève's works delve into the politics of the African diaspora as a practice of comprehending the experiences of communities of African descent dispersed across the globe through critique of sexual, racial, gender, and national norms.

This chapter begins by discussing a practice of reinventing the stories of southern cotton-pickers. The autoethnographic method of interpreting and analyzing the researcher's experience helps to exemplify how the stories of farm-laborers are not unique but rather illustrate the larger historical disenfranchisement of the early twentieth century. Additionally, this research approach helps to reveal the significance of transforming these interviews into performance. Second, I examine how his experimental aesthetic with dance forms emerges out of his artistic schooling and professional dancing as well as how REALITY artistic productions contribute to earlier works by black women choreographers and European dance theater artists. Last, I examine how Roussève's films extend the practice of dance filmmaking by black women artists. This analysis contributes to Paul Gilroy's framing of diaspora as phenomena that cannot be restricted to national lenses.²¹ While Gilroy focuses on the problem of racial essentialism in analyses of black cultural forms, my inquiry into Roussève's works examine the conflicts associated with race, gender, and sexuality.

Performing Narratives of Sharecropping in the U.S. South

David Roussève's upbringing brings forth a relationship to diaspora as a result of his immersion in racial dynamics of the American South. He was born in Houston, Texas, the place

²¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 87.

of his birth in 1959. There, he acted in children's theater from the age of five as a result of his mother enrolling him and his siblings in classes at Alley Theater. His artistic instruction expanded to include taking classes at Houston Ballet and participating in a jazz dance club at Bellaire High School in Houston. The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that racially desegregated schools in 1954 influenced Roussève's schooling at Bellaire because he graduated as one of a dozen African Americans in a student population of over 700.²² The arts scene in New York City and its close proximity to Princeton University played a major role in his decision to accept admission at this collegiate institution in 1977. Roussève grew up in the 1960s in the era of the Civil Rights Movement where the grassroots organizing in black communities in the U.S. supported the passing of *Brown v. Board of Education*. This broader context of racial equality becomes the diasporic position from which Roussève would later make choreographic work, following his studies at Princeton. Diasporic position is defined here as a creative practice that calls for an end to the social conditions contributing to the oppression of black bodies in the U.S.

Undergraduate coursework in dance and theater led Roussève to cultivate a practice of inquiring into social dynamics. Dance teacher Ze-eva Cohen and theater instructor Carol MacVey immersed him in an alternative method of creating performance art with critical intentions. In the early part of his college experience, Ze'eva Cohen's famous portrait of women's lives became his earliest introduction to the idea of creating dance works driven by meaning.²³ This work that inspired Roussève was set with choreography by Margalit Ovaed in 1975. Titled *Mothers of Israel*, it reinterprets the experiences of four Jewish women named

²² Greg Mancini, "Rousseve '81 Gives Art a Conscience," *The Daily Princetonian*, February 15, 2000, <http://dailyprincetonian.com/news/2000/02/rousseve-81-gives-art-a-conscience/>.

²³ David Roussève, interview by author, October 1, 2013.

Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel.²⁴ Cohen's performance practices in *Mothers of Israel* greatly diverged from Roussève's creative work in Houston where "being on a children's show, everything was pretend." The arts began to provide Roussève with the "real education" as Carol MacVey guided him further in self-reflexive acting approaches and toward a turning point in his college life. Roussève endured a kind of "culture shock" at Princeton because he felt disconnected from "white, all-male eating" campus activities that catered to students of elite backgrounds.²⁵ MacVey became the only person who required him to release his social and cultural defenses by asking him: "who are you" and "why are you here?"²⁶ She managed to bring out an honest presence in Roussève when instructing him to perform before an audience with a genuine character. Through MacVey and Cohen's teachings, dance and theater processes require of artists both an awareness of their everyday experiences and the social identities associated with their heritage. Princeton instructors taught Roussève a type of creative practice that can only develop a dance from cultural specificity.

A Princeton summer vacation offered Roussève resources to explore his familial past by conducting an oral history project with his Creole grandfather, grandmother, great aunt, and mother over the course of three dialogue sessions.²⁷ According to Roussève, he held these interviews "for family history but also ethnographic documentation," because his grandparents "were the last generation of really, really Creole people." The term "Creole" that Roussève utilizes to describe his heritage refers specifically to persons with a mixture of African,

²⁴ Pamela Mccuen, "Dance Around the World," *The Harvard Crimson*, July 20, 1979, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1979/7/20/dance-around-the-world-pzeeva-cohen/>.

²⁵ Mancini, "Rousseve '81 Gives Art a Conscience."

²⁶ David Roussève, interview by author, October 1, 2013.

²⁷ David Roussève, interview by author, October 20, 2014.

European, and indigenous descent, and to communities that have resided principally in regions of the American South such as Louisiana and Mississippi. The cultural distinctions of the Creole include linguistic diversity, because the French language is foundational to communication amongst Creole persons. Further discussing his undergraduate research based on differences between his grandparents, Roussève says, “She was more Native American than him. Her grandmother who raised her was Choctaw Native American so I wanted to talk to them culturally. It was all from their personal stories. They didn’t have any Internet. Cotton—that was it. That type of a Creole doesn’t really exist.”²⁸ Roussève reflects on a story from the interviews about his great, great grandfather’s land on which his own grandmother was a cotton farm laborer: “His family had a plantation and she picked cotton on it. They weren’t wealthy but for their world they had money. It was a plantation, just not a hundred acres.” From discussing the wealth accumulated by his great, great grandfather, Roussève provides an account of the authority that his family had acquired over law officials when it sought to enforce racial disparities. “The legend had it that he pulled out his whip and beat the white policeman when they said ‘no niggas at the parade’ but he finished the parade.” Taking an abrupt transition, Roussève then discusses how his familial assets were destroyed. “What happened in the course of their stories is that my grandfather did tell them that they burned down the whole plantation. He was five. They broke the windows with their guns. I asked him why it happened and he said they were looking for his uncle who they did take. He said the uncle had killed some white men’s cows and the uncle killed the white man.”

Finally, Roussève offers some additional details that disprove the memory about cows to, rather, unveil a history of sexual violence:

²⁸ David Roussève, interview by author, October 20, 2014.

All this over the cow? That's illogical. So my mother told me that it was a violent rape. They destroyed him. They murdered the white man. Stuffed dirt in his mouth. They thought they were protected. But that was it. From that point, my grandfather's family was poor. They took it all. This involves issues of power and money. It wasn't just a bunch of poor black girls. It was relatively wealthy Creoles. We went from privileged to shoe shiner. They had nothing.

As a result of Roussève being intrigued by “the issues of power” in his familial experiences, certain autobiographical detail would inform his dance theatre method, if and only if, such memories could contribute to a larger social dialogue. This story from Roussève's interviews unearths historical power dynamics that highlight the land dispossession of persons of African descent. Aspects of Creole identity consist of linguistic and cultural distinctions, yet the history of racial violence discovered by Roussève from his interviews comes from a broader oppressive structure of the twentieth century.

Similarities between Roussève's recorded dialogues and interviews I conducted with my own grandmother further illuminate the larger forces of economic disenfranchisement in the U.S. South. Reflecting Roussève's oral history method, I first interviewed my grandmother during my collegiate work at Macalester College and I documented her recalling the following:

My grandfather lived in Mississippi. He was a farmer. When he and my grandmother married, I don't think he owned land then but he early started buying land every fall—whatever he could afford. He'd invite all the men close around and they'd cut trees down and back then they towed it buy hand. They had mules to tow stuff up and the ladies would cook. They'd eat all night and work. They'd do this on the weekend on Saturday night. They'd clean up the land and they could work the land after they cleaned it up. They made fire in them to help burn them up. Then after they started buying the land, he bought 120 acres when he stopped.

The Ku Klux Klan put a note on his door and told him to leave. They said if they didn't get him out he'd have the whole damn state. They first tried to scare him. They ran into him one night, men be on them horses and things. They jumped on him and they beat him up. He got a weed in his mouth and that's how he breathed. But they still half beat him out. They told him to leave but he wouldn't cause he had all his land. He and his son was going along and they got to him and beat him up. But they got away. But that time they put a sign on his door. Then he had to get out. When they say move, you had to move. Cause they could have strung him up. They'll kill the whole family and wouldn't nothing

be done about it. All they had to do was take the land. They told him they put three oil wells on there after he had gone.²⁹

While Roussève's research maintains a specificity in Creole identity, a broader dynamic cuts across our families' experiences: a history of land ownership amongst persons of African descent in the American South that is dismantled, leading African Americans to a subordinate life as a sharecropper. Both our grandparents held memories of the landscape of the Mississippi Delta that historian Nan Woodruff describes as inextricably attached to an "alluvial empire" because southern planters articulated a rhetoric of progressive farming techniques while exercising oppressive labor practices on its colored labor force.³⁰ Woodruff makes some important connections between the issues of black landownership and land dispossession that our grandparents discussed because she reveals how a majority of African Americans were landowners and the role Klansmen played in redirecting the course of black property ownership in the twentieth century. Woodruff discusses how a majority of African Americans acquired property at the turn of the century in the U.S. South, positing that by 1900, more than three-fourths of blacks in the Delta owned land.³¹ She continues her analysis to argue that Klansmen aimed to "drive black sharecroppers from fields and black landowners from their property" using activities to force African Americans off the land.³² White planters in the Deep South discussed publicly their progressive agricultural practices to integrate the South into the larger U.S.

²⁹ Alessandra Williams, "A Piece of Land: Black Women and Land in South Africa and the United States of America" (American Studies honors projects, Macalester College, 2007), Paper 2, http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/amst_honors/2

³⁰ Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2003), 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

³² *Ibid.*, 132.

economy while denying black laborers their civil rights and deciding on their own terms whether or not to protect them from the Ku Klux Klan to which they themselves might well belong. Woodruff argues that planters' use of government and law structures helped to create an "American Congo," referencing the horrific period of King Leopold's possession of the Congo Free State, when capitalist-instigated persecution included intimidation, most famously in the severing of people's hands if they failed to gather "enough" wild rubber. Woodruff examines issues of land, labor, and violence by comparing the politics of racial oppression in the Mississippi Delta to imperialism in Central Africa. African American landowners were deprived of their properties post-World War I and sharecropping was utilized as a strategy to socially, politically, and economically control blacks in the Jim Crow South.

Black women sharecroppers' stories of impoverishment and survival become the source through which artists of African descent can explore history for performance purposes. As Roussève and I capture our grandparents' memories, we extend a tradition of farmer-storytellers that anthropologists such as Theodore Rosengarten suggest produce historical knowledge. Through an ethnographic process of conducting interviews with sharecropper Nate Shaw, Theodore Rosengarten posits that the memories of laborers unravel in ways "few records could an awesome intellectual life" and provide evidence of the "progress of a black tenant family through three generations."³³ Both our grandmothers labored in Louisiana as sharecroppers, an agricultural structure that Rosengarten historicizes to the dawn of the twentieth century. Post-civil war, Rosengarten describes, plantation-owners separated land into tenant plots and until the 1890s, whites and freed slaves tilled the land as sharecroppers and tenants alongside one another. Landowners took advantage of a "more submissive class," explains Rosengarten, when cotton

³³ Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), xxiii.

prices fell and poor whites were replaced with black workers. Rosengarten describes how cotton prices increased in value in WWI but farmers were held down with obligatory debts and were also stripped of the possibility to sell their crops and nevertheless farmers existed under the problems of racial subjugation and economic peonage. Confirming Rosengarten's descriptions about the state of economic poverty in sharecropping life, my grandmother discussed the following during our interviews:

See they just farmed. They was them halfer hands. Cause when you did that, you just got half of what you made. You made 10 bales of cotton, you only get paid for five cause the white man got five and you got five... Things went downhill when Papa died. We just stayed moving every year or two. And did like the sharecroppers they called it.³⁴

She remembered how her grandmother and her aunt and uncle struggled while working as sharecroppers in Louisiana after their family endured land loss, were uprooted from their home in Mississippi, and experienced the passing of "Papa," her grandfather. In Roussève's own words, he follows the life of his grandmother Thelma Arceneaux whose "spirit could soar, even though she would pick cotton until her hands would bleed."³⁵ To offer a detailed account of how such laborers survived economic subordination and actively sought to organize against its oppressive politics, Rosengarten explores the autobiography of sharecropper Nate Shaw.

Roussève and my own creative work, however, greatly diverge from the process of writing history provided by Rosengarten who contends with how much is lost and gained in changing former Southern sharecropper stories that are delivered orally into a textual document. In its literary form, says Rosengarten, an enduring practice of invention and reinvention ends and

³⁴ Granny, interview by author, December 18, 2011.

³⁵ David Roussève, "Grandmother of Inspiration."

is taken outside the existence of the narrator.³⁶ Though Roussève and I produce this ethnographic documentation on our families' memories, our objective to turn their stories of laboring as a sharecropper leads to different historical representation. Rather, our ideas reflect performance studies scholar Diana Taylor's analysis in *The Archive and Repertoire* that shows how writing fails to be the process by which all persons arrive at "culture" or become "modern" because embodied behaviors play an important role in maintaining memory and bringing together identities in different worlds.³⁷ As Taylor distinguishes between the archive, or textual documents and materials that are long-lasting, and the ephemerality of the repertoire, or embodied practices and spoken linguistic systems and movement, her analysis offers some clarity on the differences between the kind of history-making exemplified by Rosengarten's account for a sharecropper's memories of labor and performance processes that reinterpret these stories through theater and dance. According to Taylor's definition, the repertoire specifically creates an embodied memory through movement, orality, gestures, and other practices considered short-lived and non-reproducible forms of knowledge.³⁸ The repertoire sustains and changes "choreographies of meaning," describes Taylor, and allows investigators to trace certain traditions and influences. It also reproduces itself through its own set of systems and codes and is manipulated as processes of transmission occur through structures of "re-presentation." From the ethnographic method, a process of creation and recreation continues as artists embody the context of familial histories creatively and achieve a drastically different type of representation.

³⁶ Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers*, xvii–xxiii.

³⁷ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), xviii.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

Our undergraduate studies on familial experiences of land dispossession lead to choreographic work that places emphasis on the stories of women of African descent. My performance titled *An Exploration of Land Narrative and Performance* delves into dynamics of my interviews with my grandmother. Creating this piece entailed an expansion of my collegiate research while working toward my Master of Arts degree at the University of California, Los Angeles. I enrolled in an independent study course with Roussève for direction on the performance of narrative and movement for this piece.³⁹ As part of my studies for this production, I viewed several of Roussève's previous works as inspiration for my own performance work as well as to understand how my artistic ideas contribute to earlier choreographers who have long been examining narratives of black women sharecroppers of the U.S. South. When working with me on *An Exploration of Land Narrative and Performance*, Roussève passed on the dance-theater practice of exploring dynamics of experience for social purposes that he had learned from Princeton teachers. Roussève asked me to consider what kind of artistic skills I had in place to produce a performance because the depth of my own mastery would affect how we defined the rigor of the piece and would also help us to develop a coherent conversation about my grandmother's experiences.⁴⁰ Later on, he noticed my comfort in spoken word practices of articulating poetry with intense emotion and he stated that this form of expression made the narrative challenging to follow. I followed his recommendation when delivering the poetic narrative because it became for me a call to shift away from a performative style that places emphasis on specific words in order to be as verbally dynamic as possible.

³⁹ I also held an independent study with Professors Al Fraleigh Roberts and Mary Polly Nooter Roberts to prepare the narrative text for *An Exploration of Land, Narrative and Performance*.

⁴⁰ Alessandra Williams, "Lived Experience: The Choreographies of Ananya Chatterjea and David Roussève" (master's thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2013), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/55w1k6xt>.

Rather, I needed to deliver the words according to the layered emotions interlaced within the sentence structure. He suggested that I transform my own habits through varying the tone and rhythm of my voice and also through a continuous improvisation with movement.⁴¹ These practices connect with Taylor's understanding of how the body, as a product of cultural memory, is influenced by gender and racial techniques of transmission and of personal and shared identity.⁴² Through performance, an opportunity arises to reconfigure the disciplinary and mnemonic structures that direct bodies toward certain forms of expression. Artistic rigor entailed reinterpreting my grandmother's experiences by shifting the rigidity of my own actions, behaviors, and ways of articulating narrative.

From recreating the stories embedded within interviews to crafting narratives for performance, the priority given to a woman of color experience by artists of African descent illustrates how deliberate choices underlie the artistic process rather than a mere staging of autobiography. For instance, during the same interview in which Roussève elaborates on the context linked to his family's memories of a rape and subsequent destruction of their plantation, he clarifies that this story had not derived from his grandmother's memories. Rather, his grandfather had spoken about how their family had been driven off their plantation and Roussève later decided to make this experience part of the depiction of his grandmother's life in his series of seven dances titled the "Creole Series" from 1989–92. Though the recollection of land dispossession had emerged from a man of color, Roussève chose to take a "theatrical liberty" and shape this narrative according to politics associated with women's bodies. Such artistic freedoms were executed in my *An Exploration of Land, Narrative, and Performance* piece when I

⁴¹ David Roussève, communication with author, April 25, 2012.

⁴² Diana Taylor, *The Archive and Repertoire*, 86.

structured the entire performance in terms of my grandmother's voice and memory even though the narratives that I chose to highlight directly centered on my great, great grandfather. Learning of how the livelihood of my family had shifted at the dawn of the twentieth century filled me with many questions about how I would hold myself accountable to these stories, just as my grandmother had fulfilled her responsibility in passing the memory on to me. How would I use my skillset as an artist to ensure my family's experiences of being disenfranchised were part of the history of colonization in the U.S. South? In what ways could my creative work be positioned as decolonizing, as moving against the ongoing structures of oppression that subjugate persons of African descent? Using this degree of questioning as part of the impetus of investigating women's stories of historical disenfranchisement extends the creative processes of black choreographers such as Roussève who gather data on familial memories on the radical shifts in economic well-being across generations of persons of African descent and proceed from this awareness of a disadvantaged past with performative action. As Roussève exclaims, he was prompted to deal with "difficult issues" differently as a result of hearing his grandmother's experience and understanding the clear ways that experiences of racial oppression are "obviously timeless."⁴³ In deciding to craft a story that privileges a woman of color experience, documenting familial memories in performance also emphasizes a kind of radical politics. Roussève makes decisions based on past realities of oppression in his familial life, utilizing the idea of a woman of color body as having the capacity to embody layered histories.

The literary techniques of women of color writers such as Audre Lorde provide clarity on how choices to highlight the lives of women of African descent actually enable a radical politics in performance work. Author Audre Lorde's creative writing technique known as

⁴³ David Roussève, "Grandmother of Inspiration."

“biomythography” is vital to comprehending Roussève’s artistic process. He has been examined as a pioneer in “biomythographical dance theater” by critics such as *LA Weekly*’s Sara Wolf who indicates that his way of using his own history “builds to grander confrontations with issues of race and gender, oppression and survival.”⁴⁴ Lorde coined the term “biomythography” in her book *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name, A Biomythography*. In this text, Lorde renames herself “Zami,” a word that in her mother’s Caribbean home of Carriacou means “women who work together.”⁴⁵ She calls herself “Zami” after an extended search for solidarity among gay black women, her own longing for a whole sense of self, and a desire to both understand black lesbian women’s difference and to secure multiple spaces of wholesome interaction. The biomythographical process of recreating the self to build relations with others in terms of sexuality, gender, and race seems an appropriate fit for the kind of choreography under discussion when Lorde uses the word “Zami” to redefine women’s bodies as “a promise of life.”⁴⁶ As Lorde’s writing practice emphasizes bodily relations and the labor involved in connecting with others to heal, an investigation of grandmother’s stories becomes a journey through her experiences to understand life’s possibilities.

Beyond the broader decisions underlying choreography that dig into historical context of black women laborers, Roussève’s written texts focus on woman of color in order to reveal certain sexual politics and experiences. Some of the main events involved in Lorde’s writing process of biomythography directly correlate with the experiences discussed in Roussève’s

⁴⁴ Sara Wolf, “Upending the Past,” *LA Weekly*, October, 25, 2000, <http://www.laweekly.com/2000-11-02/stage/upending-the-past/>.

⁴⁵ Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name—A Biomythography* (New York: Crossing Press, 1982), 251.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 239–52.

narratives. One of the seven dances of the Creole Series is titled *Colored Children Flyin' By* (1990) and in this production Roussève re-contextualizes the first day at his recently racially desegregated high school in the post-*Brown v. Board of Education* era of Houston, Texas. Also exploring the effects of the *Brown v. Board of Education* moment, Audre Lorde describes the decision as indicating the possibilities of a shift in U.S. racism.⁴⁷ Through Roussève's spoken text, audiences learn about how Roussève joyfully sang "Yo Mama, Yo Daddy" chants on the "raggedy" bus that broke down on its way to bringing black youth to their new facility. Having been the first to finally sight the building, the black students pushed their faces up against Roussève's windowpane and the bus leaned on its side. Outside, the principal stood with hands on a waist carrying a protruding belly, accessorized with a cowboy hat, nodding at each of them as they passed and scattered off alone. Finding himself closer to "white people" than ever before, Roussève's narrative describes breathing heavily onto the back of a white male student's head until he had successfully parted the boy's hair "in a straight line." This commentary earns resounding laughter from the audience and even more so when hearing that Roussève's desired response to his East Texas teacher's question "who you wanna be" is a "large black woman who sings gospel." All the giggling reactions quiet down immediately when Roussève articulates how his having felt alone in a "room full of blue eyes" led him to say "Martin Luther King or Booker T. Washington" or some leader that earned the instructor's favor as a "credit to your race." His spoken text recalls precisely how easily he would fit in this new world because he had discovered what he would need "to give up."

As the narrative of *Colored Children Flyin' By* shifts from a focus on racial politics to creative expressions of women of African descent, the production develops a layered dialogue on

⁴⁷ Ibid., *Zami*, 172.

gender and sexuality. Roussève examines his own story as a gay black man within gospel performance, a practice theorized by scholar of culture and sexuality studies David Gere as part of a larger effort to highlight the desires of gay men in choreography.⁴⁸ When Roussève shifts his own childhood aims from gospel singer to a black male civil rights figure, he upholds a broader push for racial equality while also limiting his own journey of exploring the feminine potential of black men. *Colored Children Flyin' By* expands on its inquiry into gay black boy's coming of age by simultaneously including an analysis of young black women's own path to connection. *Colored Children Flyin' By* then moves from Roussève's narrative to experimenting with the realities of this adolescent dream coming into fruition when the lights come up on an African American woman singing, "I know who moves the future." When Roussève returns to the microphone, he speaks in the voice of an elderly woman to define "colored children flyin' by" as meaning the young girls who picked cotton and "loved each other."⁴⁹ Roussève's text in *Colored Children Flyin' By* supports the work of biomythography *Zami* in emphasizing mutual relationships between women. He explores a history of racial changes in the U.S. as also based on understanding gender and sexual differences. Roussève's own creative assessment of how women of color care for one another entails a journey toward recognition of gay black men's experiences in the South.

⁴⁸ David Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 234.

⁴⁹ *Colored Children Flyin' By*, choreography and spoken texts by David Roussève, performed by Kim Grier, Renee Redding Jones, David Roussève, Charmaine Warren, Valerie Winborne, Susan Wynn, Lise Brenner, Nan Friedman, Sondra Loring, Vicky Vadala, Debra Wanner, Ruth Beckham Holloman, Elaine Swayneson (recorded May 20, 1990, Performance Space 122, New York, NY,) DVD.

Dancing a Radical Postmodern African American Aesthetic

David Roussève's dance aesthetic establishes a postmodern form that expands Euro-American dance-theater methods, contact improvisation practices, and the research methods of women choreographers of African descent. Following Roussève, professional dance career, he founded the REALITY dance company with women of color artists in New York in 1989 and launched the Creole Series of seven different dances that explored his grandmother's experiences of sharecropping labor and his own stories as a gay African American man in the late twentieth century. Although the experimental processes of postmodern dance forms such as contact improvisation evolved to be most attractive for his artistic aims, his professional career began with engaging in Euro-American modern dance works.

Following Roussève's dance-theater training at Princeton University, he joined a professional dance company after graduating Magna Cum Laude in 1981 with a pre-law major and two additional certificates in African studies and theatre and dance. Though accepted into Columbia and New York University law schools, he decided against admittance at these institutions to perform with Jean Erdman's Theatre.⁵⁰ Roussève describes how choreographer Jean Erdman was "the first person I worked with in New York" and she "did what's called 'total theatre' which is speaking, dancing, singing all merged into one."⁵¹ Moreover, Roussève participated in a dance company that diverged from earlier models of Euro-American modern dance practice. *The New York Times* dance critic Anna Kisselgoff provides some further description about director Jean Erdman's performance work. Kisselgoff posits that Erdman had performed in American modern dance pioneer Martha Graham's company beginning in the latter 1930s. Contextualizing this era of Graham's work from 1926–1939, Mark Franko suggests that

⁵⁰ Mancini, "Rousseve '81 Gives Art a Conscience."

⁵¹ David Roussève, interview by author, February 26, 2015.

she created a modernist structure that consciously aimed to choreograph movement lacking emotional effect.⁵² Describing how Martha Graham diverged from earlier choreographers Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, Franko suggests that Graham articulated a formalist approach in the era of the Great Depression and succeeded in defining dance as a distinct approach to knowledge rather than merely an independent art form. Franko explicates this idea by describing, for example, how the physical contraction of the torso inward that forms part of Graham technique can be considered both an expression of grief, happiness, or entirely ambiguous and critically abstract. Franko informs readers about Graham's formalism by discussing how she negotiated the restrictions of misogynist emotivism and developed a choreographic design that refuted a simplistic description as being obsessed with the personal. Franko demands that Graham created an alternative practice to emotion in performance in her early work because her experimental aesthetic restructured the design of human presence through ambiguity. When Erdman co-founded New York's Open Eye Theatre with her husband mythologist Joseph Campbell, however, Kisselgoff demands that Erdman decreased dramatic effect and developed more abstract themes.⁵³

Roussève's engagement with this modern dance legacy received mixed review from dance critic Anna Kisselgoff. Offering an account for Roussève's dancing in Erdman's choreographic productions in 1981, Kisselgoff expresses how the "young choreographers" constructed different solos within the spatial sequences of the piece "Duet for Flute and Dancer,"

⁵² Mark Franko, "Emotivist Movement and Histories of Modernism: The Case of Martha Graham," in *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 46–7.

⁵³ Anna Kisselgoff, "Dance: Jean Erdman's Works at the Open Eye," *The New York Times*, December 28, 1981, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/28/arts/dance-jean-erdman-s-works-at-the-open-eye.html>.

originally staged by Erdman in 1956 and now being re-performed alongside other works initially made in 1950s.⁵⁴ Kisselgoff posits that the dance structure “made for trifling results but was better than the ‘recreation’ of ‘Strange Hunt’ (1954) with David Roussève and the other dancers.” Kisselgoff does not explicate in the *The New York Times* precisely why she disapproved of the dance that included Roussève. Regardless of this less than favorable review, she continues to hold critical acclaim for Erdman’s broader significance to the choreographic domain. As part of reviews for the documentary *Dance and Myth: The World of Jean Erdman*, Kisselgoff suggests, “Anyone wanting to know something about where modern dance is today can find the roots in this Jean Erdman Retrospective.”

Actual footage of the film *Dance and Myth* includes images of Roussève dancing in Erdman’s theatrical productions that weave together her ideas about mythology. In her own words, Erdman says she desires to construct a fundamental technique, unrestricted by style. She achieves this by researching “traditional dances of the world” and making dances produced through her own deliberate decisions. Such dances were designed to place the “body in its natural stance,” to be “free of cultural idiosyncrasies,” and “released from imitating technique.”⁵⁵ The effects of these stylistic and bodily objectives will be further discussed in a moment. First, I want to examine the larger framework of the modern in which Erdman exists. The modern dance paradigm is defined by dance and African American studies scholar Thomas DeFrantz as having broadly been made by dancers to interact with the personal psyche and to examine the impulse of an individual, creative idea. DeFrantz’s descriptions provide further context on the purview of Erdman’s goals when he explains that the modern examines universal elements of human life,

⁵⁴ Anna Kisselgoff, “Dance: Jean Erdman’s Works at the Open Eye.”

⁵⁵ “Part 2: The Group Dances,” *Dance and Myth the World of Jean Erdman* (Foundation for the Open Eye, Distributed by Uroboros, 1993), VHS.

provides a distinct bridge across previous choreographic notions, focuses on the freedom of the body, and communicates ideas about ritual.⁵⁶ As the film *Dance and Myth* continues, its presentation of one of Erdman's dances offers a display of the company's modern technique and Roussève's performance within it. The film shows the restaging of Erdman's group dance *Solstice* initially produced in 1950. The revised production highlights ritualistic dynamics because Roussève wears the orange mask of "Sun-Lion" and dances in direct opposition to the red-masked dancer of African descent Stephen Nunley who is "Moon-Bull." They both lower down into a side lunge with feet flexed and circle around one another, jumping and turning in a wide squat. As the chorus of primarily white-bodied, women dancers circle around Roussève, Nunley leaves and Roussève walks to the throne.⁵⁷ With a focus on cross-cultural aspects of human existence, Roussève and Nunley reenact an historical tradition of men competing for authoritative control. Erdman aims to present these bodies outside cultural specificities, yet prior to viewing the dance, spectators have already formulated a point of view about intimacy across racial difference and between black men and white women. In terms of Erdman's desires to construct spaces in which artists move outside of cultural difference, the body cannot be free of cultural, racial specificities as a result of being simultaneously subject and object or influenced by the racialized, sexualized, and gendered perceptions already existing in the world.

Deeply embedded into my analysis of this dance is a phenomenological lens that has been defined by comparative literature scholar Therí A. Pickens as how perceptions of bodies are

⁵⁶ Thomas DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21–2.

⁵⁷ "Part2: The Group Dances," *Dance and Myth the World of Jean Erdman* (Foundation for the Open Eye, 1993).

influenced by mainstream, popular ideas.⁵⁸ Phenomenological frameworks lead Pickens to understand how physicality is molded by others' interpretation of the body. Pickens's perspective allows for examining Roussève's position in Jean Erdman Theater as incapable of being rid of the "cultural idiosyncrasies" that the company seeks to obtain. Pickens defines "embodiment" as viewing and being viewed, feeling and being felt while also being positioned in the world according to dimensions of time, social politics, and space. While Erdman may intend for audiences to recognize artists' bodies as outside the frame of social categories, phenomenology offers the theoretical structure from which to make this objective impossible. Pickens offers phenomenological thick description to examine how popular narratives and images engage in molding perceptions such as her description of pop legend Michael Jackson's "Remember the Time" video. As a result of former NBA athlete Earvin "Magic" Johnson's HIV+ diagnosis, Johnson is unable to dance his heterosexuality as does Jackson and comedian Eddie Murphy in the video. Just as Johnson has a certain "anchoring in the social world," as Pickens suggests, Roussève's dancing alongside Nunley and the ensemble in *Solstice* has its own deep roots in many perceptions of race, gender, and sexuality. Images of black masculine bodies alongside white feminine bodies are anchored in a history of stereotypes about black men's sexual promiscuity and white women's innocence and purity. As Roussève begins to contemplate making his own choreographic work, the professional dance world's removal from everyday realities would be at the forefront of this new artistic journey. *Solstice* provides an example of some conflicts associated with performances that show gaps in directly connecting the bodies dancing onstage to social perspectives.

⁵⁸ Therí A. Pickens, "Beyond 1991: Magic Johnson and the Limits of HIV/AIDS Activism," *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 97.

Roussève's further participation in works by postmodern choreographers would radically transform his ideas about the potential of experimental choreographies and the use of contact improvisation in dance. Roussève worked with postmodern dance choreographer Stephanie Skura in what he defines as "a lot of really wild, adventurous work" such as the piece titled *Cranky Destroyers* in 1987. Dance critics reviewed Skura's work under a similar purview as *The New York Times* critic Jack Anderson describes the "extraordinary eccentricity" of an "abstract dance to a recording of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony." Anderson further posits that "'Cranky Destroyers' was as exciting as it was preposterous, and it was danced with diabolical glee by Benoit Lachambre, Brian Moran, David Rousseve, Margery Segal, Debra Wanner and Ms. Skura."⁵⁹ This dance evolves as dancers come onstage swirling their torso down between the hips, followed by a balance that lengthens the leg out. Continuing seamlessly, their movements include moving from throwing the upper torso backward to bending the knees and fumbling the arms in front of the chest. After rolling on the ground, they may lift the body back with the arms up. From running away from audience's view and coming back on to pause center-stage, an artist may stand straight, quickly bend the knees down toward the earth with the feet planted, and then shift to the floor, balancing on one knee with the hip of the other limb lifted open to the ceiling. Suddenly, their body could move over to balancing on just one shoulder on the floor with the legs open wide and then come to standing only to return to the floor with legs long behind them.⁶⁰ Very differently than Erdman's Theater, Roussève's participation in Stephanie Skura's work delves into the vast possibilities and contradictions of movements.

⁵⁹ Jack Anderson, "Dance: Stephanie Skura and Company," *The New York Times*, December 21, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/12/21/arts/dance-stephanie-skura-and-company.html>.

⁶⁰ *Cranky Destroyers*, Part One, conceived and directed by Stephanie Skura, choreographed by Stephanie Skura in collaboration with the dancers Benoit Lachambre, Brian Moran, David

As much as postmodern dance allows for different bodily discoveries, defining the postmodern in the 1980s helps to clarify Roussève's eventual discomfort with this domain and his decision to begin choreographing his own work. In an anthology titled *Black Choreographers Moving Toward the Twentieth Century*, dance historian Halifu Osumare articulates a major distinction of postmodern dance as going beyond the *port de bras* or balletic vocabulary.⁶¹ Offering thoughts on the alternative structure of the postmodern, dance historian Sally Banes describes how "Judson Dance Theater, the legendary amalgamation of avant-garde choreographies in Greenwich Village in the early 1960s" assaulted the hierarchical nature of ballet and American modern dance since the late 1950s, posed questions about the meaning of dance and movement, and experimented with different choreographic methods.⁶² While Banes focuses on how Judson Dance Theater embraced "democratic pluralism" and "unstylized ordinary activities" to depart from modern dance choreographers such as Martha Graham, Mary Wigman, and José Limón, Osumare focuses on the gaps embedded within postmodern dance aims. Osumare comments on the dance era of the 1980s in which choreographers intended to continue moving away from the constrictions of modern dance and to reclaim that which became lost to postmodernism, namely, the communicative aspect of dance.⁶³ Osumare describes how choreographers have struggled over the boundary between "storytelling and the kinesthetic act of

Roussève, Margery Segal, Stephanie Skura, and Debra Wanner (1987),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ELq68bTkO4>

⁶¹ Halifu Osumare, "The Avant Garde, Dance History and Labels," in *Black Choreographers Moving: A National Dialogue*, compiled by Halifu Osumare, ed. Julinda Lewis-Ferguson (Berkeley: Expansion Arts Services, 1991), 27.

⁶² Sally Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 211.

⁶³ Halifu Osumare, "The Avant Garde, Dance History and Labels," 27.

dancing.” While modern dance brought forth a form of individualism inherent in American ideologies and associated with a principle of “manifest destiny” that “ironically speaking, colonized this land,” the postmodern era rebelled against mainstream modern dance to get outside the restrictions of standardized vocabulary and relying on certain leg extensions and arm movements. According to Osumare, a new postmodern dance style in the 1980s sought resistance and incorporation of both structure and formalism. While early postmodernists “rendered the audience irrelevant,” these choreographers or “new performance artists” emerging from the abstract focus of postmodern dance sought direct relationships with audience, an interaction central to the African diaspora legacy that aims for “functionalism in life” as well as art.⁶⁴ A desire for accessibility to choreographic work underscores Roussève’s transition into making his own dances: “I was frustrated at this point, dancing was great, but I felt like a tool of others’ words.” Continuing, he says, “At that point, dance was too removed from the old world. It needed a social consciousness, and I wanted to express my own voice.”⁶⁵ Here, Roussève brings forth ideas about the social purpose of dance that he learned from collegiate studies in dance and theater. The term “REALITY” given to his company also was driven by his agitations with the contemporary dance world in which creative, abstract work could neglect to associate with vital truths in his world.⁶⁶ In other words, Roussève enters the postmodern dance realm as a choreographer who takes an interest in reflecting on everyday life.

Contact improvisation would be central to Roussève’s dance-making practice based on his interest in radical ideals within the context of social equality. Describing the subversive

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Mancini, “Rousseve ‘81 Gives Art a Conscience.”

⁶⁶ Christopher Reardon, “An Improbable Convert to Wagner,” *The New York Times*, December 5, 1999, http://www.davidrousseve.com/lovesongs_nytimes_120599.html.

quality of contact improvisation in detail, dance historian Cynthia Novak posits that this dance form diverged from the historical ballet discourse by focusing on flow and emphasizing the role of men and women carrying each other's weight equally and interchangeably, rather than control and only men carrying women's weight. Roussève carried out such experimental practices at places such as La Mama and New City in New York. Roussève discusses how his performance in dances based on contact improvisation led him to think about the paradox embedded within the experimental:

But I have to say the one thing I found inspiring but also different about the experimental stuff was “the anything goes” sense and that was cultural. I didn't know the whole notion of improvising, of contact improv. Doing this wild and crazy work was new for me. And I'd also place it in this lineage with the 60s forward of experimental dance. Well they had a few people of color there. I was always awed in good ways and in baffling ways when it registered, “Oh this is what these people were doing in the 60s.” It's kind of like, wow, how great to not have other concerns in the 60s. So that was really new for me. And some of it was, I thought, radical: “now I'm just going to do what I'm going to do.” But also acknowledging that it was complicated. When people were marching in the 60s, they were in the studios experimenting. So that's the beauty of it and the complication of it. And I have since come to recognize how subversive improv and experimental theatre can be. So they were being really subversive. It took me a while to put that kind of subversion, to define it that way.⁶⁷

Novak defines the studio experimentation sessions posited by Roussève as “jams” in which contact improvisation championed a social nature of culture where people gathered for their love of dance. According to Novak, the equal exchange of bodily weight between artists obliterated the prevalent practice of the choreographer and director telling dancers what to do to create art, allowing the body to become the intelligent mover and creator of the art.⁶⁸ Novak positions the complex nature of experimentation within the 1960s Civil Rights Movement when she explains this liberation struggle helped to generate thought about gender and a larger resistance to

⁶⁷ David Roussève, interview with author, February 26, 2015.

⁶⁸ Cynthia Novak, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 184–5.

wrongful assumptions about the differentiation between male and female movement. Roussève recognizes these subversive qualities of contact improvisation while continuing to wrestle with the timing of this dance genre alongside movements for racial justice in the U.S. Such concerns about the relationship between experimental dance and everyday conditions of persons of African descent contributed to his decision to start making his own artistic work.

While Roussève was working in professional dance companies in New York, viewing live performances in European dance theater inspired his reflections on the possibilities of choreography, although his artistic productions would be primarily interested in issues of liberation and communities of color. In his recollection of having viewed one of choreographer Pina Bausch's dances *Bluebeard* in 1984 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music while residing in New York City, Roussève says, "Whooooooa... I had no idea what it was but I just knew I had stumbled onto something of great importance to me. I broke open how I thought about dance and theater."⁶⁹ Pina Bausch became the artistic director of Wuppertal Tanztheater in 1973 in Wuppertal, Germany. Her own teachers ranged from Julliard's Anthony Tudor, Martha Graham, José Limón to European dance theater pioneers Kurt Joss whose dance instructor was Rudolf Laban in the early 1920s. Bausch cultivated her choreographic method at the Folk Dance School in Germany whose leader Kurt Joss defines his dances as translating ideas into the reality of theater, because "dance is the art of the real, of acting, of doing, not of feeling." Taking her own approach to realities of dance that not only speak of the dance discipline in terms of knowledge, as Joss determines, Bausch posits that "she only knows the time in which we live" and this knowledge captures the "source of all my pieces." Bausch inquiries into intimate feelings and such explorations with her dancers lead to producing choreography in collage technique or

⁶⁹ David Roussève, interview by Kingsley Irons, "An Interview with David Roussève," February 20, 2013, <http://dancesmadetoorder.com/blog/2013/02/an-interview-with-david-rousseve/>.

“tableaus of love and alienation.”⁷⁰ Roussève was inspired by a choreographic practice rooted in contemporary realities.

As choreographies by Bausch become embedded in 1960s politics, the radical specificity of Roussève’s own work emerges. Unearthing the applicability of the 1960s to Bausch, dance critic Deborah Jowitt indicates that Bausch “redefined expressiveness in ways that meshed with post-1960s ideas about distancing and coolness” by substituting short “enigmatic ‘acts’” in the place of “extended narratives” so that her works culminated in “collage structures” immersed in “revues and vaudeville turns.”⁷¹ Jowitt frames the 1960s in specific thematic and social dance vocabulary, yet her analysis also connects with the Africanist practice defined by Brenda Dixon-Gottschild as the forms, genres, and frameworks of Africa and the black diaspora. Dixon-Gottschild posits that new to the European perspective is the “street-wise, dead pan, laid-back attitude of black-inflected contemporary popular culture.”⁷² Roussève’s dances diverge from Bausch’s method based on how he creates with full recognition of the past and current ways of healing from social injustices. Having grown up in Houston in the “1960s around different classes of people struggling to do something of purpose,” Roussève just could not create work absent of meaning in “good consciousness.” He remembers how seeing “my family in Houston that I was growing up with and African descended people not treated well in the 60s” evolved

⁷⁰ *European Dance Theater, Tanztheater: An Overview of its Past and Present*, directed by Isa and Herald Bergsohn (Pennington, NJ: Dance Horizons Video, 1997), VHS.

⁷¹ Deborah Jowitt, “In Memoriam: Pina Bausch (1940–2009),” in *The Pina Bausch Sourcebook: The Making of Tanztheater*, ed. Royd Climenhaga (New York: Routledge, 2013), 237.

⁷² Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 54.

into a realization that “I would have to do something of purpose in my life.”⁷³ While informed by Bausch’s dance-theatre, Roussève’s choreography aims for radical social purposefulness deeply rooted in the daily conditions of persons of African descent.

The formation of the REALITY dance company was fueled by an interest in the very stories Roussève collected as an undergraduate at Princeton—that is, the experiences of women of color. The initial aim for his company was for it to be predominantly people of color and for the organization to consist of all women because this structure was “part of the feminism of piece,” explains Roussève. He desired this cultural formation because:

The characters were about people of color so I wanted it to be primarily people of color. Sandra was the only white person. Julie was the only person of color of non-African descent. Charmaine was Jamaican American and everyone else was African American. This was an attempt to keep the focus visually on our issues.”⁷⁴

Based on Roussève’s comments, African American women dancers and broadly women of color artists were essential to bringing his work to life. A founding artist of REALITY Renee Redding-Jones claims an African American identity and began performing with the company for the production of the Creole Series titled *Colored Children Flyin’ By* in 1990. Redding-Jones describes the role played by African American heritage as being “the privilege of telling his stories” and being able to “meet his mother, his aunts, his dad when he was alive.”⁷⁵ She further describes the significance of hearing his familial stories and performing in REALITY as follows: “that rich history is what I crave as an American from the African diaspora. He was so lucky to have that as his ocean to continue to go back to create work. It’s so rich and so deep. It’s like stepping into the ocean and you step into a different place every time with his work.” Redding-

⁷³ David Roussève, interview by author, October 1, 2013.

⁷⁴ David Roussève, interview by author, October 1, 2013.

⁷⁵ Renee Redding-Jones, interview by author, May 6, 2015.

Jones provides further context on the analysis made earlier in this chapter about how artists of African descent delve into autobiography for artistic, social, and political purposes. Additionally, Redding-Jones discusses how Roussève enabled artists to express aspects of their individuality while remaining true to his idea, because the company provided an opportunity “for other downtown choreographers to see me do what they were calling then release technique that they had not seen on black bodies.” African American women artists in the company brought forth a visual expression of the African diasporic experiences being told in REALITY works as well as a layered presentation of the possibilities of black bodies in experimental productions.

REALITY artist Julie Tolentino added an embodiment of queer experiences to the company’s focus on women of color. “For me, a female person of color who is half Asian, half Latin, AIDS activist, queer, and openly gay in that company—David I hoped, relied on those themes.”⁷⁶ Tolentino describes her perspective on the position of queer bodies:

My interests were queer. I was a dancer, often coordinated and worked with our extra casts in different cities with David. I was also the tour manager of the company so I had multiple roles. I was the first gay woman to join the company. It seemed – even though it is hard to believe because it was such a powerful group – but in the beginning, it was an adjustment. It was clear to me that David was working with the voices of straight black women and I felt that being gay, brown, mestizo brought other things to the discussion. I also felt a political bond with David – even though he made it a point that I was the youngest person in the company!

Tolentino brings forth an engagement with daily experiences of queer bodies while also expanding the company’s focus on experimental practice as she recalls how “somatics was one downtown form that we were all interested in” and the larger significance of knowing that “there was a postmodern movement being developed alongside Judson and black and brown dancers existed and traversed these spaces.” Her memories clarify the role of queer women of color voices in the company as contributing to REALITY’s experimental work and placing emphasis

⁷⁶ Julie Tolentino, interview by author, February 23, 2015.

on how feminine bodies have also endured and taken leadership against the crisis of AIDS during the era in which REALITY was formed.

Roussève also recalls the dialogues held with his progressive artists about his position as a man providing artistic direction to women dancers and subsequently, these feminist dialogues had an effect on the naming of the company. He states, “I was called out many times on how choreographer, as male in the room, had the power. We talked about this all the time.”⁷⁷ As a result, they resisted naming their artistic work “David Roussève and Dancers,” and instead aimed for the name to refer to the theatrical content and to women’s group performance work.⁷⁸ At the moment of the company’s founding, Roussève and his artists were doing work about his grandmother’s story, dealing with AIDS issues that were being neglected in the 1980s, and they felt that their work also sounded similar to the vocal ensemble group of black women known as The Supremes. The name “REALITY” provided space to recognize the challenging everyday issues being explored by the company as well as to consider the feminist politics of women’s experiences and creative practices that they cultivated in performance.

Dance, Music, Video, Audience Reception, and the Film Process of the Creole Series

Beginning in 1989 with the REALITY dance company David Roussève created the “Pull Your Head to the Moon...Tales of Creole Women” Series (Creole Series) of seven different dances that explore black women and gay men’s memories of systemic violence as it concerns sharecropping labor, sexual assault, historical shift from racial segregation to integration, racial and sexual stereotypes, domestic abuse, and AIDS. Roussève reinterprets his grandmother’s stories of life as a Creole woman. In many of the dances, he utilizes a voice-over to describe the term “Creole” as referring to a specific racially mixed heritage in the American South: “African,

⁷⁷ David Roussève, interview by author, October 1, 2013.

⁷⁸ David Roussève, interview by author, February 26, 2015.

French, and Choctaw Indian.” Expanding this description is the REALITY dance company’s official account of the dance production’s fit within the larger Creole Series of seven dances that “juxtapos[e] the early 1900s life-stories of an elderly Creole/Black woman (the choreographer’s grandmother) with stories, movement, and images from contemporary African America exploring issues of racial, gender, and sexual oppression.”⁷⁹ The meaning of the Creole laborer, then, extends far beyond a definition of racial mixing in the South to unravel a role for dances that comment on the intersection of multiple social categories of experience. For the Creole Series, Roussève informs that he expands on his aim to address issues of “racial oppression” by exploring spirituality, hope, love—the aspects of life “we can’t lose, that can’t be taken away.” In other words, lives of queer persons and women of African descent intersect in layered stories of survival from systemic oppression.

Dance, Music, and Video

The seven dances of the Creole Series each investigate different aspects of black women’s lives, a process that contributes to the choreographic structure of women artists of African descent. When Roussève says to the *Los Angeles Times* that his works prior to interviewing his grandmother were “autobiographical, sort of performance-arty, about being African American,” he refers to how previous dances such as *Journey to the Nonexistent* and *Enchanted Air Gardens* in 1985 search for ways of embodying black women and men’s experiences to the sounds of jazz, Motown, and opera music. The actual dances of the Creole Series examine what Roussève calls the “difficult issues” connected to “being African American” in different ways.⁸⁰ For the first dance, *Pull Your Head to the Moon...Tales of Creole*

⁷⁹ “Past works: Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams,” accessed March 30, 2013, <http://www.davidrousseve.com/urbanscenes.html>.

⁸⁰ David Roussève, “Grandmother of Inspiration.”

Women in 1989, his use of voice-over narrative and viewing of the grandmother's memory of rape revises his past methodology of embodying black women's work experiences in his own gestures. This dance diverges from other works in the Creole Series by focusing on how the grandmother's Creole identity changes as a result of conflicted relationships with her father and husband. *Mama Goes to the Moon* in 1990 thoroughly examines the relational dimensions of a grandmother's life as a housekeeper. *Colored Children Flyin' By* reexamines the grandmother's memories of gender and race-based violence and re-inquiries into Roussève's teaching experiences. This dance also finds new ways to explore the grandmother's childhood and adult relationships. In 1992, *Tellin' You My Dreams from a Cloud Sailin' By* parts one and two, focuses on sexual violence, illuminates other distinct markers of the grandmother's experiences, and brings in experiences of attending racially desegregated schools and negligence during the AIDS era. *Had Me Somebody But I Lost Her Very Young* in 1991 conducts a site-specific exploration in New York and Los Angeles and reengages Roussève's practice of incorporating gospel music. The Creole Series culminates in *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* in 1992 that explores intersections across generations through the subject of loss.

As the Creole Series remakes seven different dance works from the mid-1980s to early 1990s, it expands the previous practices of postmodern choreographers of African descent. Weighing in on the works of black postmodern choreographers such as Blondell Cummings who precede Roussève's choreographic debut, dance historian Julinda Lewis-Ferguson describes how Cummings's work emerges after the 1930–60s cabaret era of black concert dance and the civil rights integration era of the 1950s and 60s and fits within the post-1960s period in which black

concert dances took place in alternative spaces such as churches.⁸¹ Integral to postmodern works in the form of Cummings's is her capacity to reveal an "urban Black experience" such as a "black woman trying to get a taxi cab," says Lewis-Ferguson. Providing some analysis on racial and gender contexts of Cummings's dances, dance studies scholar Ann Cooper Albright argues that Cummings does not intend to disguise the difference between the categories "black" and "woman" but to broaden understandings of shared human conditions outside cultural specificity. As she tours and lectures at universities in predominantly white audiences, Albright posits, "Cummings seeks to transcend that category of difference, because she believes it will limit the audience's responsiveness to her work."⁸² For example, in Cummings's *Chicken Soup* (1981–3) that contributed to her larger series of solos called *Food for Thought*, she delves into the experience of a woman living between communal life and the solitary independence of the household kitchen. Roussève contributes to Blondell Cummings's work as a result of her aim to transcend rigid racial dynamics as well as their shared practice of continuously exploring previous dances in a series, such as that evidenced by Cummings's *Food for Thought* and Roussève's Creole Series. According to dance historian Veta Goler in her extensive analysis of Cummings's choreography, "Cummings often creates several incarnations of her works or presents them in a series format." In fact, the "very name of her umbrella organization, Cycle

⁸¹ Julinda Lewis-Ferguson, "Blacks in Postmodern Dance," in *Black Choreographers Moving: A National Dialogue*, compiled by Halifu Osumare and ed. Julinda Lewis-Ferguson (Berkeley, CA: Expansion Arts Services, 1991), 7.

⁸² Ann Cooper Albright, *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 129–35.

Arts Foundation, reflects the ongoing nature of her artistic explorations.”⁸³ Goler illuminates how Cummings’s transformation and ongoing inquiries become the way that she “recycles her dances.”⁸⁴ An account for Cummings’s work illuminates how Roussève seeks to continuously assess cultural experiences in order to transcend perceptions about these very categories of difference.

Roussève’s dance-theater approach continuously reimagines previous choreographies through an interrelated network of dance, narrative, music, and media and stage production. The 1989 dance *Pull Your Head to the Moon...Tales of Creole Women (Pull Your Head to the Moon)* exemplifies these multiple layers while also revealing REALITY’s emphasis on radical social purposefulness.⁸⁵ Central to Roussève’s investigations entails an Africanist aesthetic as well as a focus on the social and political potential in music of women artists of African descent.

Pull Your Head to the Moon’s movement composition exists outside categorical differences as specifically ballet, modern, or African dance and rather intersects these genres. Roussève’s body articulates a balletic pirouette with a toe that frames the knee, while he also flies in a rounded barrel turn and moves in a series of consecutive jumps to the ground that reflect African dance movements. The movement is based on a fusion practice of combining Europeanist and Africanist forms because the elongated, pointed feet of a pirouette originate in a Euro-American aesthetic while the tapping expresses an Africanist use of the feet as percussive

⁸³ Veta Goler, “Dancing Herself: Choreography, Autobiography, and the Expression of the Black Woman Self in the Work of Dianne McIntyre, Blondell Cummings, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar,” (dissertation, Emory University, 1995), 290–1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁸⁵ *Pull Your Head to the Moon...Tales of Creole Women*, choreographed by David Roussève, performed by Merle Holloman, Ruth Beckham Holloman, Sheridan MacMillan, Claudia Montoya, David Roussève, Elaine Swayneson, Valerie Winborne, Candice Roussève (recorded January 22, 1989, Performance Space 122, New York, NY), DVD.

instruments.⁸⁶ In a second instance, dancer Valerie Winborne lies on the floor with knees open letting out a painful exhale. At this point, she signals the piece's inquiry into the experimental through bringing in everyday gestures of lying down, opening the limbs, and breath and deploying these movements to highlight a woman's experience of sexual assault. The movement then focuses on black women's bodies while experimenting with different African aesthetics and European aesthetics of postmodern pedestrian movement. From jumping back to dodge a hit, she falls to the floor and pulls herself backward. Carrying out a microtonal soundscape of Africanist aesthetic, she yells out, whispers some incomprehensible terms, freezes with the chest lifted off the floor, slowly moves back with her knees up, and she cries. Reflecting the folding and lowering of bent leg positions in Africanist aesthetic, Winborne hangs over in a stagnant posture, gazing through her legs. Enacting contradictory movements and repetition of Africanist aesthetic, her hands scrape the thighs and she roughly lifts up while keeping her head down. She fights off an aggressor by attempting to move away unseen forces and objects from her body. She grabs her mouth with her hand. Winborne's movements emerge from postmodern inquiry into experiences through simple gestures and movements recognizable in daily existence. Her dancing unveils an inextricable relationship between postmodern and Africanist aesthetics. These movements occur during narration about the grandmother resisting physical abuse, thereby continuing a practice of merging different aesthetics under the terms of black women's lived experiences of systemic violence.

Roussève not only enacts an Africanist aesthetic in solo movements that accent the grandmother's story of physical and sexual abuse, but also in extended narratives based on black men's experience of global travel. Humorously narrating a story of sitting at the dining table in

⁸⁶ Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 112.

Germany, Roussève recalls asking his co-diners why might an “obsession with blackness” exist. He jokes about receiving the reply “we like the black people...girls do it like an animal...boys have a very big slong.” This comedic expression about black persons being considered “hot chocolates” in a European gaze comments on the sexual reduction of blackness to the size of sexual organs or to perceptions of behaving wildly in sexual encounters. In this moment, the narrative and Roussève’s expression of it takes on an Africanist aesthetic of coolness or what African art scholar Robert Farris Thompson calls a type of playful, intellectual attitude.⁸⁷ The grandmother becomes a conduit through which Roussève’s nonchalant, expressive quality carries Africanist undertones because he juxtaposes stories of Germany against the larger political context of the grandmother’s memories. At the beginning of *Pull Your Head to the Moon*, Roussève narrates his initial, ambivalent position toward his grandmother. A woman wearing sunglasses and a baby blue dress then sits on stage. Through his comedic narrative that relates his grandmother’s stories of Louisiana to his experiences of Munich, Roussève forges a coolness that evolves to be critically theatrical. Roussève moves from the comedic to the tragic when REALITY artists take turns sitting in the chair across from the grandmother figure to articulate different aspects of her story.

The musical composition requires attentiveness to specific vocalists of African descent and the musical genres that each crosses over as well as a focus on the multiple dance forms that underlie these sounds. To show how music of women of African descent operates in the composition process, I examine how songs by a series of specifically selected artists surface at critical points. In the beginning of this dance, a gospel duet emerges between vocalists Aretha Franklin and Mavis Staples in the song titled “Oh Happy Day.” Franklin is famously known for

⁸⁷ Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 43–5.

soulful, rhythm and blues hits that call for “R-E-S-P-E-C-T” and the sensual tunes that suggest her lover makes her “feel like a natural woman.”⁸⁸ However, in “Oh Happy Day,” the lyrics are closer to the Staples Singer’s song “I’ll Take You There” and its search for a place where “ain’t nobody worrin’.” Franklin and Staples carry the power of an entire choir ensemble in singing “how to fight and pray.” Their voices go from low, vibrating howls to high-pitched, harmonious cries. Meanwhile onstage, five bodies rise and fall until all of them lay on the floor. Following this song, spectators view video footage of police hosing down black protesters in Selma, Alabama at the Edmund Pettis Bridge where activists were peacefully protesting unjust state voting regulations in 1965. After displaying images of this civil rights moment, the short film pauses at a still image of a lynched body and “I’m Singing in My Soul” by gospel artist Willie Mae Ford Smith circulates the sounds of blues and gospel singing over clapping hands and organ tunes. *Pull Your Head to the Moon*, however, is not restricted even to the complexity of gospel sounds, because the operatic powerhouse of Leontyne Price in a Puccini composition plays while a dancer mouths the words of grandmother’s closeness with Jesus and Roussève undulates the chest in his solo with arms flapping up and down in an angular shape. Then, for the longest musical duration thus far in the dance, vocalist Shirley Murdock’s “No More” accompanies a myriad of solo movements and duets. The music cuts off abruptly. Roussève then speaks of experiences in West Germany and the song picks up again with dancers frozen in a series of balletic movements such as the back-leg lift of an arabesque and leg lift and extension of battements. From Murdock’s house dance and upbeat rhythms, the tone shifts to a weary, rageful rhythm and blues song by Jezetta Steele whose “I am Calling You” vocals speak about a road that leads to nowhere. Here, the grandmother realizes she is not a Creole but “a nigga gal.” The

⁸⁸ Aretha Franklin, “(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman,” *Lady Soul*, Atlantic Records, 1967, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEWuAcMWDLY>.

voice of Shirley Murdock returns with the song “Can’t Go Without You,” but this time, in long-held powerful, high-hitting notes. This raging song comes after a dancer has gasped onstage in physical response to being raped.

When the grandmother begins to remember her lover’s attempt to destroy her and Roussève rounds his back, taps feet, and swirls hips, vocalist and pianist Nina Simone sings, “I Love You Porgy.” It appears to be a sweet serenade, but the lyric’s discussions of “don’t let him handle me and drive me mad” bring the narrative firmly in line with the dance. The music spans across the genres blues, gospel, R&B, and opera. These women artists of African descent chosen by Roussève decenter musical categories as artists such as Aretha Franklin not only sing in religious terms but also the erotic overtones of popular, secular music. As Roussève defines his use of music as “Motown in sound,” his preferred genre fits within a secular context.⁸⁹ Rather than only the religious leanings of some gospel music, Roussève engages numerous sounds to multiply the possibilities for assessing race and gender. His decision to utilize Nina Simone’s music as well as other black women singers reflects the ambiguous zone in which women vocalists of African descent exist categorically. According to musicologist Shana Redmond, Nina Simone’s capacity to operate outside the genre of blues or jazz has the potential to build creative and political alliances with different people and organizations.⁹⁰ Incorporating the musical labor of black women artists enables Roussève to straddle boundaries between the religious and secular as well as to assist audiences in connecting their own lives to a culturally specific dance. Redmond continues to examine how Simone’s “To Be Young, Gifted, and Black” provides an instrumental marker of the shift from the Civil Rights era to black nationalist

⁸⁹ David Roussève, interview by author, October 1, 2013.

⁹⁰ Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York University Press: 2014), 181–2.

ideologies of the latter 1960s and moreover, this song became the anthem that reflected the vision of the Black Power movement in 1971.

Roussève's use of black women vocalists becomes part of a larger effort to connect the choreographic work to a larger history of social change that has been deeply enhanced by the efforts of African American women. Nina Simone's anthems develop even greater complexity when understanding their relationship to black women's experiences. Redmond acknowledges the role of playwright Lorraine Hansberry in not only laying the initial foundation of Simone's work through Hansberry's writings in her own text *To Be Young Gifted and Black*, but also in how Simone's composition created a conversion that honored Hansberry.⁹¹ This further investigation of Redmond's analysis provides new potential to posit that Roussève's focus on the musical artistry of black women vocalists enhances his broader interests in connections across gender, race, and sexuality. In other words, *Pull Your Head to the Moon* examines the history of grassroots organizing in black communities for civil rights such as voting in relationship to the intimacy and struggles shared between black women.

Through video work, Roussève continues to expand the production's Africanist aesthetic. In a short video during the dance, Roussève incorporates a young member of his family named Candice Roussève. She laughs with Roussève, points to the camera, and speaks in her interpretation of her great grandmother. Following the dialogue between them, documentary footage emerges of persons of African descent engaging in nonviolent protest leading law enforcement to respond violently with the use of dogs and hoses on their bodies. This section extends the aesthetic of the cool or an attitude of carelessness, "a verbal expression" that punctuates "the established mood by momentarily displacing its opposite," explains Brenda

⁹¹ Redmond, *Anthem*, 205.

Dixon-Gottschild.⁹² The production shifts from the carefree nature of dialogue between Candice and David Roussève onscreen to the serious, historical reality of racial violence. This arc may also be understood as high-affect juxtaposition, the term described by Dixon-Gottschild as “mood, attitude, or movement breaks that omit the transitions and connection links valued in European academic aesthetic.”⁹³ *Pull Your Head to the Moon*’s Africanist aesthetic switches from contemporary conversations between Candice and David Roussève in which they respond to the grandmother’s way of speaking to the 1960s civil rights era in which Roussève came of age.

Audience Reception and Dance Critique

A performance of one of the Creole Series dances during the REALITY company’s first national tour shows how audience’s received the company’s choreography and its radical intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and nation. REALITY’s first national tour began when the company was being featured in New York’s Dancing in the Street and this organization contacted alternative theater artist of New Orleans Neil Barclay who suggested the work be part of the national black festival known as “Black Choreographers Moving Toward the Twentieth Century” (BCM).⁹⁴ Roussève recognizes the impact of BCM and its launching of a touring effort in describing the initiative as crafting a national platform for REALITY to stage works in 1991 and 1992. Roussève converses with Frankie Wright of the *Los Angeles Times* in 1992 about the artistic and political contexts associated with REALITY’s participation in the BCM platform: “Some people have trouble with the idea of a black dance festival, but I don’t. There’s even a debate about whether black dance exists at all. This project is worthwhile because it shows a

⁹² Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance*, 16–7.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁴ David Roussève, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, February 26, 2015.

wide spectrum of black dance.”⁹⁵ As a result, his engagement with a national dance platform deepens his concern for the multiple possibilities of African American performance.

A more detailed history of BCM reveals a set of conflicts associated with black bodies that disturb Roussève’s idea of “a wide spectrum of black dance.” Discussing the larger, historical context of BCM, Wright introduces this platform as directed by founder Halifu Osumare who coordinated the first initiative in 1989 under the terms of her work with Expansion Arts Services in Oakland.⁹⁶ Wright frames Osumare’s aims as intending to acknowledge multiple American “hybrid forms” in order for black choreographers to be accepted within diverse aesthetic concerns and areas of thought in a cultural democracy. Since 1989, the platform’s expansion into a national dance effort grew to include the series of dances in 1992 that form part of a pilot touring initiative. Roussève discloses to Frankie Wright that “REALITY” will perform at BCM an excerpt from *Colored Children Flyin’ By*, one of seven evening length productions in the Creole Series. Roussève’s discussion of the diverse potential of “a black dance festival” is underscored by the volume produced to contextualize the polemics associated with the BCM initiative titled *Black Choreographers Moving: A National Dialogue* because editor Halifu Osumare articulates the significance of challenging dominant reviews of “black dance” as a mere reduction to more universal, white statements.⁹⁷ Osumare provides an account for BCM that discusses its advocacy for creative self-definition and recognition for the diverse choreographies produced by persons of African descent. She creates space for

⁹⁵ David Roussève, “Grandmother of Inspiration.”

⁹⁶ Frankie Wright, “Black Choreographers Meeting in San Diego,” *Special to the Times*, April 6, 1992, http://articles.latimes.com/1992-04-06/entertainment/ca-456_1_san-deigo-presentation.

⁹⁷ Halifu Osumare, “What It Is,” in *Black Choreographers Moving: A National Dialogue*, compiled by Halifu Osumare, ed. Julinda Lewis-Ferguson (Berkeley, CA: Expansion Arts Services, 1991), 29.

Roussève's choreographic inquiry into his grandmother's story to substantiate the role of a black lived experience in the cross-cultural domain.

Days following the interview with Roussève, the BCM performance event that included REALITY's *Colored Children Flyin' By* is reviewed by Lewis Segal of the *Los Angeles Times*. Segal posited that the dance created a connection between Roussève's and his grandmother's experiences. The production revealed Roussève's own "debt to the past," insisted Segal who recognizes how the piece's expressions of text and movement intersect the lives and "personality of an articulate, hyper-kinetic, young man of the 1990s and the slow, unsparing reminiscences of a [C]reole sharecropper from two generations ago."⁹⁸ Providing a specific account for the relationship between Roussève's and the grandmother's stories, this review recalls how Roussève articulates memories of loved ones passing from AIDS and a grandmother's story of a family member's horrific rape. It acknowledges how these two histories converges in the nude body of Roussève who embodies her "in body as well as spirit." According to Lewis Segal, Roussève's work creates an important conversation about "access" even though BCM has dealt with controversies about whether its platform "ghettoizes" those choreographers included in its programming by separating them from non-black artists of equivalent accomplishment and philosophy. Arguing in favor of the potential benefit of this dilemma, Segal insists on the pressing need for audiences to view Roussève's work outside of New York, an urgent request for him to consider appreciating that the "ghetto is going national." Two issues are integral to Segal's comments: the position of Roussève's work nationally as a result of BCM and the significance of audiences seeing his artistic productions.

⁹⁸ Lewis Segal, "Dance Review: African American Identity Explored by Choreographers," *Los Angeles Times*, April 11, 1992, http://articles.latimes.com/1992-04-11/entertainment/ca-8_1_american-choreographers

Roussève recalls how supportive media outlets and personnel were at BCM while remembering spectators being audibly displeased with the work. He also remembers how the “press was unbelievable” in their positive reactions to the site-specific performance *Had Me Somebody...But I Lost Her Very Young* at Bradbury.⁹⁹ Dance critic Lewis Segal recognizes Roussève’s intentions to explore his grandmother’s stories as part of a larger project to bridge a woman of color and gay man of color existence into a unified body. Yet, audience responses raise concern about whether the possibility ever existed for Roussève’s politics to meet expectations at BCM in 1992.

Based on responses to Roussève’s *Colored Children Flyin’ By*, audiences struggle to appreciate postmodern inquiries into queer of color experiences on a national, black dance, touring platform. Roussève examines viewers’ reactions to his dance as follows:

Black Choreographers Moving—that was my first national tour. We did the Bradbury Building site-specific piece but we also did a shared program with other black choreographers. It was me, Bebe Miller who’s also postmodern, Lula Washington, Philadanco, Dallas Black, and Cleo Parker Robinson. It was a whole bunch of black people... They hated Bebe Miller and they hated me. They would rather see what they recognize as “black dance” and we were “white dance.” Bebe was doing a piece with Jimi Hendrix music but they wanted to see some Alvin Ailey. They, the audience, were vocal. She and I were the artsy-fartsy white experimental... me and Bebe were not black dance even though it was black issues. We had nudity in that piece. [Hugh.] That was... [Pause] We had B. J. Crosby singing gospel—that was the only thing.

Roussève lists the names of dance companies who were also part of the evening performances, but he specifically positions his work alongside Bebe Miller as a result of her postmodern aesthetic. Roussève makes clear his appreciation for diverse presentations of “black dance.” Yet, based on spectatorship reaction to his expression of blackness, as indeed far from critical acclaim, a series of concerns emerge in terms of how the black body articulates the tensions associated with culture, history, and experience. According to Roussève’s final note, the

⁹⁹ David Roussève, interview by author, February 26, 2015.

audience repudiated the visuals of nudity and only recognized B. J. Crosby's vocal performance as a legitimate expression of blackness. He recalls how Bebe Miller also integrated music of the African diaspora with Jimi Hendrix but such usages failed to appease spectators. When he suggests that viewers disliked their works because of an assumption that they articulated "white dance," Roussève begins to reflect on the experimental terms of contemporary dance.

Roussève and Miller's choreographic aesthetics diverge from the other choreographers based on their different staging of the black body. Alvin Ailey's canonical *Revelations* (1962), for instance, suggests an optimistic shift out of slavery and toward emancipation that placed his work outside the context of racially discriminatory concert dance in the U.S.¹⁰⁰ According to Thomas DeFrantz's analysis of *Revelations*, audiences acknowledge the emotional image of spirituality and the known expression of sorrow, tradition, and rural African American experience. Through his work, posits DeFrantz, *Revelations* displays elements of southern rural black life as important and appropriate for concert dance performance. Overall, DeFrantz positions Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* into the discourse of the modern because of how its focus on freedom evolved into a defining performance text of black life for all of its spectators. REALITY's *Colored Children Flyin' By* also explores dynamics of freedom, for as Roussève explains, his grandmother was a sharecropper or the "closest thing to a slave back then" and although living in abject poverty, "she had this astonishing ability to fly, which meant her spirit could soar, even though she would pick cotton until her hands would bleed."¹⁰¹ Roussève only examines his grandmother's impoverished, laboring conditions to highlight her experiences of healing from the economic disadvantages and physical difficulties of sharecropping labor.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16.

¹⁰¹ Roussève, "Grandmother of Inspiration."

A closer look at Roussève's dancing in *Colored Children Flyin' By* helps to unveil some of the tensions with black spectatorship. In the dance, Roussève performs a solo of a series of falls and lifts. He holds the balletic posture of battement with his torso upright, balancing on one leg and the other limb extended parallel to the floor. Moving at a diagonal, he opens the chest and moves the hips until falling on the side of his foot. He awkwardly attempts to balance, turning and lifting, purposely falling, losing center, and being intentionally twisted. While creating croaking sounds in the throat, his hand comes to the chest, belly contracts, eyes gaze upward, and hips thrust outward. With fingertips to chest, he touches the navel while making subtle screams and starting to come out of his white t-shirt. Fully nude, he cries out and lifts arms up to reveal his ribcage and to grab his shoulder blades. This scene forms the apex of a production that begins with Roussève's monologue about starting school at a racially integrated facility and ends with the grandmother's memory of her cousin's experience of rape. In conclusion, live vocals of the spiritual song "Sometimes I Feel I Like a Motherless Child" accompany a dancer dragging herself down a strip of light onstage. She grabs her dress and crumples over to the floor. Three dancers sitting on stage suddenly stand, begin clapping hands, lifting heads in unison, and walking on the balls of feet. The voice-over says: "stand in cornfields and look up, the nights I used to hold her."¹⁰² Rather than the display of cultural development and beauty amidst a history of enslavement in *Revelations*, the experimental aesthetic of REALITY's *Colored Children Flyin' By* uses spirituals to deepen the inquiry into the lasting damage of racial and sexual violence in the lives of communities of African descent. Roussève's focus on spirituality takes interest in the conditions of blackness and sexuality that go un-staged.

¹⁰² *Colored Children Flyin' By*, choreographed by David Roussève, DVD.

As other dances of the Creole Series have been subject to harsh dance critique, the reception of Roussève's experimental dance-theater approach goes even further than the spectatorship dynamics of the BCM national black dance platform. *The New York Times* dance critic Anna Kisselgoff discusses how the final production of the Creole Series *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* in 1992 "channels African dance's torso and leg movements into an original geometric stylization."¹⁰³ Kisselgoff reveals the role of an Africanist aesthetic in Roussève's production. Struggling over whether to agree with the connections fused by REALITY, Kisselgoff critiques the dance based on her claims that it contains too much "structuralist literary theory." She argues the "visual and textual clichés about AIDS, racism and gay liberation" provide "an exploitative use of them" that "is dangerously blurred." When confusing structure with Roussève's choice for accessibility in creating stories connecting to person's daily existence, she misrecognizes how narrative contributes to the purpose of African American dance forms being rooted in a radical specificity. The dance highlights this function rather than post-structural imaginations so distant from cultural context that its fragmented composition escapes grasping any evidence of historical resonance.

In *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams*, B. J. Crosby rises from her rocking chair in sunglasses and robe to pick up clothes spread across the stage while Roussève's voice-over remembers why he turned to his Creole grandmother for hope. Coming to stand at the microphone, Roussève relates his unconditional love for a physically imperfect, childhood pet rat that died of cancer to a lack of concern for the high number of persons dying of AIDS. Movement bridges these narratives as Roussève directly relates the bodily position of petting a rat to the curvature created

¹⁰³ Anna Kisselgoff, "Review/Dance; Rage and Affirmation in 'Creole Dreams,'" *The New York Times*, November 12, 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/11/12/arts/review-dance-rage-and-affirmation-in-creole-dreams.html>.

by a spine that spoons against a loved one. Public Enemy's Hip-Hop melodies accompany the rapidly, swinging arm gestures that follow the spoken text. Roussève seeks to accomplish the postmodern desire that Halifu Osumare describes as a search for structure or an aim for a link between form and function.¹⁰⁴ Taking Osumare's thoughts further, Roussève's attempt to "balance storytelling and the kinesthetic act of dancing" involves, first, articulating his desire to explore his grandmother's story and, second, doing so through continuously intersecting his own losses to AIDS and experiences as a gay, black man to the grandmother's history of labor.

Roussève's works do not offer an inquiry into an American experience through rigid, limited, understandings of sexuality and race, but rather intersectionally or across and between. Critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw's project of intersectionality offers a theoretical underpinning of Roussève's aim to connect multiple areas of experience in African American life to a broader effort against oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw dissuades against cultural representations frequently invisibilizing the relationships between categories, because such images reproduce racial and gender norms.¹⁰⁵ Women of color subjectivities as woman and person of color, according to Crenshaw, refuse to be expressed and comprehended in absolute contrast. Based on Crenshaw's theory, feminist campaigns against sexual violence must recognize racial differences and antiracist movements must acknowledge the sexual violence women of color experience. Rather than the term "blurred" to describe Roussève's dances, an intersectional lens can be applied to *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* in order its to recognize resistance to clear-cut divisions between social categories of race, gender, and sexuality and its

¹⁰⁴ Halifu Osumare, "The Avant-Garde, Dance History, and Labels," *Black Choreographers Moving: A National Dialogue*, compiled by Halifu Osumare, ed. Julinda Lewis-Ferguson (Berkeley, CA: Expansion Arts Services, 1991), 27.

¹⁰⁵ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (Jul., 1991): 1282.

focus on social accountability for black women and gay men's experiences. Kisselgoff has recognized the complex layering of artists such as Pina Bausch's New York debut at Brooklyn Academy of Music, because she persuades audiences to acknowledge the "overall disjunction." She suggests that Bausch "has taught audiences how to look afresh at a performance, to avoid impatience, to wait for her dissociated images to add up."¹⁰⁶ This same framing applies to REALITY; recognizing linkages across multiple areas of experience in *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* requires understanding how problems of race and sex relate or intersect.

Choreographing for Film

Filmmaking offers choreographers of African descent such as David Roussève in the 1990s a medium to experiment with the multiple layers of their aesthetic composition. Roussève's filmmaking began in 1989 when New York International Theater Festival director Joseph V. Melillo reconfirmed what spectators had described about his work since the first REALITY presentation: the dance production is wonderful, but he should consider working in film. In his response to Melillo, Roussève describes how four areas of his choreographic methods "cry out for film:" layered composition, narrative base, time-jumping framework, and intimate gestural vocabulary.¹⁰⁷ Roussève's first film carries the same title as the first dance of the Creole Series *Pull Your Head to the Moon... Tales of Creole Women*. It expresses African American social dance forms such as Hip-Hop and focuses on imagery in New York to construct rage that publicly mourns losses to AIDS. It also highlights visuals in Louisiana to reveal aspects of the grandmother's life as a sharecropper and her memories of sexual assault.

¹⁰⁶ Anna Kisselgoff, "Dance View: The Bausch Imagination Still Bedazzles," *The Pina Bausch Sourcebook: The Making of Tanztheater*, ed. Royd Climenhaga (New York: Routledge, 2013), 203–4.

¹⁰⁷ David Roussève, "The Neophyte's Tale: A Choreographer Works on Alive from Off Center," In *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*, ed. Judy Mitoma et al. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 236.

The film *Pull Your Head to the Moon...Tales of Creole Women* has some important similarities and differences between the earlier 1989 dance of this same title. Roussève discards his narrative about sexual and race-based interactions in Germany around the black body and rather inserts his narrative about a childhood pet rat. This latter narrative is not in the earlier dance, yet, it is part of numerous dances in the Creole Series such as *Tellin' You My Dreams on a Cloud Sailin' By*, and the last work *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams*. From the very beginning of the film, the work diverges from the dance by compiling sections from multiple dances in the Creole Series. Also differently, Roussève relied on his collaboration with African American woman filmmaker Ayoka Chenzira. He knew the cinematic process needed to remove itself from the choreography and felt that he could take a step back based on his trusting that she could handle the stories embedded in the work.¹⁰⁸ Although based on the Creole Series, Roussève and Chenzira sought to “use the text and choreography as source material for a film that would stand on its own...”¹⁰⁹ Roussève’s trust in Chenzira with directing film may also be based on her own perception of how black experiences get broadly categorized in industry. Chenzira describes her experience with Sundance Institute in 1984 when she discovered people struggled to market a film containing all black characters under speculations that “its not universal.” Chenzira considers African American character’s role in “holding universal messages,” arguing that groups in a given society grapple over a set of political structures in “specific time periods, but I’m not sure that I would put that in the context of black issues.”¹¹⁰ Chenzira and Roussève make

¹⁰⁸ David Roussève, interview by author, October 20, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Roussève, “*The Neophyte’s Tale*,” 236–40.

¹¹⁰ Ayoka Chenzira, “Ayoka Chenzira: I Really Wanted It to Move,” in *Film Fatales: Independent Women Directors*, ed. Redding, Judith M. and Victoria A. Brownworth (Seattle: Seal Press, 1997), 122.

for a strong collaboration not merely based on a critical understanding of the intersection between race, gender, and sexuality but also in terms of their quest to examine histories of oppression as cross-cultural.

Beyond assessing shared contextual choices, these art-makers are connected through dance film practice. As Chenzira once danced for choreographer Syvilla Fort, Roussève and Chenzira both work from their own experience to chronicle the stories of women of African descent. Chenzira made her first film as a student in 1971 at New York University about a choreographer that she performed for, Syvilla Fort. Revising the student-made film after she graduated in 1979, it became *Syvilla: They Dance to Her Drum*, a film that she considers to be a “dance film.”¹¹¹ The structure of her work creates a biography of a choreographer in a series of moving images. “Dance film,” in this context, is a series of images that pay attention to the gestures and movements of African American women. While both *Syvilla* and Roussève’s pay close attention to dance technique, *Syvilla* focuses more on autobiographical detail and Roussève on dance and narrative technique. In *Syvilla*, Chenzira shows footage of choreographer Syvilla Fort in the studio, performing choreography “Bacchanale” for composer John Cage in 1938, and narrates her role as the “link between Katherine Dunham and Alvin Ailey era.” She provides black and white images of Fort performing aerial lifts with her leg held high, flexing the foot, contorting the body, and gesturing with her hand. She offers images of dancers in Fort’s New York studio with live drumming as they stretch and lift on toes. She flips through documents such as news clippings that read: “Three generations of refugee artists grew.” Chenzira’s narration discusses Fort’s use of Dunham’s technique in the studio. Also, Fort’s use of diverse approaches on the concert stage lead to another visual of Fort dancing in “Danza” with guitar,

¹¹¹ Chenzira, “Ayoka Chenzira,” 118.

clapping, turns with a lifted skirt, and a powerfully strong and outstretched leg. Fort bends her back, shifts hips, kicks leg, and lifts shoulders. Chenzira captures Fort's last class in her historic studio, and to the recorded flute music, focuses on Fort speaking to the camera about what it meant to move out of this historic space. A series of stills appear throughout the film, such as one in which Fort is surrounded by people talking to her at her own celebration before her unfortunate passing from cancer. In the final image, the screen freezes a shot of her kneeling over in the dance studio.¹¹²

Adapting the screen so that viewers develop a closer relationship to emotional and bodily difficulties are also part of the filmmaking processes for *Pull Your Head to the Moon*. While Roussève articulates the rat story, the camera focuses on an image of him from below, gazing up at him as he sits on a hill. Cross-cutting, the screen switches from Roussève, to underneath a bridge, to a distant image of REALITY dancers on top of the hill. When a sharp sound of breaking glass meets a black and white image of its particles shattering, the screen turns at a diagonal to show images of dancers moving, their hair flinging in slowed images to the pounding Hip-Hop music of Public Enemy. While the pet rat narrative on the concert dance stage for *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* employs similar Hip-Hop movement with popping chests and high knee lifts and swirling head circles, the camera allows for an immediate juxtaposition of Roussève and dancers' bodies on the hill and underneath a New York bridge. Similar to the first dance of the Creole Series, the story of Roussève's grandmother emerges humorously, discussing how he mocked her unfamiliar ways. Differently in the film, after Roussève introduces his grandmother, the screen shows an image of him walking through the door of her home. From the image of them eating at the table together, the camera closes in on Roussève speaking and when

¹¹² *Syvilla-- They Dance to Her Drum*, directed by Ayoka Chenzira (New York, N.Y.: Distributed by Women Make Movies, 1979), DVD.

he looks at her, the camera gets close up to her face and the screen turns black. The following words scroll across the screen: “Everybody got somebody they love more than themselves.” In the color of sepia, the young grandmother then plays with her cousin Bonnie and other young girls outside the small sharecropper’s room. The camera zooms toward hands holding their chest. The screen returns to Roussève and grandmother at the dining table and she opens up a long extended ribbon. Returning to the plantation memory, the spatial dynamics of film are expressed through the sound of wind, birds, and dirt moving. The camera observes a still Bonnie who then scrapes her back across the dirt. The lens focuses on her head and moves upward as she rises. The camera watches her from below as she flaps her arms. From sepia to color, Bonnie lowers her body in the tub. The camera begins to shake while the screen offers slowed-down images of faces and arms flinging, and bodies flapping across the screen. The grandmother’s voice recalls how they “killed that white man” and “stuffed dirt in his mouth” after he had raped Bonnie. They checked the direction of the North Star and their “heads pulled up to the moon.” The young grandmother moves the canoe across the water, shifting the paddle on each side. The lasting image captures Roussève under the New York bridge with the camera gazing up at him as he dances in the dirt. Dance technique articulates the contexts of the film’s narrative.

Roussève’s first film demonstrates the inextricable relationship between dance and film among choreographers of African descent in the latter part of twentieth century. His work exemplifies how a choreographer in the 1990s transitioned into film as a result of the racial and gendered structures of the dance that called for such a creative shift. Through collaboration with Ayoka Chenzira, *Pull Your Head to the Moon* becomes a film that connects a black woman and gay man’s human loss.

II. South Asian Diaspora Performance: An Experimentation with Indian Dance and Black Feminism

Chatterjea witnessed firsthand the environmental impact of globalization on human populations during her travels throughout Asia. “I heard of farmers committing suicide because Coca-Cola was taking all their water,” she explained. Then in 2004, dangerous traces of arsenic were found in soil samples all over the Phillips neighborhood, the poorest borough in south Minneapolis. Suddenly, for Chatterjea, that ideological gray matter that usually provides a cushion between local and global politics collapsed in on itself.

Together with activists, colleagues and leaders from the Women’s Environmental Institute, Chatterjea and Ananya Dance Theatre began conducting research and holding workshops—“Madness Workshops,” as Chatterjea refers to them—to better understand the effects of pollution and contamination on struggling populations, from Bangladesh to our own backyard. Then, she did the thing she knew how to do best: dance. “Dance is such a powerful medium,” explains Chatterjea. “And that’s all I really have.”¹¹³

Choreographer Ananya Chatterjea explains four main issues to the *Minnesota Daily* in 2007: dance as the most important practice in her world with the capacity to address social change; the role of critical study and dialogue in the work of her dance company Ananya Dance Theatre; how the company’s relationships with communities grappling over issues of disenfranchisement lead to artistic works; and how her trilogy on Environmental Justice emerges from her travels between the nation-states of India and the United States as well as her reflections on the global crises that connect them. This chapter explores how Chatterjea arrives at interweaving social justice commentary into dance and creating a distinct realm of activism based on her composition of contemporary Indian dance technique with artists of Ananya Dance Theatre, her rootedness in the political lives of communities of color, and her experience of diaspora and critique of ongoing, global colonizing dynamics. Through Indian dance forms of classical Odissi dance, *vinyasa* style of yoga, and Chhau martial arts, stories of South Asian women’s experiences of global environmental and gender-based challenges become aligned with other Asian communities and the African diaspora. Through life history interviews, the

¹¹³ Sara Nicole Miller, “The Toxicity of Our City,” *Minnesota Daily*, September 6, 2007, <http://www.mndaily.com/2007/09/06/toxicity-our-city>.

autoethnographic method, and dance critiques as well as an interdisciplinary analysis of her work through studies of classical Indian dance and diaspora, I discuss how choreographies respond to a series of conditions faced by the historically disenfranchised.

This chapter examines Ananya Chatterjea's training in Odissi dance in order to clarify how she creates a postmodern Indian dance aesthetic from a critical immersion in classical training. Second, I discuss how Chatterjea's experiences in the U.S. led her to form Ananya Dance Theatre alongside other women of color artists dealing with challenges of race, gender, and sexuality. This section begins to bring in analyses of black feminist frameworks. Last, I focus on the company's training process as well as how it expands on its dance aesthetic through collaboration with theater artists of African descent. Theories of dance and diaspora such as Janet O'Shea's focus on the ways that classical dance can respond to issues of globalization lead me to explore how South Asian performance evolves through cross-cultural intersections.¹¹⁴ Linking all sections of this chapter will be an ongoing reference to Chatterjea's interview with the *Minnesota Daily* because of how this conversation exemplifies the fundamental bases of Chatterjea's choreographic approach. Additionally, I utilize the autoethnographic method and life history interviews with Chatterjea and founding company artists to examine the makings of Afro-Asian connections in the company.

Training in Classical Indian Dance

Ananya Chatterjea faced a complex journey with classical Indian dance before she became attached to the "powerful medium" of dance, as she names it above. She began dancing at the age of five in Kolkata, West Bengal, India (formerly known as Calcutta) in the *guru-shishya* system of dance training. She, the *shishya* or disciple, learned multiple Indian dance

¹¹⁴ Janet O'Shea, *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), xii.

forms through the teachings of her *guru*, the instructor. Chatterjea reflects on the benefits of this pedagogical structure in her essay “Training in Classical Dance,” defining the form as a process of taking and offering knowledge and a framework in which disciples are accepted into the guru’s home so that the guru “eats up” the disciple’s ignorance.¹¹⁵ According to Chatterjea, the system requires the shishya to offer themselves up entirely to receiving instruction so that knowledge transmission goes beyond teaching combinations to committing repertoire to memory.¹¹⁶ Being the shishya was a rigorous endeavor for Chatterjea during the time of her own training. For ten years, she learned diverse Indian forms such as Manipuri, Kalkakali, and Bharatanatyam. She remembers being constantly urged by her instructors to push herself further and even receiving a stick thrown her way if she did not execute each movement perfectly.¹¹⁷ When she reached the phase of specializing in a specific Indian dance form, Chatterjea focused on mastering skills in classical Odissi dance with preeminent performer of the form Sanjukta Panigrahi. This history of learning Odissi through the guru-shishya system and specifically under Panigrahi’s instruction contributes to understanding the power embedded within Chatterjea’s dances. Classical Indian dance scholars Sunil Kothari and Avinash Pasricha consider Panigrahi as having provided an “invaluable” contribution to Odissi “by taking it to all” regions of the globe as well as having been a “leading exponent” who formulated Odissi “on a sound” frame.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ananya Chatterjea, “Training in Indian Classical Dance: A Case Study,” *South Asian Theatre Journal* 13 no. 1: (1996), 69.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 77–9.

¹¹⁷ Chatterjea, interview by author, November 3, 2012.

¹¹⁸ Sunil Kothari and Avinash Pasricha, *Odissi: Indian Classical Dance Art* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1990), 10.

As much as Chatterjea was privileged in receiving world-renowned training from Panigrahi, an engagement with feminist politics jumpstarted a path toward alternatives to the classical in performances of Odissi dance. Her earliest intrigue for such broader social issues emerged while attending a school surrounded by a dynamic women's movement. She remembers the occurrences of public protests during her student enrollment at Presidency College, a prestigious educational institution that she calls both "highly intellectual" and the "hot bed of politics." These protesters were women discussing daily social issues such as literacy, they resisted against the rising costs of living, and called for adequate nutrition for pregnant women who had been positioning themselves last in the family, to prevent severe malnourishment among pregnant women. Simultaneous with Chatterjea's learning at one of the most elite facilities in eastern India consisted of her discoveries of the "feminine beauty and love" within a feminist movement of women working on critical social challenges.¹¹⁹

Chatterjea's inclination toward following women's leadership in political movements led her to experiment with movement in ways that redirected the course of her classical Indian dance training with Sanjukta Panigrahi. Following Presidency College, Chatterjea earned a major scholarship to Columbia University's Dance Education program and hoped to utilize her graduate research process "to meet people from all over the world" while "talking about our reality." Her agenda then evolved to be one focusing on multiculturalism in the contemporary moment, a project that greatly differed from Panigrahi's historical leadership in helping to create the standard Odissi repertoire. Examining Panigrahi's contributions, she calls her a "highly respected professional dancer" and "one of the founders, one of the resurrectors of the Odissi form" because Panigrahi participated in establishing the blueprint for Odissi technique in 1957

¹¹⁹ Chatterjea, interview by author, November 3, 2012.

with Gurus such as Kelucharan Mohapatra and scholars such as Kalicharan Patnaik. Chatterjea provides an account for this history of Odissi dance and pays attention to Panigrahi's engagement in her essay "Contestations." The unfortunate death of her Guru Panigrahi leads her to examine the moment in which Odissi was created. She describes her initial aims to write a life history of Panigrahi following her Guru's unfortunate passing from breast cancer in 1997 at age fifty-three. In this period of reflection and grieving, she recalls becoming increasingly aware of how she had to examine the formation of Odissi in order to, first, achieve her aims to recognize Panigrahi's achievements and secondarily, extend her Guru's legacy in relationship to the creation of an Indian dance aesthetic. As a result of positioning herself in relationship to classical Indian dance history through her past training with Panigrahi, Chatterjea's desire to choreograph within the contemporary dance domain based on her racial lens still functions as a contribution, albeit with great alternatives, to the legacy of her teacher.

Closer investigation of Jayantika reveals how Chatterjea both extends and diverges from the underlying ideology of this historical event as a result of her multicultural aims. Chatterjea describes how individuals participated in the Jayantika project in 1957 to create knowledge about how the aesthetic should be systematized, how different body parts should be classified as movement, and how to follow and form alternatives to the blueprint that had already been stylized for the classical Indian dance form Bharatanatyam.¹²⁰ She discusses how hand and foot movements were substituted for Sanskrit nomenclature to create a movement classification that drew from the *Natyasastra*, a document of classical aesthetic written by Bharata around second century BC. As a clear movement grammar was established to make official technical guidelines, Chatterjea examines how a process of Sanskritization managed to remove tensions about the task

¹²⁰ Ananya Chatterjea, "Contestations: Constructing a Historical Narrative for Odissi," in *Rethinking Dance History*, ed. Alexandra Carter (New York: Routledge, 2004), 151.

of reconfiguration or any potential concerns about “authenticity” in the form. Through some of the discords that took place at Jayantika and the ways that contributors interrupted the makings of strict Odissi regulations, the location of Chatterjea’s choreography begins to be clarified. As Guru Deba Prasad Das argued for a focus on how different aesthetics made up the style of Odissi, Chatterjea analyzes how he disagreed with how regional specificities were being lost in the Sanskritization work. Chatterjea argues for memory of the great diversity of styles that make up Odissi even as the style of Sanjukta Panigrahi’s teacher, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, is the approach most widely performed in the present. She unveils the ways Odissi displays an uninterrupted “tradition” and creates a rigid code of “classicism” by recognizing the ruptures taking place in negotiations as Guru Deba Prasad Das neglected to follow certain measures. The term “classicism” refers to how Odissi practitioners and researchers framed the dance according to the *Natyastra* and the term “tradition” refers to the interpretation of Odissi as continuing the rituals of women temple dancers known as *maharis*. In fact, Chatterjea suggests that Jayantika structured Odissi outside the sexual subordination of the maharis, as the male gurus of Odissi focused on the contexts of their largely middle and working class worlds so that the significance of the maharis was displaced by other Indian traditions. As Chatterjea places emphasis on the marginalization of women performers within her broader historical writing, she provides an access point from which to discuss the formation of her contemporary Indian dance work as inquiring into current experiences of diverse people of color, maintaining the technique details taught by Panigrahi, and naming the decline of the maharis as a colonial condition.

Chatterjea’s call for memory of how the practice of the maharis was suppressed by colonial dynamics undergirds her approach to classical Indian dance technique. Chatterjea describes the history of the maharis as follows: dance aesthetics were historically practiced in

temples and backed by royal patronage as a result of Hindu principles about the role dance played in spirituality and creativity.¹²¹ Through service to deities, the labor of these women enabled them a certain kind of economic flexibility that exceeded the constraints of a social structure in which women were merely acknowledged for their familial partnerships, posits Chatterjea. She analyzes how the structures of British colonialism dismantled this system of temples receiving financial support and many of these temple workers were made to survive through sex work, struggling to negotiate a rigid social system in which women were left with no monetary source to help facilitate their economic independence. Offering a legal perspective on this history, Kunal M. Parker pinpoints the year 1860 as the earliest period in which temple dancing girls and other servants of the temple could be convicted based on the “crime” of their being subjected to the supposed degrading practice of temple dedication. She assesses how the idea of the “crime” became a creation of the Anglo-Indian judiciary, in and of itself, a judicial invention of the colonial state that opted for a hands-off approach to governance in the post-1857 era. According to Parker, two outcomes emerged in the first half of the twentieth century: to create an understanding of temple dancing girls based on the notion of “caste” and to develop a linkage between Hindu women as “prostitutes” in terms rationalized by Hindu law.¹²² Through analysis of the maharis in terms of sexuality and colonialism, Chatterjea’s objective to engage in contemporary Indian dance becomes an experimentation with the classical that maintains memory of historical disenfranchisement of women’s practices, work, and cultural leadership.

The historical conditions that surround classical Indian dance and Panigrahi’s engagement with Odissi clearly differentiate from Chatterjea’s focus on connecting dance with

¹²¹ Ananya Chatterjea, “Contestations,” 145.

¹²² Kunal M. Parker, ““A Corporation of Superior Prostitutes””: Anglo-Indian Legal Conceptions of Temple Dancing Girls, 1800–1914” *Modern Asian Studies* 32: (1998), 562.

contemporary women's lives. An analysis that clarifies this distinction between the classical and contemporary Indian dance is choreographer and author Ranjabati Sircar who offers an account from which to link Chatterjea's training with Panigrahi in the guru-shishya system to Chatterjea's desire for a contemporary Indian dance practice that explores the challenges faced by women. Sircar recommends removing dance technique from the restrictions of an inherited tradition by recreating practices according to an individual's source, a training that calls for individual devotion and accountability for environment and history.¹²³ When Chatterjea seeks to explore the daily realities of diverse communities, her work fits within this context as well as Sircar's additional descriptions about how movement can reveal the dancer's state in the world at the time of the art's creation.

When Chatterjea began choreographing her own work, she demonstrated how dance could explore social issues. An account for her choreography helps to examine the effects of her reconfiguration of Indian dance forms. Chatterjea's piece *Unable to Remember Roop Kanwar* (1997) is described by historian Janet O'Shea as discussing the politics linked to the death of Roop Kanwar in 1987. O'Shea examines how this choreography revealed the imperialist notions that underlie international feminist agendas when Indian women are described as being in need of rescue or protection.¹²⁴ Moreover, her work showed how Indian dance forms already exist in a transnational realm and offer ways of contending with global politics in the immediate social world. O'Shea proves that the piece illuminated the ways Chatterjea grappled over how to represent the multiple layers of Roop Kanwar's story through classical movement. As Chatterjea

¹²³ Ranjabati Sircar, "Contemporary Indian Dance," in *Rasa: The Indian Performing Arts in the Last Twenty-Five Years*, ed. Bimal Mukherjee and Sunil Kothari, vol. 1, *Music and Dance* (Calcutta: Anamika Kala Sangam, 1995), 260.

¹²⁴ Janet O'Shea, *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 135.

deploys the aesthetics of her former training with Panigrahi to respond to political concerns and local conditions, her choreography illustrates the political dynamics of contemporary Indian dance. Chatterjea's choreography experimented with Indian movement to stage progressive ideas based on her goal for contemporary Indian dance to revise classical aesthetics such as Odissi in order to raise awareness about social challenges endured by women of color in the present moment. Although Sircar's description of Indian dance choreographers provides critical aid in understanding how Chatterjea creates movement based on her position in the contemporary moment, O'Shea's analysis of Chatterjea's choreography leads to new definitive terms. Whereas Ranjabati Sircar defines classical dance as a category that connects traditional form and content, O'Shea focuses on the acts taking place within the category to theorize "classicism" as a kind of continuity that a dancer can strategize with and within but that does not require a perpetual reiteration of form.¹²⁵ Through O'Shea's perspective, Chatterjea emerges as a practitioner working creatively inside a classical aesthetic without lacking consideration for an instrumental, Indian heritage.

One year following the production of *Unable to Remember Roop Kanwar*, Chatterjea embarked on a journey to the Midwest that would bring together her aims for multiculturalism in contemporary Indian dance. She came to Minnesota in December 1998, arriving at Minneapolis/Saint Paul International airport with her two and a half year old daughter. "Seeing this sea of white faces coming at me," she said to herself, "shit, Ananya, there is no one here that looks like you." Her feelings that she must have been truly desperate to come to Minneapolis actually moved her to consider the action that she could take to curb her experiences of alienation. She sought then to call on women to gather and "go on strike against the amount of

¹²⁵ Janet O'Shea, *At Home in the World*, 45.

work” they have to accomplish. She wanted to explore how women were not only dedicated mothers, but also “revolutionaries” who had grown fatigued and radicalized by persons’ perceptions of women as purely focused on jewelry, clothes, and other forms of “bull shit.” In 2004, she used word of mouth tactic to send multiple emails and people showed up as a result of their being a need for women of color to come together. She sought for diverse women of color to dance together as a practice of resistance against alienation, isolation, and the experiences of subordination that surface as a result of the intersection between race, gender, and nation. Such a broader goal was specifically based on Chatterjea’s aims for different groups of people of color to learn and perform contemporary Indian dance, an objective that requires further extending the previous analysis of the classical to incorporate critical race theory. Vital to analyzing Chatterjea’s choreography is O’Shea’s theory that conceptualizes how ongoing changes characterizes classical Indian dance. Moreover, she discusses how such forms address the hybridity of a local urban area because practitioners form social networks in a transnational city.¹²⁶ Though O’Shea focuses on the conditions of multiple exclusions choreographed by practitioners of Bharatanatyam in Canada, the dynamic that Chatterjea experienced upon entrance in the Midwest is a call to address the exclusions endured by women of color within and outside the South Asian diaspora.

Founding Ananya Dance Theatre

The women of color artists who danced with Ananya Dance Theatre (ADT) since 2004 became founding company members, bringing into the company’s work different stories of alienation and desires for inclusion. The artists spent the earliest years focusing on the politics of women of color identity from within the company. Chatterjea defines the time period in which her company created the dances of *Bandh: Meditation on Dream* in 2005 and *Duurbaar*:

¹²⁶ Janet O’Shea, *At Home in the World*, 163.

Journeys into Horizon in 2006 as fostering a vision from within the company to “figure out how to collaborate with other women of color.” Collecting stories amongst women of color artists consisted of understanding one another’s difference and dancing on the same platform.¹²⁷ Remembering the beginnings of ADT, she posits that she aimed to grapple over systemic violence in ways that brought women of color together to examine these challenges.

ADT evolved to recognize processes integral to black feminism because of how the dance company became inclusive of experiences rooted in the lives of women of African descent. Founding artist Gina Kundan received the email aimed at women of color to begin a dance organization and the project seemed “perfect” because she was dealing with troubling work circumstances. She was being considered the “angry black girl” as a result of her colleague’s perceptions that she had an overly intense voice whenever she articulated herself.¹²⁸ Kundan’s experiences can be explained through black feminist theorist bell hooks’s posit that as black subjects pay attention to the many layers of their identity that originate from a different place, black subjects can be viewed as a “spectacle” by white others.¹²⁹ Chatterjea’s call to action became an invitation to join an ensemble that could comprehend such gender and racial conflicts in the workplace. When responding to Chatterjea’s request for a social movement led by women of color, Kundan was initially concerned about childcare because her husband was out of town. Chatterjea immediately eased her worries when she welcomed her children in the space and confirmed that she could bring them along. Ever since Kundan danced with her two children, the dance company has been her “community.” Kundan’s feelings of being welcomed can be

¹²⁷ Ananya Chatterjea, interview by author, November 3, 2012.

¹²⁸ Gina Kundan, interview by author, November 1, 2015.

¹²⁹ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End, 1990), 22.

associated with bell hooks's postulate that a shared site of collective expression and engagement exists within the space of "yearning" because differences come together and the possibilities of shared understandings emerge.¹³⁰ Chatterjea's initial call for women of color to unite in resistance against the amount of work they must achieve daily and to challenge the conditions of isolation in predominantly white spaces becomes inclusive of the social struggles of women of African descent. Kundan's story clarifies the ways that Chatterjea's aims for women of color to unite in resistance against the magnitude of women's work and limited perceptions of mothering does not function in retaliation against parenting. Rather, an awareness of workplace circumstances as well as women's care-taking labor contributed to creating a dance company deeply aware of the experiences of systemic violence in public spaces and the attention needed to the private domain to confront tensions in daily life.

Expanding on the culturally and nationally diverse stories of ADT artists in terms of work conditions, founding company artist Hui Wilcox describes how the community-based environment of ADT sustained her physically and psychologically because the creative work included dialogues on race and gender. Such conversations transformed her daily existence as a recent immigrant to the U.S. who was being challenged to comprehend racial dynamics as an Assistant Professor at a predominately white university. As Wilcox transitioned into the company as an immigrant and Assistant Professor, she embodies the multiple positions of the diaspora that cannot be constrained to what anthropologist Aihwa Ong calls one singular idea as "Chinese Women" but must function from diverse locations and possibilities.¹³¹ Ong's account

¹³⁰ hooks, *Yearning*, 13.

¹³¹ Aihwa Ong, "Women Out of China: Traveling Tales and Traveling Theories in Postcolonial Feminism," in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 351–2.

for the conflicts endured as a result of the multidimensional positions of Chinese women researchers in the U.S. substantiates some of Wilcox's assertions because Wilcox remembers thinking alongside dancers of color outside the context of "white noise" by limiting the prevalence of norms associated with whiteness.¹³² ADT offered space to produce knowledge on the subject of race, gender, and structural oppression. Wilcox's account for the significance of the stories exchanged between artists of color underscores Chatterjea's description of ADT as calling attention to racial, cultural, and ethnic differences and as resisting the necessity to structure her creative process around a white mediator, or, what she describes as a practice of "passing through whiteness."¹³³ Chatterjea argues that alliances amongst women of color were historically fragmented through colonialism as whites negotiated relationships. People of color could hardly support one another, according to Chatterjea, while struggling in conditions of small resources, and through living in a diaspora such as the U.S., people of color inhabit spaces in which they are inclined to be against one another. She witnesses repeatedly how women are not aware of each other's histories such as how India maintains one of the world's biggest social movements for women. Her comments can be compared with bell hooks's description of "radical black subjectivity" as being fully realized when "white people and Third World elites are not trying to maintain cultural hegemony, insisting that we be as they want us to be."¹³⁴ To navigate these kinds of problems in which people of color grapple over being coerced into roles that fail to be adequate representations of their identity, Chatterjea aims to get beyond such fractures by building relationships, but this requires that artists continuously engage questions about one

¹³² Hui Wilcox, interview by author, October 7, 2012.

¹³³ Ellen Chenoweth, "Ananya Dance Theatre: Spreading A Politic of Defiant Hope," *Left Turn*, July 28, 2008, <http://www.leftturn.org/print/867>.

¹³⁴ hooks, *Yearning*, 21.

another's histories, politics, and cultures.¹³⁵ As Wilcox developed self-awareness about her body in the social category terms of a woman of color identity, she built this very collective understanding about other ADT artists' lives.

Founding artists created a space to challenge daily experiences of race and gender through constructive dialogue and engagement with women of color artists about the workplace and through struggling to create a radical woman of color politics. Similar to Wilcox, founding artist Chitra Vairavan conducted the research needed to claim a feminist of color identity. Vairavan was in college at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities discovering her politics as a person of color and desiring to turn this search into a physical journey. In her first year with the company, she recalls having never been so "physically close to different women of color." Feeling as if she lived in the Barbara Barker Center where they rehearsed daily at the University of Minnesota, Vairavan remembers coming to train with the thirty women company members in 2004 on the weekends and during the week. According to Vairavan, their ongoing presence in the dance studio transformed the Barker building of everyday visitors and workers who "had never seen so many women of color occupy the space together."¹³⁶ She also exercised her aims to deepen an embodiment of a person of color identity during the "magic" of the early years by bringing home-cooked food prepared by her mother and sharing with these women the food she consumed at home. By the time she joined the company, she had been dancing since the age of five because her parents wanted their daughters to "have an outlet into Tamil tradition, South Indian culture." As a result of her parents driving her from Milwaukee, WI to Chicago, IL every weekend for Indian dance classes in the Bharatanatyam form, she "grew up with dance and it

¹³⁵ Ellen Chenoweth, "Ananya Dance Theatre."

¹³⁶ Chitra Vairavan, interview by author, October 4, 2015.

always had a cultural component to it.” Vairavan has a very different sense of rootedness in the space than Kundan and Wilcox.

Vairavan provides her own account for some of the conflicts associated with her dance training experiences in “the Indian diaspora” that informed her of how “dance is a big export in terms of Indian culture” and when instructors reiterate “the structure that they’ve been taught,” they place emphasis on the “stories you’re telling” and “having your own voice/improv[ization] isn’t as encouraged but technique and form is definitely.” Focusing on the teaching practices of such first-generation Bharatanatyam instructors, dance theorist Priya Srinivasan seeks to examine the politics of citizenship post-1965 in order to understand how the dance becomes a form of cultural nationalism with the potential to operate outside these standards described by Vairavan. According to Srinivasan, the 1965 legislation in the U.S. allowed Indians to come to America for the hopes of full citizenship but as they continue to live as minorities, cultural nationalism provides a means for citizenship temporarily. Cultural nationalism, as it concerns second-generation practitioners such as Vairavan, concerns how dancing bodies frequently preserve a feminine ideal of the respectable, heterosexual, model minority.¹³⁷ Rather than the rigidly formulated package that Vairavan remembers learning in the Indian diaspora, Srinivasan recommends comprehending power dynamics in the dance classroom through changing, negotiated processes enacted by individuals interacting with one another.¹³⁸ ADT provided this kind of space of engagement, demonstrated through Vairavan’s own actions to be in continuous dialogue with artists about identity and to even share food with them.

¹³⁷ Priya Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 119.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

Vairavan, Wilcox, as well as Kundan's narratives show how founding company members began to resist dynamics of systemic violence at the micro level: they structured ADT by claiming a politicized woman of color identity through dance. These stories began a process of examining structural oppression, and launched an earlier practice in which conversations about experience were an act of connecting stories across ethnic, racial, national, and class difference. Speaking about the vision of the first two years of the company, Chatterjea explains, "So the first stories were about gathering stories from inside the community, you know, within ourselves."¹³⁹ Conversations held between ADT artists about one another's experiences formed the company's earliest social justice platform to intersect the different lives of women of color across multiple social categories. Examining the company's work in transnational alliances, she defines ADT's "artistic labor" as generating vital knowledge to keep our world balanced and to carry out "world-making in the process of dancing." According to Chatterjea, ADT's work is not one of political measurability or a job of influencing policy; rather, it is dancing to train as cultural activists with hope, breath, and space sharing, learning to "move in and out of other dancers," and knowing the world differently through sustained interest in social justice.¹⁴⁰ She suggested that ADT posed questions such as "how can we relate to global material through our bodies?" and recommended that dancers share each other's stories to create a Global South alliance in which artists enact transnationalism that refuses to be divided from one another's experiences.¹⁴¹

From our experiences, Chatterjea demands that ADT launches a project of imagining "decolonization" through dance, an effort that insists on artists working to know their own as

¹³⁹ Ananya Chatterjea, interview by author, November 3, 2012.

¹⁴⁰ Ananya Chatterjea, (lecture, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, October 5, 2012).

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

well as one another's histories and to research experiences that cannot be expressed linearly. ADT's research continues to develop based on Chatterjea's reflections in three ways: first, the company is intersectional in its analysis of multiple social categories and training in different Indian forms; second, it is transnational in its aim to connect the histories of oppression in the lives of communities of color; and third, "decolonizing" in its analysis of global challenges that create negative impacts. Postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon defines decolonization as historical process, a coming together of two opposing forces that owe their resistance to each other to colonial circumstances.¹⁴² ADT's critical analysis resists the ways that histories of colonialism continue to surface in the present-day and require new explorations into how bodies move in the world. Chatterjea clarifies that ADT artists work as cultural activists through their research on unknown, hidden, suppressed histories.¹⁴³ Researching histories of self alongside others, however, evolves to be a challenging task. According to Hui Wilcox, ADT dancers confront a "complex power differential" because artists get marginalized differently. She suggests that dancers carry out the necessary research while struggling to remain grounded in community.¹⁴⁴ Decolonizing practice in ADT explores stories within and outside the company with awareness of power dynamics.

Postmodern Indian Dance: Experimentations in Odissi, Yoga, and Chhau

ADT trains under rigorous terms of philosophy and movement to make artistic excellence equal to a social justice politics of connecting the challenges faced by women and communities of color. According to the company, "Ananya Dance Theatre is the leading creator of

¹⁴² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1963), 30.

¹⁴³ Ananya Chatterjea, (lecture, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, October 5, 2012).

¹⁴⁴ Hui Wilcox in Ananya Chatterjea's lecture (Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, October 5, 2012).

Contemporary Indian American Dance in the global arts and social justice movement. Invoking the work and dreams of women of color, we radically reframe the ground on which we dance, inspiring our audiences through visual and emotional engagement.”¹⁴⁵ The company's philosophy of artistic excellence is based on three areas: *Yorchha* or technique, *Shawngam* or resistance, and *Aanch* or heat. *Yorchha* defines the company's technical foundation in the classical Indian dance form of eastern India known as Odissi, the flow through breath and poses of *vinyasa* yoga, and the martial art form of Chhau, also of eastern India. Through *Shawngam*, the company's alliances with communities of color seek to resist the ongoing impacts of oppression. ADT establishes *Aanch* based on its formulation of dance technique in ensemble movement. In the second chapter of Part Two, I will further examine Shawngam and Aanch components through my analysis of the Environmental Justice Series of three dances titled *Pipaashaa: Extreme Thirst* in 2007, *Daak: Call to Action* in 2008, and *Ashesh Barsha: Unending Monsoon* in 2009. In this section, I more thoroughly examine Yorchha by discussing the company's technical foundation in the Indian forms of Odissi, Chhau, and yoga.

Ananya Chatterjea describes the technical basis of the company as Yorchha because of the intersection of classical dance, flow and extension, as well as martial arts. This Yorchha philosophy emerged from founding company members of ADT who worked since 2004 to comprehend how classical Indian dance training “had power which was not always enough in terms of a contemporary feminist aesthetic” and as a result, the goal of Chatterjea's training process is to “bring together poetry and feminist power.”¹⁴⁶ ADT's training primarily focuses on ensuring liberation by developing unity with the struggles of women of color across the globe.

¹⁴⁵ Ananya Dance Theatre,” accessed November 7, 2016, <http://www.ananyadancetheatre.org/>.

¹⁴⁶ “Yorchha (Technique),” Vimeo (from Ananya Dance Theatre), accessed January 6, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/106247485>.

ADT's dance technique contributes to the company's path to meditate on the struggles for social justice in communities linked to the artists' own ancestry and to connect meditations on resistance to other communities of color, transnationally. She outlines Yorchha as based on five areas: first, extension and spiraling of the spine; second, curvature of the skeletal structure; third, lengthening of the limbs; fourth, a relationship to the ground; fifth, knowledge of the energy along the entire body; and sixth, generosity of the hips. These multiple areas of the body get cultivated and targeted differently as the company trains in Odissi, yoga, and Chhau.

Training in ADT is based on the capacity to increasingly develop technical skills in Odissi and it follows this form's guidelines on body poses. According to Sunil Kothari, Odissi is structured into body bends, such as *tribhanga* (hereinafter written as *tribhangi*) in which the human body folds in three as the torso moves in contrast to the head and hip and *chauka* (hereinafter written as *chauk*) in which feet make the weight of the body equal and the arms are square.¹⁴⁷ ADT structures its Odissi training system based on these stances, because it rehearses ten different sequences of movement in both *tribhangi* and *chauk*. In the *chauk* exercises, dancers move into a stance with the heels grounded into the earth at about one to two feet apart with bent knees and arms lifted in a firm rectangular shape. In the ten sets of movements in *tribhangi*, artists keep body weight onto a bent leg, the other foot planted diagonally forward, the torso in a half-moon shape, and hip thrust out. For both *chauk* and *tribhangi*, the gaze looks toward or away from a *mudra* by forming a hand gesture. These *mudras* include *hamsasya* by touching the index finger and thumb while leaving the remaining fingers spread and lifted; *pataka* by stretching fingers out straight and keeping them together; *mayura* by touching thumb and the third finger and leaving the others lifted straight up; *pechakamukha* by touching thumb and

¹⁴⁷ Sunil Kothari, "Odissi: From Devasabha to Janasabha," in *Orissa Revisited*, ed. Pratapaditya Pal (Mumbai: Marq publications, 2001), 96–7.

middle finger and leaving others slightly softened downward; *musti* by forming the fingers into a fist; *shikhara* by bringing the thumb to the inside of the navel and bringing the remaining fingers into a fist.¹⁴⁸ The training in both *chauk* and *tribhangi* consists of ten movements phrases and the use of hand gestures, footsteps, and *mudras* that get articulated for different purposes in these stances. Additionally, other exercises work from within and outside the structure of these stances in order to deepen artists' training in Odissi dance.

Chauk exercises strengthen artists' capacity to: (1) maintain an upright torso with precise arm placement; (2) keep the hips open and lowered to the floor; (3) and sustain a bent knee posture for extended periods of time while articulating the feet in specific steps. The first *chauk* sequence establishes this posture of the square arms and bent knees while lifting both feet off the floor simultaneously and lowering back into the stance. The second *chauk* sequence develops artists' ability to move sequentially from *chauk* into a challenging balance, in this case, quickly shifting from flat feet to holding the entire body's stance while only on the balls of the feet. The third *chauk* sequence concentrates on the intricate oscillation of the torso that moves at the sternum while keeping the front ribs from protruding outward. It improves the subtlety by which dancers can circulate from the wrist without over-clenching the hand muscles. It also works on the flexion of the feet and the ability to balance the weight of the body while on a flat foot and on the heel of the other extremity. The fourth *chauk*, the sequence allows dancers to develop flexibility in the movement of the torso sideward, albeit specifically from the rib cage as opposed to from the waist. As the speed of the sequence quickens, it also increases artists' capacity to maintain the cross of the ball of the foot behind the front leg as well as the precision of *chauk* when moving sideward. This fifth pattern allows dancers to work on maintaining *chauk* while

¹⁴⁸ "Odissi Hasta Mudra," accessed November 7, 2016.
<http://odisihastamudrasamirkumardance.blogspot.com/2012/05/odissi-dance.html>.

opening the body in a turn. It also deepens artists' training in a circular formation of the chest while balancing from the heel of the foot to the sole of the other extremity. It also increases dancers' awareness of the exact precision necessary in the feet so that the full flexion of the heel is achieved and the steps onto the feet are each accented and not muddled together. In other chaul sequences such as the ninth, it enhances our practice of turning the body open sideward, albeit with a different intelligence in mudra change and an awareness of how to maintain the hips square with the ball of the foot crossed behind the other extremity. The tenth chaul increases dancers' capacity to be aware of multiple shifts occurring simultaneously based on the sideward movement of the chest, the upward and downward movements at the wrist of both hands, and the steps onto the heel and soles of the feet. Other exercises become exemplary of the intricate movement of the chest and feet.

On the other hand, tribhangi exercises: (1) sit deeper into the pose so that the hip can move further out to the side; (2) emphasize the intricacy of the chin and hand movements; (3) and articulate the feet while achieving multiple curves of the body. The first exercise forms the tribhangi stance while lifting the front foot off the floor and returning it down to the sole of the foot. The second tribhangi sequence places emphasis on the flexion of the feet in an image by producing a half moon shape in its flexion from the sole of the foot to the ball of the foot and back again. It also expands the complexity by which dancers must understand bodily movement by marrying the simultaneous outward movement of the chest and inward movement of the ball of the foot. The third tribhangi sequence requires that dancers maintain the precarious nature of the hip jutting outward while balancing on the heel of the opposite leg. It also asks that artists accomplish the coordination of the head and hand gestures while perfecting the figure eight turn of the chest. The fourth sequence encourages dancers to create the full extension of the hip

outward so that the multiple curves of the body are accented from the ankle, to the hip, to the chest, and the chin. It also challenges artists to shift between tribhangi on both sides of the hip while maintaining a steady balance. This fifth tribhangi sequence challenges artists to maintain the generous opening of the left hip while opening in a one hundred eighty-degree turn to the right and then lifting off the left foot. It also continues the figure eight spiraling of the chest by requiring that the chest open in a circular formation to the right, then down, followed by moving up and over toward the left. The sixth tribhangi sequence increases artists' capacity to shift the hip outward at multiple intervals while creating the continuous sideward movement of the chest. While dancers follow the hip with the subtle shifting of the chin from left to right, the hands gently open and close hands and maintain the lifted elbows. Other tribhangi exercises strengthen dancers' capacity to create multiple arcs of the body. The seventh tribhangi sequence increases dancers' capacity to move from the ball of the foot, to a flat foot, and to the heel of the foot. It requires that dancers swing the chin from right to left and maintain the half moon of the ball of the foot, the circular formation of the chest, and the arc of the hand from left to right and down to up. The tenth tribhangi sequence encourages dancers to move seamlessly between a tribhangi with the left hip out to one with the right hip out to the right. It also requires maintaining both the shape of the arm overhead and the opposite hand at chin level while fully flexing the heel and achieving each of the footsteps as the frequency of sets increases.

In a third Odissi stance known as double chauk in which the feet are twice as wide apart as regular chauk, dancers practice different exercises that encourage: (1) maintaining a seated, lowered position at all times; (2) extended lines with the torso in relation to the legs; (3) and detailed hand gesture work and flexion of the feet. For instance, the sequence that ADT titles the third Odissi sequence increases the lengthening of the torso from the hip while ensuring that the

pelvis sits low to the ground. It also encourages precision in the lengthening of the arms and maintaining the details of handwork as the insides of the palms create different facings. This third sequence enhances dancers' ability to open the hips deeper in double chauh while opening the torso sideward to downward. It also requires that dancers be deeply grounded in the bent knees of double chauh even when balancing on one leg and changing swiftly the shape of the arms. Additionally, the fourth Odissi sequence maintains the length of the torso as it makes a full circle from the hip and with the legs lowered in chauh. It also increases distinction in the feet as the hip moves out sideward and balances mainly on one leg.

The double chauh position is considered a *mandala* because of its grounding into the earth with feet wide apart as well as its philosophical significance in developing a relationship with the cosmos. Chatterjea carries out an analysis of the possibilities of the *mandala* in performance when describing how choreographer Chandralekha works through different choreographic decisions such as using the collective power of women's bodies and abstraction of these many dancing bodies without an interest in iconographic images:

Contemporary choreographer Chandralekha, for example, referred to the goddess *dashabhujā* (ten-armed) Durga in her piece *Sri* (1990) to create a vision of the future woman who has fully realized her potential. Note, however, that this goddess-spirit is imaged only through a community of women who collectively empower the concept, positioned in a line vertical line, their arms reaching out from different sides as if to indicate the different weapons and symbols Durga holds in each of her hands. The image is evoked through abstraction, through the bodies of many dancers, and with no attempt at iconographic verisimilitude.¹⁴⁹

Chatterjea explains how an image of a goddess may appear and the sudden immediacy of several dancing bodies break through, or deconstruct, the context of the image through their immediacy and *mandala* with feet wide apart. In her own descriptions, Chandralekha posits that Indian

¹⁴⁹ Ananya Chatterjea, "In Search of a Secular in Contemporary Indian Dance: A Continuing Journey," *Dance Research Journal* 36, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 112.
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20444595>

structures of creativity are centered on the significance of the human body in every aspect of cultural formation because the *mandala* offers a concept of the relationship between the self, community, and cosmos.¹⁵⁰ Chandralekha describes how the *mandala* works through every aspect of material existence to express how the human body operates as a fundamental framework for understanding everyday work and objects. Chatterjea and Chandralekha's different discussions of the mandala help to reveal the purposes of Indian dance forms in positioning humanity in connection with the conditions of everyday existence.

While the company's training in classical Odissi dance deepens expertise in at least three different Odissi poses and footwork, yoga and Chhau martial arts provide training in forms that function outside the historical conditions of the classical framework. ADT trains in Chhau martial arts to expand the company's grounding in Indian dance forms and also to put forth the possibilities of Indian dance performance outside certain ideological limitations. ADT's training contributes to Chatterjea's aims for choreographing in Indian forms to direct the practices outside rigid religious formulations and to place emphasis on progressive thought. She outlines these aims in her essay "In Search of a Secular" in which she insists that the decisions are minimal for choreographers seeking to develop artistic work outside of religious significations, but that some possibilities include yoga and Chhau martial arts.¹⁵¹ Chatterjea reflects on how choreographers work through neoclassical aesthetics and forms such as Chhau martial arts that do not derive from the reconfiguration practices during the revival period in order to ask questions about religious, gender, and sexual politics. She provides a vivid example of the power of deconstructed images in performance by describing how choreographer Chandralekha uses a

¹⁵⁰ Chandralekha, "Contemporary Relevance in Classical Dance: A Personal Note," *National Centre for the Performing Arts Quarterly Journal* 13, no. 2 (June 1984): 62.

¹⁵¹ Ananya Chatterjea, "In Search of a Secular in Contemporary Indian Dance," 110.

Chhau and Bharatanatyam dancer to stage juxtaposition and to prevent privileging of any form. Although Chandralekha is driven by a Hindu text, Chatterjea addresses how she employs images that reveal many contexts of life in the community such as those depicting religious conflicts in the region. Chandralekha's choreography presents cultural forms as in conflict with each other, says Chatterjea, and problematizes assumptions about a unified monotonous Hindu cultural practice. Chatterjea offers an account for how Chandralekha deconstructs the notions of Hindu context in the form, destabilizes the cultural practices as belonging to an ideology, and bridges the traditional aesthetics with different forms and everyday gestures. As Chatterjea has always sought to work outside of religious significations, she discusses how Indian artistic forms become divorced from religious ideologies when the choreography connects with forms outside the classical. Chatterjea incorporates Chhau techniques into the company's artistry in progressive, secular ways when calling on artists to be rigorous in a form that aims not for religious sentiment but critical engagement with radical politics and women of color lives.

In additional writings on Chhau, the form has been understood as a martial art or tradition of preparing for combat and crafting bodily positions from the movement of animals and women's labor. According to Chandralekha, classical Indian dance forms cannot be separated from their martial and gymnastic origins because Indian dance forms were deeply embedded into labor practices such as hunting, food collection, and land cultivation.¹⁵² Chandralekha suggests that tribal and folk forms were designed to produce a feeling of fraternity and to prepare for hunting or warfare, and to enliven the body and mind for work. To address the problem of how radical movements neglect to understand how militancy is important to diverse cultural forms in India, she describes how militant operations continue to be relevant to dance forms such as

¹⁵² Chandralekha, "Militant Origins of Indian Dance," *Social Scientist* 9, no. 2/3 (Sept.-Oct. 1980), 80-1, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3516927>.

Chhau with origins in Paik in which dancers who were unarmed went before the military to “demoralize with their speed and grace.” Chandralekha defines the word *paika* as meaning “infantry” and Paika soldiers were deeply trained artists who were deployed to confront external aggressors. These dances continue to be practiced in the Puri area of Orissa. Chandralekha describes the goal of these dances as enhancing physical excitement and bravery among dancing soldiers and as an approach to ensure warriors were constantly prepared for battle. This historical analysis leads Chandralekha to call for going to the “source of culture” to revive people and transform conditions because the possibility to create social change exists when remembering how cultural realms are often far more progressive than the political.

Indian dance historian Sunil Kothari offers further clarification on the meaning of terms associated with Chhau in stating, “There is another word in the Oriya language from which Chhau is derived, and it means ‘to attack.’”¹⁵³ Although Kothari defines some terminology in relation to the use of defense and attack in Chhau, he also focuses on the dance form’s multiple influences. Exercises with “shield and sword” establish the “basic movements of the Chhau dance technique,” explains Kothari, and the “manner in which steps are taken” also “include those of birds and animals as well as human beings.” As Kothari focuses on how “Chhau dance has come down to modern times in an unbroken tradition,” his analysis uncovers how martial art forms bring different potential to dances seeking to work outside the limitations of the classical.

Closer investigation of the formation of Chhau shows how the martial art tradition has also been shaped over time. The revival of Chhau becomes the central discussion of Basanta Kumar Mohanta who outlines how the changing conditions of patronage for this martial art form had an impact on its structure. Broadly, Mohanta describes how Chhau martial art is practiced in

¹⁵³ Sunil Kothari, “The Chhau Dances,” *The World of Music* 11, no. 4 (1969): 38–55.

Mayurbhanj, Orissa (currently known as the state of Odisha) as well as Seraikela, Jharkhand and Purulia, West Bengal.¹⁵⁴ For the Mayurbhanj style of Chhau, Mohanta provides an account for how popularity for this form grew during the rule of Maharaj Krushna Chandra Bhanja Deo (1868–1882) who brought Chhau teachers from Seraikela to teach Chhau dancers in Orissa. Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanja Deo died in 1882 and the festival of Chhau dance known as Chaitra Parva was performed within the palace from April 11–13 in order to “keep the festival alive,” according to Mohanta. Chhau dance confronted new challenges following 1912, explains Mohanta, because a different ruler named Maharaja Purna Chandra Bhanja Deo financed artists with only a grant of 250 Indian Rupees per year, for the purposes of maintaining the Chhau dance. Artists could only practice for one or two months rather than the usual regular practices throughout the year, resulting in the practice’s hiatus. When the younger brother Pratapa Chandra Bhanja Deo came into power of Mayurbhanj, he increased the yearly grant to 5,000 Indian Rupees and “a new era of Chhau dance was started” because the formation of committees allowed training for artists as well as performances during Chaitra Parva. Mohanta’s analysis illuminates how Chhau dance fell into moments of decline, yet financial and structural support of Indian rulers continued to revamp the form over time. A general report of Chhau’s historical emergence provides an account for how the militaristic origins of the form have evolved over distinct periods of rupture.

When training in Chhau martial arts, ADT artists develop experience in a form based on stages and sequences of body movements. ADT’s training in Chhau became systematized in 2015 as a result of Chatterjea’s fellowship to receive training from Guru Sadashiv Pradhan as

¹⁵⁴ Basanta Kumar Mohanta, “Chhau Dance of Orissa and its Revival: Understanding the intangible cultural heritage of a threatened folk-art-form of Mayurbhanj,” *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 2016): 125.

well as ADT's training with the disciple of Guru Janmejoy Sai Babu's named Rakesh Sai Babu. Discussing the terms of her learning from Guru Pradhan, she describes how his teaching in a university leads him to construct Chhau through the structure of a course syllabus. Chatterjea provides an account of the systematic organization that she learned as follows: "He created the system of these *ufli*. The first set is about women daily chores, like he calls them. Some things are daily and some things are not. Then there are men *bata chira*, they slice a bamboo thing in half. Then there are the animals, the deer drinking waters."¹⁵⁵ Chatterjea's comments can be explained also through Basanta Kumar Mohanta's definition of *uflis* as "the movement of body along with limbs" and a "type of inspiration in dances from daily activities of rural people" that "is very rarely found in other folk forms."¹⁵⁶ This stage follows the initial phase of learning the "Chhawk" pose in which "a trainee slantingly places both of his feet on the surface and then gradually presses his body in downward direction[,]'" according to Mohanta's framing. Chatterjea imparted the knowledge she had acquired from her studies with Guru Pradhan onto artists of ADT in the regular rehearsals, adding it to the already extensive training in Odissi dance. When Rakesh Sai Babu provided two weeks of intensive instruction to ADT in Minneapolis in summer and fall of 2015, artists received their own firsthand training in Chhau from a global exponent of the form.

While Chatterjea taught ADT artists the different steps in the structure that Pradhan had taught her, she also found ways to shape these movements into her own training guidelines. For the three different kinds of *topka* or "movement" known as *Dheau*, *Muda*, and *Duba*, Chatterjea fused them together so that artists accomplish one set of each and then transition smoothly into

¹⁵⁵ Ananya Chatterjea, interview by author, October 6, 2015.

¹⁵⁶ Basanta Kumar Mohanta, "Chhau Dance of Orissa and its Revival," 130.

the next movement. *Dheau Topka* or “wavy movement” increases dancers’ capacity to lengthen the leg forward while balancing on the back leg and stretching the torso over the leg. It also encourages dancers to sit the pelvis low to the floor and to create a wavy movement in the torso as the body continues to sit low with bent knees. *Muda Topka* or “twisting movement” encourages dancers to develop shoulder movement capacity as the body twists forward while standing in a lounge pose. It also develops balancing as the back leg lifts simultaneously with the subsequent movement of the shoulders to begin the set. *Duba Topka* or “diving movement” encourages dancers to maintain balance on one leg while stretching the upper torso and head backward. It also requires of artists to create a bended, standing leg while completely rounding the spine and contracting the belly inward.

Yoga becomes another form of dance training with a history that exists outside the Odissi classical framework. Vinyasa is a form of yoga that links poses to breathing technique. Yoga was first systematized as a practice in 200 BC in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali that provide explanations for the entire philosophy of yoga in short statements. Although the yoga sutras are the foundation of yogic philosophy, I frame this section through B.K.S. Iyengar’s *Light on Yoga* because of the attention paid to *asanas* in this text and to this section’s focus on physical training. Iyengar provides detailed history, explanation of breath, and directions and images of the inversions, twists, standing postures, hip openers, warrior stances, arm extensions and binds, and arm balances that make up the different types of poses executed by practitioners. He defines the term “yoga” based on the Sanskrit term *yuj*, meaning to bind, join, attach, and concentrate one’s attention on, to use and to establish union and communion.¹⁵⁷ This definition resonates with ADT’s aim to join alliances with the resistance movements of communities of color. The

¹⁵⁷ B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 20.

specific form of yoga enacted in ADT, *vinyasa*, places emphasis on deepening yoga practitioners' base in poses by moving through different asanas with pranayama breathing. While the work with asanas fits within the third of eight stages of yoga, *pranayama* or what Iyengar calls the rhythmic control of the breath, falls into the fourth stage. Pranayama engages a deep, slow inhalation through the nose, followed by a full exhalation through the nose with a slight constriction in the back of the throat to warm up the body from the inside. Pranayama becomes simultaneous with poses to create vinyasa flow when practitioners take an inhale breath through the nose to position their bodies in a pose and then take an exhale breath to deepen their extension in that pose or to move into a different stance. Vinyasa breathing practice enlivens the energy all along your body rather than severing off any of the joints, as Chatterjea describes about ADT's technique.¹⁵⁸

Beginning with a vinyasa flow through a series of poses helps to warm-up dancers' bodies and prepare them for all the training in both Odissi and Chhau. Although the sequence of the flow changes, Chatterjea consistently engages artists in developing intelligence about the hips in relationship to the extension of the legs. Dancers also lengthen the spine and create proper placing of tailbone. For instance, the company's parallel balance series increases dancers' capacity to open the hips in a lounge pose and flexibility in the spine. Another sequence that highlights the yoga pose Birds of Paradise encourages dancers to lengthen the spine from the crown of the head to the tailbone and to maintain an open pelvic region. It also requires open shoulders to create the bounded arms and strength in the legs to hold the difficult balancing posture. Other series insist on a skillset in keeping an awareness of the pelvic sitting bones so that it is parallel to the floor in the leg extensions of Hand-to-Foot Pose or Warrior III Pose.

¹⁵⁸ "Yorchha (Technique)," Vimeo (from Ananya Dance Theatre), accessed January 6, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/106247485>.

Here, dancers increase flexibility in the legs to hold the right big toe with the right hand and balance on the left standing leg. For Hand-to-Foot Pose, artists maintain open hips to make the right shin perpendicular to the body on the floor and the front of the left leg lie flat on the floor. Long balance sequence requires that dancers balance for longer periods of time on one leg as well as further open the hips on the floor by grabbing onto the back left leg with the inside of the left elbow. Artists move from stretching the right leg forward and lengthening the right leg to the side to bending the right leg behind them to grab onto the inside of the right foot all the while maintaining a lifted, upright torso. Yoga provides training in precision of bone placement, quality in transitions between postures, and overall awareness of breath and body movement. To the company's philosophy of *Yorchha*, yoga adds a focus on being rooted to the ground based on body alignment.

People Powered Dances of Transformation

Through elements such as *Yorchha*, *Shawngram*, and *Aanch*, ADT establishes "People Powered Dances of Transformation," its philosophy that recognizes progressive transnational feminist of color politics. In terms of "People," ADT is a "professional dance company of women artists of color who believe that creating with intention can make a difference."¹⁵⁹ The company defines "Power" based on the "interaction of *Yorchha*, our unique movement language, with *Shawngram*, our philosophy of resistance, generates power." It defines Dance according to "choreographic responses to global issues." Last, "Transformation" is "Rooted in social justice, our artistic work hinges on an urgent invitation to *Daak*, a transformative call to action."

This larger philosophy of People Powered Dances of Transformation is deeply embedded into the choreography of ADT's earliest dances such as *Bandh: Meditation on Dream*, a

¹⁵⁹ "The Foundations of Our Practice," accessed November 7, 2016, <http://www.ananyadancetheatre.org/philosophy/>.

production about “women’s dreaming, including their resistance, their reaching for beauty, their claiming of space on their own terms” and how this journey “has generated healing and life sustaining forces throughout time.”¹⁶⁰ In Ananya Chatterjea’s solo for this production, she forms her hands in the mudra of *hamsasya* and then crosses the right leg behind the left. She moves her body into a lounge posture and reaches arms out to the right. Her feet move into the classical Odissi posture of *tribhangi* with the left hip extended outward. By stepping onto the left foot repeatedly, her body glides over to the left and she lands with the right leg forward. She steps quickly right and then onto the left foot in order to stretch the left leg forward. Again tapping on the left foot, she moves her body backward and lands on a lifted left heel with her arms out and her body leaning backward. She reaches her arms forward while in a lounge. She balances on the right leg with the left leg lifted. Her body leans over to the left. Forming double *chauk* with the left foot lifted off the earth, her arms float to the right and then the arms circle forward. She steps into the *chauk* stance and then shifts into *tribhangi* with the right foot forward and the left hip out. She steps back slowly in parallel feet with her right arm lifted and left hand at her waist. She lifts the left hand from the knee and up. She then comes forward and sits in *tribhangi* with the left foot forward and right hip extended. Lounging forward with the back foot planted and left knee turned out, her arms reach out with hands, first, forming *alapadma* and second, forming *hamsasya*. She leans her body to the right while keeping the hips lowered deeply toward the floor. She lifts onto the right leg and then steps right and left in double *chauk*. Crossing the right leg behind, she steps out twice on the right foot, then crosses the left leg behind the right and opens the arms to the left. When stepping to the right, her arms float toward this same direction. She stands with the chest open and gazes up. Shifting the arms left, her hands express

¹⁶⁰ “Bandh: Meditation on Dream,” accessed November 7, 2016, <http://www.ananyadancetheatre.org/dance/bandh-meditation-on-dream/>.

the gesture of *mayura*. Her right foot steps onto the floor so that she can cross her left foot behind. Turning the hip to the right, she flips her arms overhead. She balances on the right leg with the right hip out, revealing the extensive curve of her posture. She steps into double *chauk* and shifts into a lounge with the right leg back. She stands on the left leg, revealing the inside of the right heel and entire leg. Arms swivel above the head and she turns by following each pivot on the step of the right foot with the ball of the left foot. She opens out in a side lounge, walks backward, taps thigh, and turns toward the back wall by creating the shape of a figure eight with each turn. She then grabs onto the rope hanging from the large square structure onstage.¹⁶¹

While Chatterjea falls to the floor and lets go of the rope, dancer Pramila Vasudevan crawls on, grabs her stick and gazes up. She releases the stick over Chatterjea's body, rubs hands on her torso and leg, and then opens *alapadma* hands around to the right while circling her torso. Chatterjea lifts up, caresses the stick in front of her, picks it up while Vasudevan grabs another stick. Yorchha and Shawngam interact in this moment, following the shift from Chatterjea's immersion in Odissi technique to the exchange between two women, preparing carefully to pick up an object that can be utilized toward resistance. The movement of bodies with sticks quickly generates power as the ensemble begins to crawl onstage and the sounds of sticks pounding the earth reverberate. Another artist, Chitra Vairavan, reaches her arm forward on the floor. Chatterjea grabs hold of the center of stick with the right hand. She brings the left arm overhead, holding onto the top of the stick. The feet of women are flexed while they move on the ground with an extended spine, one leg lengthened behind them, and the other perpendicular to this leg. Srija Chatterjea-Sen walks on and Vasudevan stares at her from the back. Sticks pound repeatedly into the earth as Chatterjea-Sen crosses from front of stage to center. Three artists

¹⁶¹ "Bandh: A Meditation on Dream," Vimeo (from Ananya Dance Theatre), accessed January 19, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/23804396/cc0200cde>.

stand in the back with arms overhead and underneath ropes hanging from the back wall. As each artist moves individually within the larger ensemble, it reveals the company's intent to make dance through the complexities of women of color artists. Chatterjea falls onto a straight leg with her stick and Vasudevan and Vairavan join her in flexing the foot and grabbing the stick. Vairavan forms her own pose with the stick by sitting in yoga's Garland pose with feet together, knees open, and hips lowered down on top of the heels. Lowered to floor in a lounge pose, Kayva Vang's knee sits on the floor while the other knee remains lifted. Vasudevan turns behind her stick and then crouches down to floor. Vang holds the stick while sitting in tribhangi with her right hip accented outward. Kenna Cottman sits in double chauk and then crosses her left foot behind. As the ensemble moves together, they express an urgent call for unity across diverse histories of bodies, albeit while maintaining all of these differences. The ensemble lifts their sticks to shoulders, sits in double chauk, and brings the right foot behind. They slowly lift a flexed right foot up and place it down, heel first. They slide the feet open to double chauk and then cross the right foot behind. They sit in tribhangi with the right hip outward and left foot forward. They lift the right knee and bring the right foot behind and swivel it to front. With the stick overhead, they balance on the right leg with the left leg crossed behind and lifted. They stretch the left leg forward and land with crossed legs. Their capacity to bring multiple bodies together under Odissi and yoga technique illuminates the potential for solidarity through training. Audiences get invited into this transformative work based on their own capacity to delve into dynamics of social justice through histories of women of color.

The process of being transformed by choreographies based in global issues linked to women of color is not always immediate, for given my own experience of *Bandh*, accepting a call to action can take much concentration. At the time in which I viewed the dance, however, I

had difficulty engaging with ADT's work. *Bandh* was staged at the Southern Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2005 and I attended the show as an undergraduate student at Macalester College with my colleagues of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF). At this point, I had completed my first reading of Ananya Chatterjea's *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies through Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha*. As part of my summer MMUF research, I had read her book that examines how the dance aesthetic of two women choreographers of color redirects the terms of the "post-modern" from the mere presumption that only dance-makers invested in experimentation with Western modern forms establish the cutting-edge. I discovered Chatterjea's emphasis on how the dances of radically-inclined artists such as Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha redefine the postmodern through progressive evaluations of the techniques and cultural histories of communities of color. Through a method of analyzing the dances of a choreographer of African descent and of South Asian descent, specifically artist Zollar who focuses on African American cultural forms and histories and Chandralekha who explores contemporary Indian aesthetics and social issues, Chatterjea prefaced *Butting Out* by discussing her struggle to stage Indian aesthetics amidst failed norms of "East" and "West" in dance production. Though I had read her scholarship and was thereby exposed to her interest in changing the ways that the postmodern was comprehended in the dance domain, viewing Chatterjea's own choreographies caused me to be attentive to the specificities of my inquiry into dance and the gaps therein. I had not primarily viewed works by women artists of color, but had predominantly observed performances by African American men choreographers such as Bill T. Jones and Ralph Lemon. I was deeply immersed in Brenda Dixon-Gottschild's discussion in *The Black Dancing Body* about how artists

of African descent embrace soul power to address the human condition.¹⁶² I had examined contemporary, experimental African American dance and how choreographers explore histories of racial subjugation and sexuality, but I had not yet critically exposed myself to the role of a feminist practice in dance and had limited experience viewing contemporary Indian dance.

The writings of Dixon-Gottschild had prepared me to examine the racial and cultural dynamics associated with dancing bodies and Chatterjea's scholarship had given me insight into the radical potential of the works of women choreographers of color; however, neither of these texts could prepare me for the experience of my first live performance of ADT's *Bandh*. I was shocked and unnerved by the powerful gaze of such diverse women of color artists on stage slowly hovering off the ground in a low plank, moving toward me with such sharp attentiveness and direction. The staging of an ensemble of women whose sounding, rhythmic footwork sent vibrations across the floor was unlike any rhythmic forms that I had ever witnessed. Without a critical self-reflexivity that made claim to a radical feminist politic across racial difference, I left feeling uncomfortable, confused about the contexts of these women whose dreams of themselves and one another had produced the dance. Looking back at this critical time in my growth as an intellectual, activist, artist, and feminist, it gives me pause to think about the lack of clarity I had about whether I desired to witness another ADT performance again. Although, reflecting on this moment reminds me of how I endured my own journey of discovering a woman of color identity. Accepting a call to action from women of color in *Bandh* called for me to envision the activism of women of African descent as a feminist project deeply connected to shared colonial histories.

Prior to witnessing my next ADT performance, I embarked on a journey through transnational gender politics. When I studied abroad in Cape Town, South Africa in 2006, I

¹⁶² Alessandra Williams, Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship research paper (ed. Professor Beth Cleary, 2005).

completed graduate courses in the University of Cape Town's Gender and Women's Studies Department. I completed an ethnographic project on women and post-apartheid land reform. Upon award of summer Mellon funding, I continued my research on land redistribution throughout the summer, totaling my South African stay to 8 months. My interview with two women at the Women on Farms Project broadened my understanding of feminism and the ethnographic study of women of African descent. One of the leaders was rightfully hesitant to speak with me during the beginning of the session, but afterwards, she provided some context for her demeanor and established that she carries herself with a sense of caution around Americans. My Women on Farms Project interview taught me an important lesson about the position of the African American researcher: assuming camaraderie is an inadequate practice of diaspora. The term "diaspora" is used to discuss the conditions of persons dispersed across the globe, residing outside a place of origin, as a result of voluntary or involuntary migration, whether the earliest migrators have traveled in recent times or several generations prior. Scholars have long debated over the problem in diaspora studies with utilizing the term to broadly refer to any and all groups dispersed across the globe.¹⁶³ My discussion of this moment launches a broader aim to deploy the term "diaspora" with specificity, against rigid structures of nation and nationalism, and according to how subjectivities are practiced.¹⁶⁴ With the Women on Farms Project, I was learning to embody the politics of resisting absolute, essential constructions of race, as Brent Hayes Edwards suggests in *The Practice of Diaspora*, and to negotiate the "political linkage only

¹⁶³ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*, trans. William Rodamor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁶⁴ *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 9.

through and across difference” by grappling over cultural international difference in ways that find reciprocity in the work of anti-imperialism.¹⁶⁵ In transnational feminist terms, my exchanges there underscored the significance of Chandra Mohanty’s call to resist universal depictions of the Third World woman in ahistorical fashion, maintaining the superiority of the West.¹⁶⁶ This interview led me to examine the following question in my senior honors thesis: What are the implications of feminist praxis as it concerns the black diaspora and modernity? To begin exploring this concern, I expanded my ethnographic approach to include autoethnography in analyzing my own history as it concerns labor and land in settler colonial states. To understand sharecropping, the debt peonage system of the American South, I conducted an oral history project with my grandmother, a former black sharecropper in Northeast Louisiana. With these studies of diaspora and transnational feminist politics on land, I began to complete my senior honors project, “A Piece of Land: Black Women and Land Ownership in South Africa and the United States of America.”

I viewed the second performance of ADT at this disjuncture of having explored the conditions of race, gender, and sexuality associated with black women in performance and having investigated the anti-colonial politics of women of African descent. Now embodying my earliest inquiries into transnational feminist theory and dance, my reactions to *Duurbaar: Journeys into Horizon* in 2006 were quite different than my previous experience of witnessing *Bandh*. I was captivated by how these women found ways to be empowered and healed by water, even as dancers revealed the difficulties in acquiring such a precious, depleting resource. I was in

¹⁶⁵ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 13.

¹⁶⁶ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 41.

awe of Chatterjea as she twirled under the water falling down from above her and as women walked on the flooded ground, and very carefully poured the substance onstage. The tears flowing from my eyes after witnessing *Duurbaar* revealed to me a desire to be closely connected to an artistic process that could weave together so beautifully the stories of women of color. In fall of 2006, I began dancing with ADT as an apprentice, developing firsthand experience in the company's performance work. As I reflect back on viewing these dances, I do so from the position of the experiences described by Chatterjea, Kundan, Wilcox, and Vairavan: as an artist seeking to comprehend the politics of diaspora, a woman of African descent intending to express my ideas without being inhibited by persons' notions of blackness and womanhood, an emerging woman of color scholar searching for space to produce knowledge that fosters rather than erases the radical politics associated with my experience, and a transnational feminist of color who actively seeks out alliances with different women of color struggles.

Intersecting Contemporary Indian Dance and Black Feminism

With changes in company structure, ADT began to highlight black cultural practices alongside its experimentation with Indian dance forms in ways that emphasized black feminist thought. As Ananya Chatterjea discusses the cultural shifts that had taken place in the company, a dialogue surfaces on the possibilities for anti-colonial training, dance movement, and research among non-women of color bodies in the company. According to Chatterjea, the company changed over time in terms of difference because “we cannot afford to remain a community-based dance organization” when the dancers in the company such as Lela Pierce and Chitra Vairavan “deserve a professional stature.”¹⁶⁷ Following the year 2009, ADT began incorporating two women artists of European descent Sarah Beck-Esmay and Renée Copeland as well as one gay man of African descent into the company named Orlando Hunter. Chatterjea opens the

¹⁶⁷ Ananya Chatterjea, interview by author, November 3, 2012.

potential for artists who do not primarily identify as women of color to participate in building alliances to resist the ongoing effects of colonialism. She simultaneously describes this change as integral to a larger vision of supporting women of color artists such as Pierce and Vairavan in a domain of professional dance struggling to recognize artists of color for their social justice work. Even as the training expands to include artists positioned in different locations as it concerns women of color politics, Chatterjea continues to highlight the dancing of artists of color.

The politics and aesthetics of a woman artist of African descent and her racial and gender politics became crucial to aiding the company in its new changes. Chatterjea emphasizes the role of her collaborator Laurie Carlos in helping ADT navigate through the expanded ways that it would now explore women of color politics. Laurie Carlos is a theater director and artist who helped ADT co-conceive three of its productions from 2010–12. To ADT’s interests in gender, she brings over three decades of experience working in theater, cultivating the jazz aesthetic and exploring issues of women’s empowerment and survival from violence. Analyzing Carlos’s jazz framework, theater scholar Omi Osun Joni L. Jones defines jazz narratives as textually based on a sense of nonlinearity, an attention to self, and new ways of developing narration in order to challenge the dynamics of oppression on black communities.¹⁶⁸ Second, Jones defines jazz narratives as containing a physical, gestural form that engages in a broader experience.

Chatterjea specifies that her recognition for Carlos’s primary focus on an artist’s dedication to the work and disregard for issues of race creates a difference in politics because “Laurie refuses to have the race conversation” and prioritizes “whoever is ready, right for the work.” Although Chatterjea points out this difference, Carlos’s artistic work does bring forth some critical, racial experiences. I grew up reading my mother’s copy of the play *For Colored Girls Who Have*

¹⁶⁸ Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, *Theatrical Jazz: Performance, Àṣẹ, and the Power of the Present Moment* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 36–8.

Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf, a play by Ntozake Shange that explores the search for a claim to empowerment amongst seven women of African descent known as the Lady in Brown, Lady in Yellow, Lady in Red, Lady in Green, Lady in Purple, Lady in Blue, and Lady in Orange. Laurie Carlos was the original composer of the “Lady in Blue” persona when it was staged in Broadway in 1976. As I scan through the pages of this work, I notice all of my notes in the margins, many of them next to the poetic narratives of Carlos’s “Lady in Blue” who grows tired of us dealing “wit emotion too much so why dont we go ahead and be white then/ and make everythin dry and abstract wit no rhythm and no reelin for sheer sensual pleasure/ yes lets go on & be white/ were right in the middle of it/no use holdin out/ holdin onto ourselves.”¹⁶⁹ Carlos uses irony to suggest that women who claim a subjectivity as black and as a woman may as well exist as white persons, while also indicating such a move would mean we have chosen to let go of the stories, experiences, and relationships that make us who we are. In racial terms, Joni L. Jones examines how Carlos’s narratives, texts, and manuscripts create performances of jazz. She focuses on how autobiography, nonlinearity, and a larger resistance to black oppression in theatrical jazz establish a gestural vocabulary and imaginative possibilities.¹⁷⁰ Carlos’s practices also underscore black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins’s formulation of black feminist thought according to four components: central themes, interpretative analysis, epistemological framework, and empowerment understandings.¹⁷¹ Carlos’s call on women of African descent to

¹⁶⁹ Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf: A Choreopoem* (New York: Bantam Books, 1977).

¹⁷⁰ Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, *Theatrical Jazz: Performance, Àṣẹ, and the Power of the Present Moment* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 36–8.

¹⁷¹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Second Edition. New York: Routledge, 2000), 17.

not merely live according to images of whiteness and rather hold onto their own pleasures, contributes to the fourth black feminist category of empowering ideals.

As Chatterjea seeks out a secular Indian aesthetic, the roots of breath and movement in the artistic forms of women of African descent offer a different possibility in secularizing Indian performance. Training in a yogic tradition of breath and movement becomes increasingly innovative as the company engages in practices of the African diaspora through the techniques of Laurie Carlos. As a result of a priority given to jazz in physicality, even Carlos's instructions on breath had emerged from a basis in aesthetics of women artists of African descent. According to Joni L. Jones, Carlos first began to study breathing to deal with health conditions such as asthma. Foundational to developing her breathing techniques was African American choreographer Dianne McIntyre's focus on a perceptible inhalation and exhalation from which Carlos had comprehended "how to take language into the body and release into breath and flight."¹⁷² Just as Carlos's work builds toward a broader aim, Dianne McIntyre's own techniques lead to a larger objective, according to dance historian Veta Goler who describes McIntyre's work as "an approach to life and creative endeavors that claim affirmation in the face of adversity and brings meaning, power and a sense of community to African Americans in a way that is accessible to, and expressive of, a more universal audience."¹⁷³ Collaboration between ADT and Carlos provides a means to fully integrate bodies of non-Indian descent into the work of breath and unifying the body in consciousness. Through the historical ways in which Carlos is positioned in relationship to ADT in terms of artistry placing emphasis on women of African descent, it

¹⁷² Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, *Theatrical Jazz: Performance, Àse, and the Power of the Present Moment* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 42.

¹⁷³ Veta Goler, "Moves on Top of Blues: Dianne McIntyre's Blues Aesthetic," in *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance*, ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 207.

provides an opportunity to discuss the alliances between women of South Asian descent and women of African descent in the company. In other words, women artists of African descent participate in the Indian techniques of ADT based on the ways that they connect a history of African diasporic performance.

Though grounded in Africanist histories, the techniques deployed by African American artists such as Carlos are translated for the benefit of all artists. Carlos provides techniques to get dancers inside of the emotional contexts by leading artists through exercises designed to build individual and collective relationships to the choreography. In the example of one rehearsal, dancers forged a circle in the center of the studio space with forearms lifted to their navel and palms facing out. The studio fell silent as dancers gazed out at one another and reached out their hands. From the breath engaged and eye contact circulated, Carlos's exercise suggested that energy could be accessed in the space if dancers used their emotional life to do the work.¹⁷⁴ The act of breathing encouraged dancers to accomplish work that Joni L. Jones uncovers about Carlos's practice: to weave their own mythology and to help others to weave theirs. Through targeted exercises with ADT, Carlos suggested a creative journey to bring forth self-awareness through embedding an artist's lived experience into the dance. During this activity, I sat on the floor, far distant from the circle and observed from the outside, because it was only my third week at rehearsal and I did not want my unfamiliarity in the space to interfere with artists' capacity to dig deeply into Carlos's directions. However, I too could only follow her guidelines to "use your front eye and the eye behind your head" by figuring out how to take risks so that I

¹⁷⁴ "Lived Experience: The Choreographies of Ananya Chatterjea and David Roussève" (master's thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2013), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1415457825>, 72.

would not feel intrusive as dancers were deeply engaged in movement, their legs turning from stillness to a fluid isolation, from slow shifts in the torso to a steady decline toward stillness.¹⁷⁵

Carlos's history in jazz performance enables her to act as an external observer to ADT's work, offering insight to Chatterjea about the broader arc of the choreography as well as specific details on overall structure and aesthetic. Carlos provides essential perspectives as Chatterjea moves between the roles of choreographer and dancer. In an example of another rehearsal, she calls on dancers to circulate breath below the hips so that the whole body stays present and encourages artists to develop a full-bodied performance so that when dancing behind other bodies, they continue to propel energy forward to the audience.¹⁷⁶ In terms of thematic focus, Carlos takes leadership in the company's "Emotional Mapping" process in which artists outline the ideas of each section, the kind of energy to embody in those moments, and the relationship between these elements and the larger choreographic framework. As part of mapping sessions, Carlos has recommended that artists consider the following: "Your emotional life is not to be disregarded in your work. Bring it in with you and use it. You can't do work if you're trying to negate yourself. You have to bring your whole self—that's the stuff you use to do the work. All of that is what you require as an artist. The work is your life."¹⁷⁷ Moreover, her skillset in supporting the broader outlook of the performance leads to production-related responsibilities because she works with the company's lighting designer to help illuminate the movement of bodies onstage in ways that emphasize emotional layering in the dance. Carlos also records vocal

¹⁷⁵ Laurie Carlos, Ananya Dance Theatre Rehearsal (facilitator, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN, July 8, 2012).

¹⁷⁶ Laurie Carlos, Ananya Dance Theatre Rehearsal (facilitator, July 8, 2012, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN).

¹⁷⁷ Laurie Carlos, Ananya Dance Theatre Rehearsal (facilitator, July 8, 2012, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN).

compositions with ADT's sound designer Greg Schutte, produces live performances of her poetry alongside Chatterjea's choreography, and incorporates her theatrical process of connecting with the audience.

Carlos's direction in the jazz aesthetic fits within theories of diaspora that emphasize the creative practices of persons of African descent and de-center certain national ideologies. Through moving away from racial essentialism in understandings of cultural production, African diaspora studies scholars such as Paul Gilroy can help to illuminate the broader context of Carlos's vocal work. Gilroy's term "black Atlantic" offers a vital concept from which to comprehend the significance of the jazz aesthetic in ADT. The black Atlantic focuses on a transnational site of cultural interaction in which black individuals have established a diasporic configuration that transcends territories of continental regions. Based on this definition, Carlos's jazz aesthetic expands on the artistic processes of black Atlantic by not only disrupting rigid racial ideologies, but also intersecting cultural forms of the African diaspora with practices of the Asian diaspora. Gilroy focuses on artistic expression and specifically how music goes beyond the limitations of ethnicity and national identification. He demonstrates how cultural expressions offer commentary on racial inequality and forms of domination embedded into daily existence.¹⁷⁸ Through Quartet thematic structure, jazz aesthetic assists the performance in placing gender at the center of race, nation, and everyday challenges in communities of color. Gilroy's analysis of diaspora as moving across national and ethnic rigidity contributes to uncovering the position of Carlos's jazz narratives and directive duties as continuing Chatterjea's larger diasporic practice of destabilizing a mere focus on territories of nation states. Shedding new light on the black

¹⁷⁸ Paul Gilroy, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity," In *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 74.

Atlantic, the jazz aesthetic establishes a dialogue on everyday lives of persons of African descent in relationship to persons of Asian descent.

When I sat down to talk with Carlos, I began to comprehend why she does not share Chatterjea's concern for white supremacist ideologies and norms that place the bodies of persons of color on an unequal platform with white bodies. Carlos posited that she dealt with such ideologies as a "myth" that "has no real power unless you internalize it."¹⁷⁹ I began to further grasp Carlos's comments when I positioned her ideas within the context of decolonial thought. I discovered that some relation between her and Chatterjea's distinct perspectives develop when considering Frantz Fanon's postulate that the oppressed struggle against subordination by being aware of how to put an end to the fallacies implanted in our personality by colonialism.¹⁸⁰ Carlos's admittance that white supremacy "exists in terms of institutional" problems, but refusal to "believe in it" or allow herself to "live racially," supports Fanon's aims for the colonized to resist internalizing certain ideas that render our bodies subordinate. Using Fanon to explicate the differences between them brings forth the nuances involved in how artists of color position themselves against white supremacist ideologies, because it is Chatterjea's vision for a woman of color dance company that responds to Fanon's concluding thoughts about colonized peoples creating a new history that does not draw upon European institutions but rather makes new discoveries of humanity. As Chatterjea focuses on expressing the conditions of the body through Indian dance forms in a contemporary era in which multinational companies' extraction of natural resources for maximum profit suppresses the voices of communities of color, she places new emphasis on global struggles for survival.

¹⁷⁹ Laurie Carlos, interview by author, November 20, 2012.

¹⁸⁰ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 250.

Although Chatterjea and Carlos differ in terms of racial politics, their thematic approaches to performance converge under a framework of systemic violence against women. Just as Chatterjea explains how she has long pondered over the experiences of sexual assault in women's lives, so had Carlos through her plays and performances. Thoroughly examining the focus of Carlos's works, Joni L. Jones discusses Carlos's play *White Chocolate for My Father* that includes a "female ancestor" explaining "how she negotiates repeated rapes by placing a bag over her head." According to Jones, the use of minstrels dressed up in blackface makeup as part of *White Chocolate for My Father* are entirely embedded into how the play encourages "contemporary contemplation on racism." Linking up issues of gender, race, and the potential to be liberated from violence, Carlos's work indicates that freedom may exist as an "illusion" for "black women regardless of their class status."¹⁸¹ Based on Jones's analysis, Carlos examines women and girls' experiences of sexual violence in ways that make tangible associations to racial challenges. Additionally, Jones traces the resonances of creativity of the African diaspora in Carlos's theatrical structure by calling attention to the conclusions of her verbal texts as going "beyond what the words alone can bring" and thereby producing "an African American legacy of fractured storytelling." She contributes to an Africanist performance tradition by focusing on the stories of women's lives in ways that are fundamentally rooted in experiences of race. Though Carlos positions her disbelief in white supremacy at the foreground, her works stray far from a "colorblind" notion in which she would refuse to comprehend racial differences between persons. Both artists unveil oppressive conditions by exploring gender-based violence through attention to complex bodily experiences. Though maintaining a distinct position as an artist of color seeking to examine contemporary structures of oppression, Chatterjea acknowledges the

¹⁸¹ Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, *Theatrical Jazz: Performance, Ase, and the Power of the Present Moment* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 40–7.

role played by Carlos when ADT began incorporating women artists of European descent and a gay, male artist of African descent into the company. During post-*Moreechika* discussions, Chatterjea informs audiences that Carlos “has given me the courage to move forward in this journey” because few dancers can do the extensive ADT research that requires deep spiritual, emotional, and mental labor.

Renée Copeland began dancing in ADT in 2009, her body exemplifying the kind of research conducted by dancers in the company who do not primarily claim a women of color subjectivity but thoroughly examine the politics rooted in such experiences. Copeland relates her dancing to her upbringing on indigenous Dakota territory on a cooperative outside of Winona, Minnesota.¹⁸² She describes how the mission statement of the cooperative on which she was raised was “pulled from Native American philosophies of full consensus” and “a lot of philosophies, however many levels of appropriation, I lived it without making any choices” because “it was just my life.” By college years, Copeland became a dance major and an American Indian studies minor at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities and enhanced her lived experience in teachings deeply influenced by indigenous practices. She comprehended “the intersectionalities of the body” and that we are indeed living in “a fairy tale” if we think that “we’re in a post-racial society” and “that white supremacy has disappeared and vanquished.” When Chatterjea choreographs Copeland as the first dancer to walk with deliberate intention across the stage prior to the ensemble entering into a piece about native people’s struggles for land, she makes a choice to recognize Copeland’s reflections, both her immersion in indigenous philosophies and activism and the position of non-native persons’ solidarity. The radical divergence between the consumption of native spirituality, as assessed by Native studies scholars

¹⁸² Renée Copeland, interview by author, September 25, 2013.

such as Lisa Aldred, and the position of Copeland is her ongoing research on indigenous people's resistance to the harmful effects of globalization.¹⁸³

Orlando Hunter began dancing with ADT in 2012, reflecting on his experience and the stories of others as it concerns femininity and masculinity. According to Hunter, ADT's choreography allowed him to explore "the performance of femininity and how it resides in our body." The "basics of my research," said Hunter, concerned a position in the body of a "self-identified male" who is "rejecting what people automatically place on my body when they see me."¹⁸⁴ Such embodied inquiries critique race and sexuality through queer of color critique or "identifications with and antagonisms to the normative ideals promoted by state and capital."¹⁸⁵ By "dismantling conventions that are placed on my body and that I even place on myself as a gay man," he reflects on "how femininity is perceived as a negative" in the body of "a gay man."

Artists of European descent and gay men of color in the company become part of a larger focus on intersectionality. Chatterjea suggests that women of color work together around stories of women and systemic violence based on her thoughts that the physicality of our existence as women of color cannot be divided as solely based on race or gender. According to Chatterjea, she takes an interest in:

The deconstruction of the principles from Odissi, Chhau, and yoga—intersected; the intersection of the principles from these principles; and the deconstruction of movement

¹⁸³ In "Plastic Shamanism and Astroturf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality" (*American Indian Quarterly* 24 no. 3 (Summer 2000): 329–352), Lisa Aldred examines how Native Americans have responded to the commercial exploitation or "acts of commercialization" of Native American spirituality. She demands that an individualistic attitude of non-native persons does not reference the significance of social and political accountability.

¹⁸⁴ Orlando Hunter, interview by author, September 20, 2012.

¹⁸⁵ Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 3.

from these forms. For us, it's all about intersectionality. How do we intersect? If there is any principle that works, it's that. In your body, things don't stay separate.¹⁸⁶

Chatterjea's comments are deeply rooted in two areas: practices of South Asian diaspora across borders and in relationship to theories rooted in experiences of women of the African diaspora. Agnew's discussion of flexibility in the construction of diasporic identities also offers a place from which to discuss this first point. She posits that identities are "deterritorialized or constructed across borders and boundaries of phenomena such as race, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship."¹⁸⁷ Her latter focus on the relationships across different subjectivities has been theorized in the field of critical race studies to discuss women of color and sexual violence. Scholar of critical race theory Kimberlé Crenshaw assesses how problems associated with race and sex are linked or "intersect," yet such categories fail to be consistently interrelated in antiracist and feminist initiatives.¹⁸⁸ When Chatterjea references the intersections of the body as part of the knowledge that undergirds the work of ADT, she conceptualizes our dancing through the theoretical frameworks that pay attention to the survival of women of African descent in terms of gender and violence because Crenshaw focuses on how black women's experiences are silenced when our victimization gets subordinated in larger rhetoric around rape. Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of "intersectionality" challenges anti-patriarchal and anti-racist movements to explore the interrelated dynamics of race and gender so that accountability for black women's experiences of sexual harassment can be resolved.

¹⁸⁶ Ananya Chatterjea, interview by author, November 3, 2012.

¹⁸⁷ Vijay Agnew, ed., *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 15.

¹⁸⁸ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (Jul., 1991): 1242.

While embedded into Chatterjea's choreography are these concepts related to black women's lives, her process offers a different possibility for intersectionality because she links up different contemporary Indian dance forms. In order to discuss contemporary experiences of gender and violence through dance, Chatterjea, first, intersects multiple Indian forms and second, intersects the multiple social categories of race, gender, nation, and sexuality associated with the body. Her choreographies produce intersectional analysis of the gender-based violence rooted in experiences of women of African descent as well as construct artistic works that cut across aesthetic forms to underscore a South Asian diasporic practice of decentering national territories. Intersectionality helps to explicate how performance can substantiate the set of norms linked to systemic violence and the daily challenges women of color confront. As Chatterjea constructs choreography across issues of race and gender, she cannot be contained within Crenshaw's discussion of "representational intersectionality" in which normative displays of women of color fail to articulate our actual lives and add to experiences of disempowerment.¹⁸⁹ Whereas Crenshaw provides an intersectional interrogation of obscenity cases against popular cultural forms such as rap music in order to examine the issues of race and gender that emerge, Chatterjea's dance-making focuses on progressive, performative gestures. Overall, the vital focus on intersectionality in the company through experimentation with multiple Indian forms and relations across dancing bodies of color offer an important example of how black feminism gets highlighted in the choreographic work.

¹⁸⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1245.

Part Two: Dancing Politics in a Long-Term Series

Part Two discusses how choreographies concentrate on queer or feminist politics over an extended period of time and in numerous dances. In the first chapter, I examine how David Roussève works with the REALITY dance company to situate the contemporary stories of queer of color persons in relationship to women of color. REALITY's Dream Series staged works such as *Pop Dreams* and *The Whispers of Angels* from 1993–1995. By focusing on *The Whispers of Angels*, I clarify how Roussève's narrative and movement process brings attention to the immense human loss and mourning in gay black men's lives. Some analysis of Roussève's choreography produced for the film *Positive: Life with HIV* further reveals the role of nudity, gesture, and vocal work as well as dancing of REALITY women of color artists in radical portrayals of queer of life. Moreover, the live performances of both queer women artists and black women vocalists in *The Whispers of Angels* help to forge the intersection across gay men and women's livelihoods in the Dream Series. REALITY's next long-term set of productions was titled the Love Series and took place between 1996 and 1999. I examine how one of the Love Series's dances named *Love Songs* in 1999 redirects the course of the Dream Series by finding new ways to privilege movement such as contact improvisation over narrative, focus on European classical music, and incorporate local artists into the performance. When Roussève writes his *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* film script in 2013 he continues to reenvision queer experiences, albeit through Creole subjectivity as well as filmic space, time, and movement. I discuss Roussève's position within black American independent filmmaking to emphasize how his works fit within an overall push for spectators to observe films outside a white vantage point. I then discuss how the productions of REALITY take a more drastic shift with the making of the film *Bittersweet* in 2005 and the dance *Stardust* in 2013 because Roussève has transitioned into a teaching role at the University of California, Los Angeles where he makes choreographies and

films with artists in the university's dance program. I interrelate concepts of dance film, race, and gender and sexuality in order to analyze the role of both narrative and movement in the structure of *Bittersweet*. For *Stardust*, I connect dance and sexuality studies to understand coalitions between gay men and women through lens of queer of color critique and effeminate gesture and in resistance to settler ideologies about the challenges of modern sexuality.

In the second chapter, I examine how Ananya Chatterjea and Ananya Dance Theatre produce the Environmental Justice Series of the three dances *Pipaashaa: Extreme Thirst* in 2007, *Daak: Call to Action* in 2008, and *Ashesh Barsha: Unending Monsoon* in 2009. I frame the major politics of this dance series as based on Chatterjea's journeys between India and the U.S. and her reflections on shared conditions of climate and pollution in West Bengal and Minnesota. I discuss how she expands on her own ideas about environmental justice through collaborations with community organizers in Phillips neighborhood in Minneapolis and theatrical directors such as Dora Arreola. By examining how each of these dances employ the company's philosophy of technique, resistance, and ensemble energy and dance critics' reviews of the different performances, I intend to explore how the company's politics on collective experiences of environmental crises gets constructed in choreographic work and gets substantiated into larger discussions of contemporary Indian dance and diaspora when dance reviewers recognize the company's expression of technique. Finally, I assess the overall framework of the company's next dance series, the quartet of four dances that explore systemic violence against women from 2010–13 in the dances *K'Shoy!/Decay!* in 2010, *Tushaanal: Fires of Dry Grass* in 2011, *Moreechika: Season of Mirage* in 2012, and *Mohona: Estuaries of Desire* in 2013. I explore how the quartet contributes the following to debates on globalization: dance can reveal cross-cultural solidarity across communities of color in ways that comment on gender and violence.

I. From The Dream Series to Stardust

The Dream Series takes place between 1993 and 1995, staging works that expand on the earlier dances of REALITY's Creole Series of seven dance productions from 1989–1992. For instance, in 1994, the dance *Pop Dreams* is staged at La Mama in New York City with choreography and text by Roussève and performances by REALITY artists Sondra Loring, Renee Redding-Jones, David Roussève, Kyle Sheldon, Charmaine Warren, and Julie Tolentino. *Pop Dreams* continues the narrative practices of the dance from the Creole Series known as *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* because Roussève again speaks in a comedic tone before audiences at the microphone about experiences of gay black men. Differently than the earlier set of dances that broadly connects queer stories to black women's memories of labor, the Dream Series looks primarily at gay men's experiences of loss and mourning. Narrative and movement in *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* briefly discusses anger over the lack of accountability for AIDS deaths and ends with staging Roussève's grandmother's memory of rape. *Pop Dreams*, however, begins with Roussève's monologue about being featured in a film where black bodies die from a virus and ends with Roussève's staged death from AIDS and rebirth in heaven. In this section, I examine the dance that follows *Pop Dreams* in the Dream Series, *The Whispers of Angels*, in order to reveal how Roussève prioritizes gay men's stories while still placing emphasis on the experiences of women of color through dance and musical composition.

The Whispers of Angels (Whispers) develops a conversation on sexuality that focuses on gay black men's losses to AIDS because of the layered narrative, vocal work, and movement. To start, *Whispers*'s monologues direct attention toward the erotic in ways that shift misguided ideas about HIV/AIDS subjectivity. Roussève's first narrative transitions from childhood memories to speaking about fearing the death being projected in his own dreams. Standing at the microphone onstage, he recalls being constantly beat up as a child because he was "sorry," the "southern

black English” term he defines as used only for “a complete wimp.” Going further, he describes his post-graduation life after Princeton in which he sent letters to daytime television series for employment. He hoped for a favorable response from the networks as a result of his being a “nonthreatening black man.” Unfortunately, his monologue goes on to describe how his roles would be restricted to playing domestic workers. As the narrative continues, Roussève says to spectators that he took a role for the film *The Dreaming Death* in 1986 in which the director called on him to prepare for his “time to die.” He describes his memories of the movie script where black bodies were known as having contracted a lethal virus where person’s ultimate peril was caused from fear of their own dreams. Vocal composition then enhances the narrative when six dancers shout “Oh-Ah-Eh-Ah-Agh-I,” the vowel sounds that Roussève considers to be the “key” to his “fears.” Roussève does not state the term “AIDS” in his narrative, although these six, incomprehensible terms create a rhythmic composition that Roussève and REALITY artists chant out of their bodies and that will later accompany Roussève’s death from AIDS onstage.

Roussève’s type of narrative framing can contribute to audiences beginning to understand the human conditions surrounding the illness and to appreciate the experiences of persons living with HIV rather than its associated stigmas. AIDS is an illness that cannot be separated from the daily public domain or the kind of myths and perceptions linked to the disease that refute any type of logical comprehension, explains cultural studies scholar Douglas Crimp.¹⁹⁰ Art responds to AIDS in limiting ways, cautions Crimp, when it does not contest the medical administration and handling of AIDS. Crimp shows how what is missing from the media in the late 1980s is an understanding of how artists or cultural producers comprehend AIDS through their progressive actions. In Roussève’s narrative work exists the kind of response Crimp recommends. Prior to

¹⁹⁰ Douglas Crimp, “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism” (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 3.

Whispers's scene of death from AIDS, the narrative highlights multiple areas of gay men's lives through speaking about struggles for acceptance in adolescence and adulthood aspirations that might be deferred because of social stigmas. The dance demonstrates how artists or cultural producers comprehend AIDS through their progressive actions in order to define gay men's experiences outside those negative perceptions that Crimp argues are partly responsible for the high death toll in the 1980s.

The juxtaposition between narrative, movement, and music deepens the potential for artistic work to respond to gay men's experiences of structural oppression, in this case, survival from the AIDS crisis of the latter twentieth century. In another monologue, Roussève describes how his father loved the sound recording artist "Nina Simone." In response, bodies onstage begin to open fully on their chairs. Roussève suddenly screams out "Daddy's home!" and scrambling bursts among artists to prepare for the actor Lavelle Zeigler, who plays the father, to enter stage. Zeigler is dressed in the red and white suit of the famous Christmas figure "Santa Clause" and enters angrily through the audience shouting, "cut that goddamn noise!" Meanwhile, Roussève wears a large, flowing wig while two women partner together in their dancing. While the father changes out of his Santa Clause clothing, Roussève tells audiences that he remembers going to the department store to sit on his father's lap and to hear him say, "What do you want my child?" Christmas had in that moment met his greatest desires, though father beat him "like never before" that evening and he would never see his father again. As dance critic of the *Chicago Tribune* Sid Smith illuminates, this section of *Whispers* juxtaposes a "wild dance of cabaret divas" alongside "the realistic telling of Daddy as Santa."¹⁹¹ Smith describes how Rousseve's piece shifts from a story about soap operas to a journey into heaven—a remarkable and

¹⁹¹ Sid Smith, "'Whispers of Angels' Shouts its Uplifting Message," *Chicago Tribune*, September 29, 1995, http://www.davidrousseve.com/whispers_chicagotribune_092995.html.

inspirational path, in the middle of which, Roussève provides again a mixture of movement, theatre, music and humor about a gay African American man dying with AIDS, his journey to find his lost father, and the grief and joy of being and passing on as African American. This review acknowledges the dance's process of shaping the familial, adolescent, and adulthood layers of black gay men's lives. As Douglas Crimp suggests, to prevent stigma against people with AIDS, we must think and function outside of dichotomous frameworks such as visuals of healthy or visibly diseased persons, highly mobile versus passive images, average or exceptional images.¹⁹² Crimp argues in favor of a portrait of a person living with AIDS that reveals the negative stereotypes associated with these persons while also "reclaims" the images for the groups directly affected by AIDS in the U.S. Such images can resist being based on mere empathy or identification with the subject and rather focus on sexual desire, understanding of gay subjectivity, and struggle for sexual liberation. This moment with Roussève reminiscing on memories of his father and bodies of the same sex dancing with one another provides a portrait that resists falling subject to limiting images of persons living with AIDS as non-sexual bodies.

Movement and musical composition support the production's capacity to unravel imagery around gay men's survival. Under the accompaniment of Nina Simone's song "I Put a Spell on You," bodies clutch chairs, turn away from others, and women embrace each other. Simone's lyrics bolster Roussève's story of a son who desires most to be embraced lovingly by his father on Christmas, but only receives this intimacy when capturing the attention of his father as Santa Clause during his work shift in the department store. Though bodies shuffle hurriedly when the father enters, cursing, through the audience, their former play resumes as he removes the Santa Clause attire. Nina Simone's music links all aspects of the son's desire for a father's love, as

¹⁹² Douglas Crimp, "Portraits of People with AIDS," *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossman. (Routledge: New York, 1992), 126.

called for in the narrative, and for experimentation with gender and sexuality, as expressed in movement. Simone's music holds the potential for dialogue on sexuality based on how her music has been built with tactics that enable audiences to ponder over the meanings of the songs. According to musicologist Shana Redmond "It is not mournful but manages to set a tone that encourages reflexivity through its melodic stillness, which incorporates moments of silence every couple of measures—a strategic pause in which the participating audience can reflect."¹⁹³ The effort in allowing listeners to grapple with the musical context might enable audiences to think deeply about the relationship between father and son in a gay man's exploration of sexual desire. Redmond also suggests that Simone constructs a "queering of her gender performance" through "sonic transgression" that further troubled "the myriad racial and gender politics that she critiqued within her songs." The convergence of partnering between women onstage, Roussève's dressing across gender norms, and Simone's sound all contribute to the dance's exploration of gay men's experience.

The use of various artistic mediums in *Whispers* more broadly underscores an interest in examining sexuality within African American histories because a section of the dance places the father's death in the context of the Civil Rights Movement. Another of Roussève's monologues poses the question: "Where am I now?" He then counts from the year "1665" until he repeats the year "1964." Through this numbering, Roussève begins by remembering slavery's emergence in the U.S. in the seventeenth century and concludes with an era that actually legislated freedoms of employment equality in the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In this moment, Roussève both recalls his father's death and articulates an awareness of his position in time: "I know where I am...this is a playground of angels." *Whispers*, locates a personal search for one's sexuality within shared,

¹⁹³ Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 199.

grassroots actions of persons of African descent across time. As Redmond demands, anthems of the African diaspora were major tools of radical mobilization in black communities because of their capacity to be musically recomposed and central to how these songs were reconstructed involved the political environment in the U.S. South in which blacks articulated the context of their disenfranchisement.¹⁹⁴ She postulates that the performance of song established resistance and allowed for different actors to develop meaning out of a song's origins while simultaneously resisting the patriarchal, elitist ideals emerging in the presence of iconic civil rights figures. Roussève positions one gay black man's story of kinship relations and intimacy within the larger history of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement in order to weave sexual practice into accounts of black resistance.

While queer of color sexuality remains primary, Roussève's body evolves to be the site where multiple elements of femininity and masculinity converge in ways that highlight the erotic. Following the narrative that describes dreams as filled with the fear of death, the actress Yvette Glover who plays Roussève's grandmother says that she will guide him through "a love story" involving a man's dream. The path of this story ends tragically as Roussève eventually stands in front of four dancers lying naked on the stage floor. In the background, a different recording of Nina Simone's plays titled "The Twelfth of Never" while Roussève, also nude, crunches his chest to navel, breaths rhythmically, folds over, lifts arms up, and opens his mouth wide. In a shaky voice, he repeats "hold my hand—I'm dying" and lowers his torso downward. In this moment, Roussève is dying of AIDS. Roussève then rises from death to walk alongside vocalist B. J. Crosby who sings before a colorful collage of artifacts and family members, awaiting Roussève's presence. This conflation of events lead cultural studies scholar David Gere

¹⁹⁴ Redmond, *Anthem*, 144.

to theorize *Whispers* as “soaked in gay male eroticism and founded on the sensations of sex.”¹⁹⁵ According to Gere, a “gay man with AIDS is risen from the dead” and the metaphor of the “gospel diva is there to render this resurrection a kin to sex, in the form of musical ecstasy.”¹⁹⁶ Gere’s findings are based on this definition of the dances of gay male choreographers in the late 1980s and 1990s: (1) abjection or marginalization of gay men; (2) erotic or desire for male sexual organs; (3) mourning.¹⁹⁷ The nude body section offers an example of Gere’s use of the term “abjection” and “mourning” because Roussève’s body calls out to be held while dying from AIDS, a condition discussed previously as impacted by social stigmas. While Roussève’s work delves into the erotic, he goes beyond a focus on male sexual organs by intentionally highlighting sexual desire between women, such as the partnering of women that takes place during the father’s entrance in Santa Clause attire.

Roussève’s reenactment of the the dying moment for the film *Positive: Life with HIV* extends the analysis of how physical nudity, precise gestural movements, and vocal work express the circumstances of a body passing away from AIDS.¹⁹⁸ In *Positive: Life with HIV (Positive)*, activists, persons living with or caring for persons with HIV/AIDS, artists, and healthcare providers are included in the film’s discussion of everyday memories, experiences, and work to support persons living with HIV/AIDS and to provide redress for the misconceptions and lack of knowledge about the condition. The film’s feature of the Stand Up organization of Harlem, for

¹⁹⁵ David Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 230–4.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 230–4.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁹⁸ *Positive: Life with HIV*, directed by Calogero Salvo and Lucy Winer, edited by Ruth Schell and Mary Manhardt, AIDS Film, Inc. (San Francisco, CA: KQED Video, 1995).

instance, includes African American leaders and members creating a community that “gathers around the pain” by lightly laying on their hands, breathing in an awareness of healing and exhaling out the pain of illness as a means to offer support to one of the participants in the circle. Under the direction of Ayoka Chenzira and camerawork of Thomas Moon and with Roussève’s movement and vocal work, Roussève’s solo contributes to the film’s inquiry into different communities’ discussion of struggle and survival. Similar to many of the other artists and leaders featured in the documentary, Roussève chooses to work outside the format of merely speaking directly to the camera for the section of the film that focuses on his story through camerawork and the filmic context. Zooming toward Roussève’s face, the camera views his mouth and fingers when he speaks some incomprehensible terms while Nina Simone sings “I’ll love you ‘til the blue bells.” As the camera shifts from observing his neck to his face, the lens backs up to provide a full view of his body reaching, then hovering over, and stating the syllables “Oh-Ah-Eh-Ah-Agh-I.” Roussève’s refusal to vocalize a series of understandable phrases and to rather connect Nina Simone’s music with a set of vowel sounds exemplifies David Gere’s statement that the process of “silent speaking” exists in work made by gay men in the AIDS era. With AIDS, comes the stigmas of both transgressive sexuality and grief and nevertheless Americans articulate such interpretations without need for words, describes Gere.¹⁹⁹ Calling on readers to consider the context that enables us to perceive “AIDS” onstage, Gere asks that dance critics and dance historians explicitly discuss the homoeroticism embedded within contemporary dances. Roussève’s solo exists as one of multiple choreographed moments in the film that suggest the era of the 1990s must redirect the circulation of negative perceptions about persons with AIDS, understand the complexity of eroticism in everyday life, and be conscious of human loss.

¹⁹⁹ Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic*, 24.

In addition to this performance featuring Roussève, the film also places REALITY choreographies between interviews with persons discussing how their lives have been affected by AIDS. Roussève's choreography is first introduced with REALITY artists Charmaine Warren and Kyle Sheldon whose dancing begins immediately after a set of interviews posing questions such as why "people are not crying out" about the many deaths. A recording of a choir ensemble accompanies REALITY's dancing, their voices chanting the words: "Everybody's talkin' 'bout AIDS and if you got it and if you get it who you gave it to and why, why, tell me why, why, why all this loss?" The cameraperson Thomas Moon focuses on Warren and Sheldon whose fists shake and tremble up and down. Moon jumps to a mid-shot of their bodies hunched over in the middle of an empty urban street with an image of a bridge in the distance. Moon then focuses on how their rounded movements circulate through the body and down to the floor until Sheldon pauses to hold Warren's shoulders and jump on her chest. The second part of *Positive* that includes REALITY dancing begins after a gay couple embraces, one of which has AIDS. Here, Chenzira's direction leads to additional city spaces: near the side of a building covered in bricks and with a blackboard branded with white chalk graffiti, Sheldon and Aziza drop to the floor with undulating chests and run in opposite directions only to find each other again on a different street. Julie Tolentino joins them so that they form a chorus of ensemble dancers with shaking elbows at their chest. Before Moon's camerawork takes a final view from below of the trio whose bodies retire to their sides, he focuses on Roussève and Sondra Loring running in. Roussève turns Loring's open legs to the ground, embracing her as the vocal composition exclaims, "We must turn to our community." This analysis of REALITY in *Positive* reveals how *Whispers* is not limited to gay male eroticism, offering some alternatives to David Gere's investigation of gay men's choreography. Gere argues that all of dance occurs in "the shadow of

proscribed gay sex” in the AIDS era.²⁰⁰ He provides an account for how gay men produce choreographic works that explore subjecthood through their examination of the power of a penis, objecthood by looking at oneself as desirable, and abject through feminization by discussing the role of being on the bottom of a sexual encounter. In the example of Roussève’s work, the choreography intends to move beyond social determinations of gayness by not only working in relationship to categories associated with a gay male dance but also connecting such experiences to the lives of women of color.

Both *Whispers* and the film *Positive* focus gay male choreography on being consistently intertwined with women of color experiences. The deeply layered partnering section in *Whispers* brings focus to the relationship between queer men of color and queer women of color lives through dancing by Roussève and Julie Tolentino. They share a duet where Tolentino rises carefully onto Roussève’s shoulder. Accompanying the sequence is an original R&B melody of Roussève’s making in which spectators can hear the chants: “I need you to wrap your arms around me.” Tolentino and Roussève also embody this relationship in their linked, solo segments in the film *Positive*. To the REALITY chant “our cities are burning/ our people are dying/ we must find hope,” Roussève kicks his leg forward and back, turning around with his arms swinging. His chest dips and releases. He swings out and opens. He lifts up in a lounge and brings his hand through the chest. He stretches his arm out to the side and rounds the head. In her solo to the words “our cities are burning,” Tolentino turns and brings her arm up to her face. The camera focuses on her body from the waist up while she kicks her leg out, straightens her arm diagonally, and gazes to the side. Turning consecutively, she brings her arms to the back and runs off. The film *Positive* further illuminates this intersection as Tolentino both dances and

²⁰⁰ Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic*, 51.

narrates her own story of the AIDS era. In her segment titled “Never Forget,” Tolentino describes how she has never attended a caregiver support group, but she and her girlfriend think it may be a good idea, as she feels she lives as if she is HIV+ whether or not she actually has been diagnosed. Accenting this life of navigating the AIDS crisis and its effects on her self-perceptions, Tolentino dances near a high building’s edge accompanied by the serene sounds of the flute. Expressing her desire to “stop living like this is the last chance I get,” she stretches her legs out and rounds over. She turns in her platform shoes on the structure’s ledges. When Tolentino describes her shared experiences with her grandmother around death as a result of the degree of loss in both their lives, her narration connects to Roussève’s method in *Whispers* that connects his mourning of AIDS deaths to a grandmother who helps him to never stop believing in his dream. According to Tolentino, Roussève’s use of his grandmother’s narratives consists of an effort to apply survival techniques.²⁰¹ Tolentino’s comprehension of the digging into a grandmother’s history as a form of strategy to heal from current bodily conditions in the early 1990s is a search for intersections between queer of color and women of color lives. Gay grief, mourning, and melancholy is embedded with choreographic potential, based on Gere’s discussion.²⁰² Roussève’s work in *Positive* and *Whispers* leads to extending the possibilities of gay men’s artistic work to a thoroughgoing exploration of women’s stories.

The marginalization of gay men further intersects with women of color experiences by bringing attention to the role of black women’s singing in sharing in the struggles of queer men of color who seek to resist an essentialized identity. Roussève directly attaches B. J. Crosby’s performing of Me’Shell NdegeOcello’s musical reconfiguration around histories of labor,

²⁰¹ Julie Tolentino, interview by author, February 23, 2015.

²⁰² Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic*, 106.

challenging audiences to connect her powerful vocalization to the broader work on sexuality. Specifically, *Whispers* opens a curtain revealing dancers in a cotton-field holding a specific set of still postures from which they repetitively isolate bodily parts in: reaching an arm out, holding their face in hands, lifting an arm to head, leaning over, falling to the earth, dropping a woman over a man's shoulder, and pausing between rising the spine, pointing the finger, and dropping the torso. Prior to and following this laboring movement, B. J. Crosby sings composer Me'Shell NdegeOcello's original composition of "Georgia On My Mind," guiding those misguided ideals of a stagnant gospel tradition into awareness for how such forms can be intently re-crafted toward progressive politics. Her performance exemplifies Paul Gilroy's argument against reducing blackness to an authentic form of musical expression or ethnocentric theme that diminishes the vastness of a multilayered, lived existence. Gilroy suggests that while black music often functions as a key metaphor of racial authenticity, it must rather be historicized according to the slave experience and problematized.²⁰³ According to Gilroy, the uncritical unification of blackness involves relating music to tradition or cultural rigidity, describing blackness without understanding differences, postmodern critiques of essentialism that refuse to recognize class and overlook racism, the idea of a pure, absolute aesthetic that can be traced to Africa but fails to acknowledge new practices created in the modern world. In this sense, B. J. Crosby's singing has the potential to contribute to the dance's focus on queer sexuality by performing outside absolute constructions of race. This section of the performance accomplishes a fluid understanding of social categories rooted in an analysis of slavery. Between B. J. Crosby's singing is a memory narrated by the grandson's father who remembers his grandmother picking cotton until her hands would bleed and losing her virginity when raped as a young girl by a white man. During these

²⁰³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 97.

narratives, three couples hold one another, one of the partners lifts the other to allow their legs to float behind them. From these cotton-picking gestures, Crosby's performative vocalizations fasten an unshakable force of expressivity that embodies the AIDS conditions of the main character's death. *Whispers* ends with a man joining his father in a heaven sounding the spiritual voice of the angel, played by B. J. Crosby. The heavenly world appears quite similar to human life as persons stand before a vast array of brightly lit colors and wide-open windows. Based on touch, the angel assists Roussève's dream to be connected to his father: B. J. Crosby leads Roussève to Lavelle Zeigler, the father who then takes Roussève by the hands and into heaven. Roussève's anti-racial essentialism process entails one of creating alliances between women of color and gay men of color experiences in a larger exploration of sexuality.

Through analysis of *Whispers*, the Dream Series creates an enduring analysis of queer politics that consistently links up with women of color experiences. The dance's use of musical recordings of Nina Simone support the production's take on the position of queer of color lives and gender in large-scale grassroots movements of communities of African descent and also provide space to reflect on the layers of familial relations and sexual practice among gay men. The physical and vocal expression of nudity in *Whispers* as well as the film *Positive* contribute to developing a portrait of gay men's lives that exists outside binaries and alongside the stories of intimacy and caretaking in the late 1980s. Performances by REALITY artists Julie Tolentino and vocalist B. J. Crosby offer primary examples of how Roussève intends to connect gay men's memories to women of color and to do so in ways that challenge dynamics of racial essentialism.

Love Series

While the example of *The Whispers of Angels* reveals how the Dream Series broadly delved into the conditions of AIDS through gay men and women of color practices, the following choreographic series of the REALITY dance company known as the Love Series (1996–9) takes a

drastic turn away from these contexts to reconfigure historical dialogues on sexuality. Whereas former choreographic series such as the Dream Series and the Creole Series (1989–92) privileged an assessment of black women’s singing in Roussève’s choreography, the Love Series greatly diverges from such aesthetics to emphasize European classical music. Queer sexuality formed the centerpiece of the Creole Series and the Dream Series, while encapsulating the core of this section, concerns a deviant form of sexuality in the forbidden love between two slaves. Analysis of *Love Songs*, one of the dances of the Love Series, offers the following to the broader queer politics evident in REALITY’s dance series: 1) the visual changes of a women of color dance company; 2) a search for a meeting place between movement and narrative; 3) history of bodily violence continuing into the present-day; 4) accessibility of African American culture. To examine these four areas, I investigate analyses of contact improvisation as linked with social challenges through Cynthia Novak’s work. I also connect diaspora studies with feminist theories, such as Paul Gilroy on the black Atlantic and bell hooks on the postmodern black subject.

Following the Dream Series, changes in REALITY dances were not only contextually-driven toward different dialogues on sexuality, but also structurally-rooted as visual and physical dynamics shifted away from a focus on women of color being the primary artists dancing in the work. For the dance production that culminated in the Love Series titled *Love Songs* in 1998, artists Julie Tolentino and Chamaine Warren were the only two dancers in *Love Songs* who had been in the company since the Creole Series of 1989–1992. With the incorporation of artist Ilaan Egeland, Roussève continued the company tradition of including a woman of European descent as part of the formation of the choreography. Differently than the Creole Series, the company had for the first time three men of African descent. Visually, then, REALITY continues to present blackness in the forefront of the company; though, women artists of African descent are

no longer the majority. Roussève desired to transform how the company appeared ethnically, culturally, and racially so that spectators could make new connections with the work:

As time went on, I became concerned with making sure that issues of African American people and women, whether grief or joy, was everybody's issues. People were othering us. I didn't want them to have that chance. What if we put two white people in there scrubbing floors, or two white heterosexuals in there with AIDS, representing humanity onstage?²⁰⁴

Roussève's comments reveal his aims to exceed person's limited understandings of race and gender by making different decisions about how to develop choreography based on external perspectives about the backgrounds of his dancers. Roussève provides new insight into discussions of the black Atlantic, the intercultural and transnational formation that Paul Gilroy constructs to examine political and conceptual frameworks about black vernacular identity and to offer new ways of thinking about how the heritage of black nationalist thinking has had to repress its tensions around being dispersed from Africa. The black diaspora should be acknowledged for its capacity to construct an exchange between ethnic difference and similarity, what he calls "a *changing same*," says Gilroy who intends to critique the kind of racial essentialism that exists in black cultural politics and to prioritize a discussion of hybridity and how identities and cultures are continuously recreated.²⁰⁵ Roussève's choices lead to constructing an artistic production deeply focused on black experiences without requiring a rigid display of race. He provides new context for analyses of "a changing same" by shifting the cultural and racial dynamics of his company REALITY for the purposes of getting audiences to comprehend the meanings of the choreography in relationship to diverse communities.

²⁰⁴ David Roussève, interview by author, October 1, 2013.

²⁰⁵ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, xi.

As REALITY artists who danced during the era of the Love Series maintain memories of the structural specificity of the company at this time, their insight allows for analysis of the role of contact improvisation in the choreography. Company member Terry Hollis recalls his feeling as a new REALITY artist who was faced with Tolentino and Warren's deep philosophical grounding in the company's work. Hollis remembers how Ilaan Egeland, Steven Washington, and himself had to "get the flow and the language, and the nuance" of the choreographic practice.²⁰⁶ Acknowledging Hollis's diligent focus during *Love Songs*, Tolentino describes how he entered REALITY with a lot of experience, yet managed to immerse himself in "David's process in a way that we all admired."²⁰⁷ Whether founding company member or new to REALITY, all dancers were committed to creating a "physicality through a multi-year period of dancing a lot in *Love Songs*" with "expressionistic but full-bodied" movement, according to Tolentino who proclaims this dance enabled them "to be the best dancers that we could." Confirming her remarks, Hollis remembers: "after that piece I was in the best shape that I had ever been." These thoughts are perhaps based on a significant shift that took place in Roussève's emphasis on physicality in the dance. Prior to the Love Series, a regular company class in which artists warmed-up with specific movement exercises, as constructed by Roussève, was not a part of the rehearsal. When such a practice became instituted for *Love Songs*, Hollis recalls how much he appreciated these company classes that allowed him to be fully present in the creative space. After the warm-up session, Roussève would provide dancers with a source phrase in which artists produced material with that sequence as the premise. From Roussève's phrase, artists would construct duets and finds ways of connecting and separating movements. Dancers

²⁰⁶ Terry Hollis, interview by author, May 4, 2015.

²⁰⁷ Julie Tolentino, interview by author, February 23, 2015.

created a lot of movement under the terms of what Hollis calls “guided improv.” This new process evolves into what dance historian Cynthia Novak calls collective action in dance-making, because as cultural values prioritize the importance of group authority, so does contact improvisation support collective directional and artistic authority.²⁰⁸ Contact improvisers took pride in sharing the dance, says Novak, because they taught beginning practitioners the form, a practice which established its “folk” nature—that is, its the values of equality and the idea that all could participate. Although REALITY relies on principles of contact improvisation to create movement from dancers’ own bodies and ways of exchanging physical weight with one another, the company’s process also diverges from Novak’s analysis as these artists were not beginning practitioners of dance technique but rather came into the company’s practice with different training in dance forms of ballet, Euro-American modern dance, and contact improvisation.

Complimentary to the different approaches in *Love Songs* entails Roussève’s alternative musical method. While works of the Creole Series and Dream Series contained live black women’s singing or a grandmother’s narrative, the Love Series uses European classical music to tell the story of two slaves in love who attempt an escape from slavery. Roussève worked with the music of Puccini as well as the compositions of Richard Wagner whose anti-Semitic viewpoints led him to become a distinct figure of German nationalism.²⁰⁹ Christopher Reardon explained that the musical picks were a surprising decision for this African American, gay choreographer because Roussève despised Wagner prior to working on the piece and found all he

²⁰⁸ Cynthia Novak, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 189.

²⁰⁹ Christopher Reardon, “An Improbable Convert to Wagner,” *The New York Times*, December 5, 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/12/05/arts/dance-an-improbable-convert-to-wagner.html>.

understood about him as a human being to be appalling.²¹⁰ While exploring the contradictions of despising Wagner for his racial prejudices and appreciating his compositions, Roussève became puzzled about how a person of such repulsiveness could make music of profound excellence. Roussève lets go of the musical representations that rooted his choreographies in an authenticated blackness when privileging the “Tristan and Isolde” opera of Wagner to tell the love story of two slaves, Sarah and John, depicted by Charmaine Warren and Stephen Washington.

By authentic portrayals, I refer to the spirituals that W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* describes as the greatest gift of persons of African descent to America.²¹¹ For instance, the songs of the Fisk Jubilee singers of the latter nineteenth century reveals for Du Bois, a history of yearning towards a better world, because they offered stories of death and pain, journeys, and veiled lives. Dance studies scholar Thomas DeFrantz has discussed how the choreographic work *Revelations* by African American modern dance choreographer Alvin Ailey utilized spirituals in order to connect with ancestral histories of creativity and to establish a visible African American body in the work of U.S. modern dance.²¹² Focusing on the potential for spirituals not only to relate to African heritage but also to diverge from historical representations of race, Paul Gilroy describes how the Fisk Jubilee singers prevailed in a hard won fight to gain an audience in the enduring age of black minstrel performance because they grappled over issues in black communities about the presence of spiritual-based performances in

²¹⁰ Reardon, “An Improbable Convert to Wagner.”

²¹¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 178.

²¹² Thomas F. DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey’s Embodiment of African American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

audiences already conditioned by tunes of Jim Crow and Zip Coon.²¹³ Gilroy suggests that the Jubilee Singers provided a moment in which audiences could live more connected to God and salvation and simultaneously the slave past surfaced in their singing, enlivening their sense of ethics about political changes. They created new public roles in terms of authenticity in black cultural forms that was distinct from minstrel representations, explains Gilroy, producing a key shift in the formation of black cultural forms. As a result of this switch from live performances by black women vocalists such as B. J. Crosby singing in the form of a gospel tradition, REALITY can be assessed as perhaps having never been concerned with songs to authenticate the historical legitimacy of the black body. Rather, REALITY has focused on exposing how the black body reveals and restructures certain national politics of liberation. In *Love Songs*, the classical music contributes to REALITY's interest in turning upside-down norms of race, gender, and sexuality.

Love Songs expands on the memories of rape expressed in the context of the antebellum plantation in *The Whispers of Angels* and the sexual assault explored based on the conditions of sharecropping in *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams*. In the choreography of *Love Songs*, Tolentino and Hollis dance in a duet, grabbing hands and pulling away until she lifts into his arm, then jumps into him, and then finally breaks his fall to the ground. Hollis wears a red shirt and continues to remain on top of Charmaine Warren's body even as she screams "that's bad." Roussève then walks onstage as the slave master, beating Warren until the sound of thunderstorms. He says, "ain't no love round here for niggas." The slave master gestures to cut her left breast and speaks of selling her baby off to slavery. The master then lies on Sarah's body and a man holds John's waist with rope as he leans forward. "Hold on—real tight," says the

²¹³ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 89.

voice-over in a rounded chant. Later, dancers say “no, no” and moan “aagh,” fall, and women dance with one another. Performing queer dynamics, Kyle Sheldon performs a duet alongside another male artist with lifted legs, whirling, an open chest, and holding one another. Cynthia Novak describes contact improvisation as referential in its continuous recall of anatomical motion and formal in its use of time and structure of space and weight.²¹⁴ The form is founded on a body’s capacity to experience resistance and move about randomly, evaluates Novak. In these moments, *Love Songs* utilizes contact improvisation in partnering to position queer relations within a critique of sexual violence. By evaluating contact improvisation as an historical, social, and national practice, Novak demonstrates how this performance style functioned as a cultural mechanism in America. *Love Songs* also engages in historical issues of sexual assault on the slave plantation, as artists lift one another’s bodies, lie on top of each other, or take part in carrying one person’s weight so that the other can stretch their torso forward.

The focus on dynamics of the slave plantation build into exploring the relationship between past and contemporary histories of bodily violence in the dance’s modern park scene. When Roussève crackles “Welcome” with his hand to heart, a red-shirted man with a woman seated at his feet known as “Venus, the goddess of love” instructs Warren to take the golden chalice from a reluctant Isolde so she will find love in the person who drinks it. Emphasizing relations between black men within a historically, primarily women of color dance company, Roussève stages on a park bench a moment between Kyle Sheldon who grades the firmness of Terry Hollis’s chest a mere “6.” When Kyle’s unwarranted torso-grabbing halts, someone drinks the water from Warren’s hidden chalice. In hat and cane, Roussève is the master yelling to “get in line” on his plantation. Amidst fighting to quench the new slave John’s thirst, Sarah wins, giving

²¹⁴ Novak, *Sharing the Dance*, 14.

him the challis. No longer the slaver, Roussève offers a body makeover. Still continuing the role of movement amidst these narratives, a woman dances with a man at a picnic and a couple moaning “that’s good” turns to yelling “that’s bad.” Having fully wrapped Ilaan Egeland to hips, Roussève draws “Bambi eyes,” “big beautiful breastesses,” a “36-24-36” waist, and makes her head move like “Shaniqua.” Angrily, Tolentino makes a head-bagged, Roussève say “I’m a dumb ass” while thrusting forward the penis she has formed out of his pants. From audience applause, Warren packs up the picnic and Tolentino says, “I love you” to the man whose feet she binds. Crickets sounding, he walks off with pants around ankles. Here, Roussève connects the conflicts associated with the white female body as representation of ideal womanhood to his concerns for the problems embedded in perspectives of the black male body as overly-sexually virile. While Novak describes how contact improvisation mirrored the politics of the 1970s in its rejection of traditional gender roles, *Love Songs* critiques social representations in its shift from men commenting over one another’s muscular capacity, male and female bodies dancing with one another, and images of a perfect, physical body made to appear false and artificial.

Roussève adds new context for how contact improvisation can be positioned in larger African American histories because he sustains an interest in the possibilities of accessibility embedded within African American culture through recycling his comedic narrative technique and use of local performers. A discussion of accessibility fits within the framework of the company’s own mission: “David Roussève/REALITY creates evening-length expressionistic dance/theater works that combine the accessibility, grit and passion of African American traditional and pop cultures with the challenging compositional structures of avant-garde dance and theater to explore socially-charged, immensely relevant, and often spiritual themes.”²¹⁵ This

²¹⁵ “The Company,” accessed December 6, 2016. <http://www.davidrousseve.com/reality.html>.

charge toward the potential for black culture to develop connections with spectators gets constructed in monologues. In *Love Songs*, for example, Roussève stands before audiences in wide, flowing pants, as “Grady McGrady,” an “old, country black” telling the story of two slaves John and Sarah. Loosening the back, Jim or “Tin Man” emerges, but only for McGrady to return, calling Jim a “crackhead.” “Raymond Johnson” surfaces in a tightened back, “Aunt Ruby” with a high-pitched voice, and Ms. Clara stands with elbows at sides. Finally pushing through, McGrady asks audiences why he calls Sarah’s best friend “Becky:” because he’s country. Back to storytelling, McGrady divides time into the master’s day and the slave’s night when Sarah could count the stars. Stopping his speech, McGrady pauses to argue, “no black person could fly,” until night when Charmaine Warren who is Sarah reaches to grab bodies soaring from the sky. When Roussève embodies the main comedic personhood of “Mr. McGrady,” his composure stiffens and voice vibrates in the rhythms of an elderly man while poking fun at spectators to respond when “old country black people ask you a question.” McGrady describes the intimate lives of two slaves whose living just seven miles from a “stop on the Underground Railroad” leads them to follow Harriet Tubman, or the “Moses” that was “comin’ ya’ll.” John learned bittersweet love, argues McGrady until Tin Man breaks-through to highlight the nighttime and Aunt Rubie breaches through Roussève’s body to describe hearts engulfed in sadness.

Roussève’s comedic narratives seek out specific kinds of spectators or audiences directly making bodily connections to national crises through laughter. Simultaneously, the comedic nature of these spoken texts brings spectators into the difficulties of black people seeking to be in relationship during slavery. His spoken texts can be examined through Paul Gilroy’s statement about how black cultural forms have the capacity to make the lives of slaves expressible, even as

these experiences were embedded with terror.²¹⁶ Artistic practices of the black Atlantic, based on Gilroy's analysis, operate as a means to articulate forms of cultural particularity that persons of African descent mold to fit changing conditions. The persona of McGrady makes the work accessible to audiences by facilitating their own laughter at specific moments or being intentional about phrasing and theatrical transitions so that spectators become knowledgeable of appropriate moments to laugh, such as McGrady's statement about black people flying, versus inappropriate periods, such as his Aunt Rubie's description of sorrow. Furthermore, the structure and content of Roussève's narratives can be compared to bell hooks's ideas about postmodern blackness. Hooks outlines the problem with postmodernist discourse that appreciates "heterogeneity, the decentered subject, declaring breakthroughs that allow recognition of Otherness" because it fixates on using a particular language amongst specialized individuals.²¹⁷ Hooks argues for the production of liberatory theory in which "Third world nationals, elites, and white critics" pay attention to black people in public spaces, the particular forms of labor they work, and when the normative functions of viewing and conceptualizing everyday life are challenged for the purposes of dismantling racist domination. To appreciate the liberatory practice of Roussève's narratives, spectators are bombarded with stereotypes of black bodies as addicted to drugs or as elderly, country dwellers and then audiences are presented with a spoken text that shifts from a comedic speech to a serious tone about the larger history of prohibiting intimacy between black persons during slavery.

Similar to *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* and *The Whispers of Angels*, *Love Songs* relies on local community members to attach the dance's politics to different regional spaces, but

²¹⁶ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 73.

²¹⁷ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End, 1990), 25.

instead of supporting a broader narrative about queer of color experience, local artists contribute to alternative investigation of sexuality. Utilizing a 20-member chorus, *Love Songs* intends to “involve performers and non-performers from diverse communities in the alternative arts” to “augment the visual imagery.” This practice extends the company’s aims that were inaugurated for *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* and expanded with *The Whispers of Angels* to draw in the “local communities in which it is performed.”²¹⁸ Incorporating local artists into the dance adds to the company’s potential to disrupt dominant structures. According to performance studies scholar Jan Cohen-Cruz, avant-garde art worked against disciplinary boundaries by relying on interaction with nontraditional artists or broadening the venues in which art could be displayed.²¹⁹ For REALITY, giving local artists opportunities in professional experimental works can lead to this type of engagement with non-dancers.

Local artists are integrated into the very beginning of *Love Songs* where the recording that plays at the start of the audio announces that some African American male youth were involved in beating a white woman, reports Roussève, until a woman describes a world of rape and crack while a mother holds a pillow. Since her heart required that she force her sleeping child “between a place of breathing in and out,” says Roussève, the mother drops the pillow on the child until his limbs cease to shake. “Welcome to the night,” laughs the voice-over, and a scene of numerous local artists, all in frozen, stagnant posture, emerges. Roussève speaks onstage about searching for “Tristan” and one of the local artists is a pregnant woman who walks forward, pops her body in a contraction and release, and freezes. Other local artists then move

²¹⁸ “David Rousseve/REALITY-Love Songs,” accessed April 17, 2013, <http://www.davidrousseve.com/lovesongs.html>.

²¹⁹ Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2005, 33.

who are named “Angela” Davis, “Shaniqua,” “Shanene,” and “Shabébé.” When soldiers arrive onstage, gunshots pop and a woman lifts her dress to reveal a very, light-skinned “African baby.” They walk, kneel, crawl, jump, and celebrate. These pieces of the dance continue to immerse the audience in different stigmas associated with black persons, such as the names given to them, how black women dance to express their sexuality, or through the pregnant woman’s presence, whether young black women have children frequently outside of marriage. Again, the production shifts out of these stereotypes through focusing continuously on themes of freedom, expressed by the presence of soldiers whose bodies provide indication of the oncoming changes of abolition, caused by fighting between Union and Confederate soldiers during the American Civil War. According to Cohen-Cruz, professional theatre is produced by conventional artists for entertainment while community-based forms such as workers theater create a depiction of broader cultural activities for the benefit of participants and viewers; although these two ways of creating community-based performance differ, Cohen-Cruz argues that they relate based on their activists goals.

When local performers engage in choreography, they move in simpler gestures in order to enhance *Love Songs*’s focus on the everyday actions that lead bodies to be liberated from ongoing historical injustices. Some differentiation arises in the focal point of this dance and Cohen-Cruz’s suggestion that activism depends on a specific context of struggle in order to cause social change and that performance must be employed to impact local concerns in the region of their existence.²²⁰ Although Roussève’s performance work extends the first point on specific conditions, given the dance’s story of intimacy between two black individuals during slavery, the production also diverges from Cohen-Cruz’s latter point about local regions. *Love Songs* fits

²²⁰ Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 51.

more in tandem with bell hooks discussion of how black subjects must determine the context and form of representation of their work and not look to others to put the stamp on their legitimacy.²²¹ Black subjects must not count on others for recognition, says hooks, but must work to engage their own identities and identities of other black subjects constructively. Roussève produces a critical dialogue on sexual politics through the lens of his approach to staging local artists within comedic narrative and pedestrian movement.

As *Love Songs* moves across regions in the U.S., dance critics perceive the possibilities of local bodies in the performances differently. Jeanne Claire van Ryzin of the *American Statesman* posits that the presence of local performers displayed “the scale of the production to a more epic proportion.” Offering agreement, Jennifer Dunning of *The New York Times* suggests the local performers from Brooklyn augmented the cast, such as the “nicely innocent young Shakir Torbert as the little boy.”²²² In disagreement, Sarah Kaufman suggests the additional bodies failed to serve Roussève’s point and rather added to “a building sense of confusion” with them appearing “only briefly, to mill about unnecessarily in two or three scenes.”²²³ Though the use of these artists received more than one positive review, none of the dance critics seem to be informed of Roussève’s actual point in utilizing local performers: to involve persons from the community in experimental, alternative dance-theater. Dunning’s attentiveness to the resonance of the young African American boy is perhaps most instructive, because it reveals how this child’s body connects the beginning, middle, and end of *Love Songs*. The idea of African

²²¹ bell hooks, *Yearning*, 22.

²²² Jennifer Dunning, “Love Stories Outlasting their Time and Place,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 1999, http://www.davidrousseve.com/lovesongs_nytimesreview_121099.html.

²²³ Sarah Kaufman, “Otherworldly ‘Love Songs,’” *The Washington Post*, October 19, 1998, http://www.davidrousseve.com/lovesongs_washingtonpost_101998.html.

American male youth is first presented in the recording that plays as audience members make their way to their seats. Then, a mother smothers her young, black child in order to save him from the drugs and other forms of violence in society, as suggested by the voice-over. In the center of the work, the “perfect African boy” is stripped away from Sarah’s body when she fails to escape from slavery with her lover John. Last, the young African American boy who was once suffocated by his parent, rises from the bed alive. The ongoing resonances of this privileging of an African American male youth contributes to Roussève’s goals for *Love Songs* to read as placing emphasis on the possibilities of African American cultural experiences. This usage of the black boy in performance further exemplifies the resonance of bell hooks’s politics of radical black subjectivity. hooks posits that black artists create work in a market that is formed by white supremacist principles and thus what becomes more marketable are seeing black people as the cause of their oppression. hooks addresses the full context of a radical black subject: not just an oppressed individual who rebels and resists dehumanization, but also comprehends the systems of domination taking place in one’s daily experiences, commits oneself to a critical thought process, develops innovative and alternative ways of existence, and “resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined.”²²⁴ Roussève’s consistent play with stereotypes of black bodies through movement, staging, and narrative evolve to the set of practices that reveal his awareness of dominant representations of African Americans. His integration of local artists in innovative ways consists of the strategic placing of the boy as a frame of the larger work.

Love Songs becomes a dance of REALITY’s Love Series that reveals the cultural and structural shifts of the dance company toward new developments in its anti-racial essentialism, contact improvisation, narrative and use of local artists. As the visual presentation of the

²²⁴ hooks, *Yearning*, 15.

company shifts away from being primarily women artists of African descent, Roussève finds new ways to highlight sexual ideologies in duets between black men and in theatrical work onstage between women and men. Contact improvisation plays a new role in REALITY through the kinds of exercises constructed in the rehearsal process as well as the place of partnering between artists in a dance that examines sexuality through forbidden practices during slavery. The exploration of common assumptions about black persons in Roussève's comedic narratives and his staging and choreography of local artists offer critical insight about the activist possibilities and radical black subjectivity in dance.

Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams Film Script

Roussève's 2013 film script *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* inquires into many of the politics of his earlier dance, of this same title, from 1992; although, the script examines queer and women of color lives through attention to filmic time and space. Twenty years after the original presentation of his choreographic work, Roussève continues to reflect on experiences through the lens of a gay, Creole of color, male body. Yet, in its twenty-first century reconfiguration in a film script, no gestures and dance movements will materialize into a dance for the concert stage or have yet been formulated into cinematic production. Rather, a text rewrites an idea that had come to fruition in the dancing body to create fusion between choreographic and cinematic practice. The *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams (US/CD)* script recreates the narrative and movement of the dance that Roussève previously produced at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. While the earlier work begins with Roussève expressing a memory of a childhood pet rat and his raging over the circumstance of AIDS deaths in the latter twentieth century, the more recent script opens by describing how the full moon lights the body of a young

Creole of color girl.²²⁵ Whereas the 1992 dance communicates a very limited array of phrases in Creole, Roussève immerses the 2013 script in Creole linguistics, conversations, and speech mechanisms. Differently than the dance, the text not only closely follows a grandmother's experiences of labor as a sharecropper and domestic but also her later life in a soon-to-be demolished Houston, Texas community as well as her struggle to adjust to living in New York City. Roussève's bodily presence onstage becomes central to the narrative form of the dance as he articulates his memories of having lost loved ones to AIDS. In the script, Roussève repositions such grief in the role of John. Though the script includes the apex of the earlier work in which dancers' improvisational, pedestrian movements and a choir ensemble's song create a train-yard visual onstage, the text reconfigures this very section of the 1992 staging. It brings contemporary artists into the historical moment of the grandmother witnessing her husband's manual train labor. Overall, the script creates anew as well as sets itself apart from the dance through these strategies of reflecting on the meaning of the prior dance as it concerns a woman of color's history. It gives priority to the linguistic dynamism of a Creole people and directs film producers to mise-en-scène or space and time orientation of the screen.

In a cinematic search for worlds between nation-states and across social categories, Roussève's film script gives priority to women of color stories and progresses toward an exploration of creolization. In the case of the film script *US/CD*, he constructs a history rooted in the multiple identities of the Creole. Theorizing the possibilities of creolization, dance historian Brenda Dixon-Gottschild defines the term as cross-pollination from the slave plantation-era or the ways that contact between persons of African and European descent fused and molded a

²²⁵ David Roussève, "Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams," film script, version June 2013 (2).

distinct Creolized culture in the U.S. South.²²⁶ The meaning of creolization in Roussève's script, on the other hand, seeks to go beyond recognition of Africanist influences in the Euro-American cultural fabric in its description of the term "Creole" as "Bayou peoples in Lou-sana dats a mix o' slaves, French and Indians." Expanding the previous chapter's discussion of how Roussève's choreographic attention to women of color experiences begin in his ethnographic oral history interview with his grandparents in which he documented their lives as Creole persons in the American South, such data continues to be relevant in the *US/CD* script that closely follows the grandmother's transition from Creole female sharecropper, to Black domestic laborer, to caring for a person dying of AIDS, and finally to a transcendent body. The text directs the future film production toward a transcendent vision of Creolized personhood because its subjectivity exceeds categories of the black diaspora, or persons of African descent in the Americas, outside a mere opposition to whiteness. *US/CD* emphasizes the French-speaking capacity of Creoles as a major articulation of difference, putting Roussève's script in relationship to Shirley Thompson's analysis of Creole identity as an "ethic of in-between-ness to connect multiple allegiances and to channel them into a singular identity with deep roots in a context."²²⁷ In this way, Roussève's work fits within a broader understanding of creolization as across racial, cultural, and ethnic norms. While existing within the American cultural performance context examined by Dixon-Gottschild, his works place emphasis on Euro-American dance forms, as exemplified by descriptions in the *US/CD* script, but not in ways that overlook Africanist influences. Through the analysis of the history of the Creole in Louisiana as having shown the Americanization of

²²⁶ Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 3–5.

²²⁷ Shirley Elizabeth Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 8.

ethnic groups and the ways that they identify and reject certain racial constructions, I discuss the script in terms of the Creole's struggle to obtain an identity that allows for recognition of Creole heritage. This work extends a broader understanding of the Creole body as operating across social categories by intersecting the fluidity of Creole identity with queer of color experiences.

Roussève's self-reflexivity, as it concerns his position as independent filmmaker of African descent, helps to understand how racial histories remain primary in his work. *US/CD* was developed as a result of a Sun Dance Film Festival grant. Such a shift in resources, from the ALIVE TV series of PBS for his first film *Pull Your Head to the Moon...Tales of Creole Women* in 1992, resituates Roussève's work in relationship to American independent film with a focus on race and feminism. Through this genre, his work participates in a concern for profit-driven interests, subject matters, and approaches to representation in major Hollywood studios. Although, Roussève produces cinematic works in relation to his upbringing in the post-racial segregation U.S., a broader context that is considered integral to black American independent filmmaking. According to James Snead, black independent filmmaking became a legislated endeavor in the 1920s because of the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision that produced for black filmmakers their most significant marketing agenda: to meet the needs of an emerging, yet disenfranchised, black audience.²²⁸ *Plessy vs. Ferguson* legislated "separate but equal" division between blacks and whites in facilities, a racial separation that defined the earliest generation of black independent cinematic practitioners. Based on Snead's perspective that post-1986 artists build on each of the cinematic contexts that surrounded the era of the generation prior to them, Roussève's films contribute to works that responded to racial tensions in the U.S. South, the

²²⁸ James A. Snead, "Images of Blacks in Black Independent Films: A Brief Survey," in *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives on Black Independent Cinema*, ed. Mbye B. Cham and Claire Andrade Watkins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 17.

Brown vs. Board of Education decision, everyday life within black communities, and the conflicts underlying cross-cultural spectatorship. Roussève fits within the post-1980s era in which filmmakers grapple over whether the audience can view their works outside a white vantage point and this specific context comes as a result of the conflicts dealt with by previous generations.

In order to analyze how Roussève's dance and film works contribute to the different generational politics faced by filmmakers of African descent, I make a slight revision to Snead's analysis. In terms of the first period of focusing entirely on a black experience that Snead discussed, Roussève's film *Pull Your Head to the Moon...Stories of Creole Women* (1992) looks at a laborer's story of resisting sexual violence in the American South. Delving into the end of racial segregation, the choreographic work *Whispers of Angels* (1995) connects African American women's narratives to experiences of growing up during the era of *Brown vs. Board of Education*'s implementation stages in which Roussève eventually became one of the very few black students to graduate from a recently integrated high school in Texas. Based on the post-1980s context described by Snead, Roussève examines his personal experience at the landmark moment of desegregation to take a close look at daily life within African American communities and position himself in an unprecedented era of cross-cultural encounters. Furthermore, Roussève seeks for audiences to recognize unconventional narratives as he investigates women of color stories of intimacy and power.

Analyzing Roussève's work within the black independent filmmaking criteria provided by James Snead allows me to discuss financing and how his films emerge through specific relationships with artists of UCLA's World Arts and Cultures (WAC) Department.²²⁹ A primary

²²⁹ The Department is currently known as World Arts and Cultures/Dance.

funding source of Roussève's film works, such as his second film *Bittersweet*, is the School of Arts and Architecture at UCLA where he serves in the role of professor of choreography. The financial complexities linked to black independent filmmaking leads Snead to use the term "independence" with a considerable degree of caution as filmmakers' reliance on multiple funding sources inhibits their desires for autonomy. Snead pointedly suggests that these filmmakers negotiate and exploit their marginalized location as indicated by their lack of major studio distribution, financial backing, and marketing. Through university financing and protocols on academic freedom, Roussève has considerable autonomy over his cinematic ideas. Roussève navigates and de-centers monetary disparities through his academic position that puts him in close contact with colleagues and students of dance.

Other analyses of independent filmmaking point to the role of feminism. Film studies scholar Sherry B. Ortner defines the term "independence" as being engaged in a network of individuals who share the principle of independence from dominant culture, as displayed by Hollywood.²³⁰ Ortner considers former dean of UCLA School of Film and Television Bob Rosen's four-pronged criteria of independent films, e.g. risk-taking, personal, non-Hollywood monetary backing, and artistically rather than financially driven, to be quite improbable given the challenges in operating without Hollywood monies. The broader domain of "independent" is a complex one for the film script. Its focus on Creole and queer of color identity is indeed personally and artistically-driven because of its roots in an earlier dance work that greatly reinterprets autobiographical detail from Roussève's personal and familial life. Ortner's questioning of the non-Hollywood financial support is vital based on the film script's current

²³⁰ Sherry B. Ortner, *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 33.

state, as a text with unknown possibilities in terms of funding that could come from Hollywood studios or perhaps other sources. As a result of the ambiguous zone in which the film script sits, I focus primarily on the genres of independent filmmaking that the text contributes to, such as feminist film. According to Ortner, a “feminist” film provides a critique of a broader structure that refuses to sufficiently respond to gendered oppression and also offers a deep sense of sympathy and integrity for women.²³¹ A specific genre of feminist filmmaking are productions focusing on poor women and discussing the problems with neoliberal economic structures in the lives of both poor and middle class women, says Ortner. These films embody the more metaphorical notion of “downward mobility” in which the middle and lower classes fall even further into economic impoverishment. The *US/CD* script explores the multiple dimensions of a Creole woman sharecropper’s rage, a gay black man’s love for a white man dying of AIDS, and a choreographic work on a premier American performing arts center designed for an elderly black woman’s healing and a queer man of color’s mourning. Differently than suggested by Ortner, Roussève explores the histories of women of color from the lens of dance and in relationship to the queer, Creole of color body. Roussève uses the voice of the black woman grandmother, as re-embodied by him, to narrate a neglected history of the Creole sharecropper and the gay male person who carries an immense loss to AIDS.

Further extending the terms of Ortner’s feminist film, Roussève’s approach to laughter, Creole cuisine, and social vernacular performance privilege the aesthetics of persons of African descent and thereby situates the film text in relationship to black American cinema. Roussève’s configuration of a transcendent body that exists outside norms of female and male, binaries of black and white, exemplify his interests in challenging the norms associated with black bodies.

²³¹ Ortner, *Not Hollywood*, 188.

Manthia Diawara's attention to the terms of diaspora in black film and how such filmmakers bring awareness to the ideological conflicts within mainstream film offer the clearest indication of the relationship between Roussève's films and black American cinema. Diawara argues that this genre situates black person's lives and diasporic people's existence in the foreground to illuminate their experiences outside the stigma produced and reiterated in Hollywood that positions white persons and whiteness in the periphery.²³² The term "diaspora" legitimates the *US/CD* script's emphasis on the lives of a Creole of color grandmother and grandson.

While examining how film constructs blackness can legitimate Roussève's relationship to black American cinema, his cinematic visions also call for recognizing his expression of blackness through the structure of laughter. The text continues a practice of consistently associating humor with suffering and pain by prioritizing laughter through dialogue. The script explicates how everyone laughs as the ceiling of a shack gives and the heavy rainwater bearing above it falls onto the prepared Creole meal of "crawfish etouffee, dirty rice, and boudain," yet the script posits that one of Azema's family members Nana "begins to despair." In Azema's later years, Creole cuisine exists within the comedic realm as her grandson John scoffs at the sight of boudain in her kitchen, calling it an object previously viewed "on the wrong side of a pig's anus." This scene occurs immediately prior to Azema's call to the ghost of her deceased husband for guidance in teaching John to love. In shifting from mockery to compassion, Roussève approaches laughter as a force to merge and muddle opposites in the cinematic realm. He incorporates such a practice continuously in *US/CD* as the script also discusses a moment in which Azema reconnects with Nana in a bar in the 1930s. Directing attention to the mise-en-

²³² Manthia Diawara, ed., "Black American Cinema: The New Realism" and "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance," in *Black Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 5–7.

scène or the conscious decisions about location and historical moment in the film, the script envisions a crowd parting to watch as Azema smashes a bottle on the bar, only to be disappointed when a fight fails to emerge between Azema and Nana who then embrace one another and burst into laughter. Diawara examines the term “mise-en-scène” as an imperative technique in film studies that refers to the position of the camera in order to comprehend the ways black filmmakers construct these alternative depictions. *US/CD* contributes to Diawara’s analysis of spatial narration as a filmmaking mode in black independent cinema that reaches toward cultural transformation by offering new interpretations of black experiences in the U.S. As much as the script plays with interpretations of black persons fighting with one another or cooking undesirable foods, Roussève creates the kind of cultural transformation that Diawara recommends by burying the moment in pain and ethnic tension, as Azema has only come to find Nana to rescue her from falling in love with a “nigga”—that is, non-Creole of color.

Roussève questions the perceptions about blackness among Creoles by bringing forth dialogue on the strict cultural and ethnic guidelines that persons of Creole identity may have sought to follow. Roussève taps into the ways that “Creoles of Color moved within and without a ‘veil’ of invisibility” in their “double life” of seeking to pass racially and to underscore African heritage, explains Shirley Thompson.²³³ Double consciousness, as the dual existence theorized by W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* of living between an American and African world, becomes useful in Thompson’s work that intends to show how Creoles of color “challenged the practice of racial discrimination but also sought to undermine the racial binary

²³³ Thompson, *Exiles at Home*, 15.

that served as its basis.”²³⁴ Roussève gradually peels away the layers of Creole identity that challenge histories of racial disparity.

The film script presents an opportunity to analyze Roussève’s mise-en-scene process not only through the comedic framework of narrative but also dance because movement reveals how the underlying political challenges at play cannot be solely revealed through the direction of the camera but require making deliberate choices about space and time orientation. *US/CD* repositions Roussève’s decisions about movement from the 1992 dance *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* around the era in which this previous dance takes place as well as his self-reflexivity. Exemplifying this process, a scene of the script recommends that contemporary dancers from the staging of John’s choreographic work at the “Brooklyn Center for the Arts” fill the train station platform by throwing, catching, falling, and creating a “cauldron” of powerful energy with their bodies. In movements without the more normative virtuosity of full-out dancing, Derrick and John rehearse to the music of Jimmy Scott’s recording of “Day by Day” in the grandmother’s garage in Houston. While partnering with John, Derrick dances in his ill body with small and romantic movements. The script continues to emphasize such intimate gestures by including images of the small shack that Azema lived in as a child. A “light-skinned” and “dark-skinned” woman clothed in slips, the text articulates, give off “an aura of timelessness” while moving through a series of weighted lifts. This scene envisions images that contradict sexual assumptions about the Creole body, such as that assessed by dance historian Jayna Brown who examines how the “Creole woman” was the enactment of a sign or an action that implied a social role; however black women ensemble artists of the early twentieth century performed within and in resistance

²³⁴ Thompson, *Exiles at Home*, 99.

to the exploitative script of the Creole woman symbol as prostitute.²³⁵ The script's inclusion of women holding up one another's weight also expands discussions of contact improvisation by focusing on the meanings of intersection between race, sexuality, and gender in representations of black women artists. Through analysis of burlesque shows of the late nineteenth century, Jayna Brown shows how Creole vernacular performers were complexly varied in their signifying practices through laughter that made dominant narratives on race a drama of the absurd. More specifically, such artists could be dancing out stereotypes for spectators while nodding implicitly for another audience.²³⁶ Mixed-race women performing on burlesque platforms enabled a response to the constructions "domestic" and "foreign" because blacks existed within the U.S., but just as colonial subjects from regions across the globe, were not considered part of it, explains Brown. Roussève's work extends this broader understanding of the Creole body as operating across social limitations by intersecting the fluid, Creole with queer of color experiences. The script's attention to young Creole women's connections with one another through the lifting of bodies refocuses contact improvisatory technique toward the potential of black women artists to uncover histories of racial disenfranchisement, such as that endured by Creole characters of the film script in their cotton-picking labor in the American South.

US/CD expands on Roussève's filmic tradition of exploring the movement practices closely associated with the woman of color body that is most integral to the plot. As a result of the dense layering of movement described in the script, *US/CD* reuses the dancing from the 1992 production to illuminate how a person dying of AIDS was intimately cared for, the poverty-stricken environment of sharecropping was personally dealt with through intimate aide provided

²³⁵ Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 105–7.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

by familial members, and the modern innovation of the train yard station was marked by the degraded, manual labor of black male bodies. By following John as he creates a commissioned dance on his company and as he returns to Houston to assist his grandmother whose neighborhood is being demolished, *US/CD* intersects a Creole history of loss and contemporary experience of death within the corporeal existence of a gay, man of color.

In addition to space, black independent filmmakers' struggle with the politics associated with representations of time in ways that deepen the artistic and political issues of their work. Diawara determines that time-based narrative films distinctly focus on the daily experiences of black characters in U.S. society by showing persons involved in ongoing activities and by manipulating time to describe how black persons determine their hopes and needs. *US/CD* accomplishes this practice by restructuring the grandmother's life chronology with the insertion of 1992 contemporary dancers into her 1930s memories. Time-based frames, insists Diawara, provide representations of blacks resisting racism by making the distinction from space-based films which work through cyclical structure, repetition, and also tend to be expressive in revering black culture. Diawara creates a demarcation between time-based and space-based films in which the former carries greater weight in its objective to situate blackness in high regard. More significant than these differences, black American independent filmmakers play a central role in creating anew spatial and temporal tools of cinema, because Diawara argues that Hollywood's expression of space and time creates a gaze of marginalization toward black people by orientating space in terms of empowering white men and white time and structuring behavior toward white person's stories. A time-jumping framework certainly plays a central role in Roussève's script that shifts continuously between the grandmother's early-to-mid-twentieth century memories and her contemporary crossings with the grandson's intimate life struggle.

Dance also forms the crux of *US/CD* because movements function as markers of history and as linkages between the past and present to promote healing in the lives of John and Azema. An ideological focus on healing resonates in *US/CD* as John's evolving appreciation for his grandmother Azema's story reaches the point of him weaving her stories in his choreographic work at the Brooklyn Center for the Arts. Roussève textualizes into the script an initial hesitance about and mockery of Azema's story when John's partner Derrick pleads with Azema to tell him about her life as a Creole and her relationship with the deceased husband Jonah. John appears to have no interest in hearing such memories. By the time Azema resists her own tears in telling the story of how she and Jonah began to grow apart, John begs to know whether Jonah ended up "messin' around with that woman." Gradually, John's interests in her life peak when he moves his grandmother to his apartment in New York City. There, he asks whether he may tell her stories as part of a dance. Azema reluctantly agrees in her belief that telling the truth will keep "a bunch 'o folks alive." In its writings, the script illuminates how retelling stories offers the greatest transcendence of all: witnessing Azema's own healing from her own childhood memories of racialized, sexual violence and vengeance create potential for others to heal from their own pains. In the Brooklyn Center for the Arts, the script directs the camera to zoom toward Azema's face in the audience who starts to shiver as the dance's narrative mentions the name "Lollabelle." She attempts to leave her seat when hearing how the white man "grabbed her soul and then squeezed it," but she drops back into her seat. An audience member soothes the Grandmother who bursts into tears as the performance evokes the memory of having "stuffed dirt in his mouth" and pissed "in his open lids." Simultaneously, the script seeks for John to relive his own grief in telling her story as his high-pitched shrieking, nude body merges with the Grandmother's onstage in a figure "neither male nor female, neither young nor old, neither

Creole nor Black.” As boundaries across gender converge in the description of Roussève’s dancing body, the script then exemplifies Thompson’s account for “a Creole methodology of speaking across and within boundaries of race, gender, and culture as well as those of discipline and genre.”²³⁷ The script writes healing as an act to converge past and contemporary memories as well as racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual differences into one body.

Alongside an inquiry into the stories of women of color, the script analyzes the self because *US/CD* pays consistent attention to John’s own internalized oppression in his early refusal to recognize his grandmother’s history and his own grief in mourning the loss of loved ones to AIDS. In his film script, Roussève expresses Creole linguistics through the experiences of the grandmother Azema. The script directs readers—that is, future film producers—to display subtitles of Creole French when young Azema confronts the mother of a poor, white, Cajun girl playmate for demanding they no longer be friendly toward one another because she is a “nigga.” Insulted, Azema responds, “Mon Dieu!” creating an individual protest against the mother’s misrecognition of her Creole identity. Such tension around the meanings of blackness comes to pass in the film after the cotton plantation of “Vieux Papa” is destroyed following the revenge his loved ones enact against the white male who had raped a young female of the family. Following the household’s subsequent plunge into poverty and Azema’s life as a domestic, wife, and restaurant owner, the ghost of Azema’s husband Jonah can offer no help when he says to her, “Je ne sais pas, mon amour” when she asks him how she can help her grandson John to act more lovingly toward his partner Derrick who is dying of AIDS. Narrating her memories to John and Derrick, the Creole subtitles cease immediately in her story of the 1930s in which Jonah proclaims he and Azema will no longer exist as Creoles, but rather as “niggas.” Such decisions

²³⁷ Thompson, *Exiles at Home*, 23.

entail what Thompson calls the “efforts of the Creole of color” to “ demonstrate that choosing to become black might be a means of communal liberation.”²³⁸ Thompson discusses how the choice to live as a black person “drew upon the experience of their group in between black and white racial categories, in between French and American national traditions, and in between Louisiana’s Confederate experiment and the Union triumph, thus pointing to the constructed nature of both race and nation.” In the script, a shift in Creole identity serves a series of purposes: to authenticate the grandmother’s distinct life as Creole and to reposition her subjectivity in a struggle for justice on the basis of race and gender, to fixate the potential film on a history and experience of systemic violence, to grapple over the underlying tensions surrounding the black body, and to use the Creole as a space to explore diverse layers of loss and healing. As *US/CD* also positions the Grandmother as the voice-over, the script extends his approach to poetically narrating personal experience and illuminating a shift in women of color identities.

The *US/CD* film script of 2013 visualizes imagery, narrative, and movement to construct Creole of color identity as integral to understanding histories of racial disenfranchisement, subordination of gay men’s livelihoods, and sexual violence. With the aid of Manthia Diawara’s analysis on black American film, the spatial and time orientations of the film script can be comprehended as challenging dynamics of dominant Hollywood filmmaking. Through the script’s focus on Creole subjectivity, Roussève contributes an investigation of queer of color loss to larger debates about racial identity and the transgressive potential of Creole dancing bodies.

²³⁸ Thompson, *Exiles at Home*, 215.

Bittersweet

Roussève was “burnt out” on New York, and UCLA made him an offer he couldn’t refuse: full tenure, a quarter off each year to do his own work, and an understanding that it would take some effort on both sides to find a paradigm that would allow the working artist to function within what he calls the “phenomenal demands of academia.” REALITY remains based in New York, where its administrative arm and five of its seven members are located (the others are in San Francisco and L.A.). To develop work, Roussève’s dancers meet for intensive, three-week residencies around the country.

“It seems like a really weird scenario,” says Roussève, 39, sipping coffee on the terrace of his house in the Silver Lake hills, where he lives with his partner, Conor McTeague and their three dogs. “But the traditional [dance company] model—working like a dog, being radically underpaid—artistically, it wasn’t desirable. The only people who will do this are people in their 20s. His dancers, he points out, are all over 30: “The process works best when people have something to offer other than their bodies.”²³⁹

Through David Roussève’s mentoring and collaborative relationships with students in dance, his creative focus on queer and women of color politics now materializes through partnerships with choreographers of University of California, Los Angeles’s (UCLA) MFA program as well as undergraduate students in the Bachelor’s program. Roussève became a tenured professor at UCLA in 1996. Roussève’s second film *Bittersweet* is produced in 2005 and offers a platform to understand how his position as dance educator in the university deepened his transition from artistic director of a primarily women of color company to a multiethnic dance company exploring African American culture and history. Roussève initially aimed to start his REALITY company with people of color and with women as a result of the work’s emphasis on black issues and its interests in feminism. As opposed to the second chapter of Part One in which I discussed filmmaker Ayoka Chenzira’s role as director of Roussève’s film *Pull Your Head to the Moon...Stories of Creole Women* (1992), this chapter explores Roussève’s primary location as director. By the time Roussève transitioned into his role as professor of choreography at UCLA and began making new works, the cultural composition of REALITY had also

²³⁹ Kristin Hohenadale, “‘Love’ On Grand Scale in Multilayered Production,” *Los Angeles Times*, Friday, May 7, 1999, http://www.davidrousseve.com/lovesongs_latimes_050799.html.

expanded on its cultural and structural shifts to include artists of diverse ethnic, racial, and national contexts. His teaching and mentoring role in the university was integral to this change.

As women of color experiences are a driving political force of all Roussève's works, I continue to assess his films under conditions of feminist theory and critical race studies. Previously, I integrated such conceptual thinking into my analysis through Kimberlé Crenshaw's call to merge anti-racism and anti-sexism in efforts to dismantle systemic violence against women, enabling me to discuss Roussève's investigation of sexual assault in his Creole Series of seven dances from 1989–92. This section expands my framework of focusing on critical race theory by examining film through bell hooks's analyses because she helps to focus on how choreographers reflect on issues of race, sexuality, and femininity when making decisions about the moving body on film. Specifically, I rely on hooks's definition of feminism and feminist theory: feminism is based on women working to dismantle sexism as actors and as subjects rather than as objects of domination and feminist theory is a framework of a liberatory praxis, one that focuses on change through the subordination occurring in everyday life.²⁴⁰ In the terms outlined by hooks, Roussève's films inquire into the specificity of individual experiences only to develop a political dialogue that is feminist at its core: the lived histories of women as expressed through the moving bodies of women of color in the diaspora. Second, his works implement a conceptual structure from which to deploy feminist theory when the film *Bittersweet* engages in the daily lives of women of color and their relationships to partners in the 1940s. With choreography and editing of images at its core, the film investigates women's search of their own freedom from male dominance, on the one hand, and liberty to secure the possibilities of intimacy with one another.

²⁴⁰ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End, 1990), 27–35.

As a result of the significance of dance and cinematic production in *Bittersweet*, I define Roussève's film method using a term theorized by Douglas Rosenberg known as "screendance," a filmmaking process that values cinematic production over choreographic approaches. I suggest Roussève's first film offers a clear connection to Rosenberg's theory of screendance, yet, I also make clear that Roussève's focus on issues of power requires placing critical race theory in the foreground of this analysis. I focus on how dance and critical race theory emerge as a central ideology and methodology in the cinematic apparatus. This praxis is based on the term "feminist of color" or allying with radical politics to transcend and work across categorical boundaries that are historically rooted in colonial ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality. By attaching this term to issues of dance and cinema, my analysis examines those gestures, movements, and performances that are visualized and embodied through the filmic medium. This theorization calls for an interdisciplinary inquiry into the body's articulation onscreen outside mere hierarchical fixations on dance and choreography, as Rosenberg suggests. I further recommend that Roussève's filmmaking also calls for understanding a praxis of filmmaking among artists of African descent that extends black feminism. According to Patricia Hill Collis, black feminist thought understands African American's issues as part of a larger challenge to obtain empowerment and social change. "Black women's empowerment involves revitalizing U.S. Black feminism as a social justice project organized around the dual goals of empowering African American women and fostering social justice in a transnational context," summarizes Collins.²⁴¹ Through positioning stories of women of African descent in relationship to multiple stories of women of color, a transnational discussion of gender surfaces in Roussève's film. African American experiences form a major core of *Bittersweet*, albeit through screendance. The

²⁴¹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Second Edition. New York: Routledge, 2000), 290.

use of spoken narrative, as rooted in women of color lives, calls for a black feminist contribution to screen dance theory. Just as Roussève had inquired into the livelihoods of women of African descent in the Creole and Dream Series, so does *Bittersweet* continue this aesthetic through use of written text and performative voice.

Bittersweet unites the stories of four women named Ms. Georgia Clifford, Rebecca, Ms. Sally Mae Brown, and the narrator herself in a set of past and present actions. These four women's tales are narrated by Roussève who speaks in the voice and experience of an elderly woman. Describing the relationship between the narration of women of color characters alongside the movements of the four women of color artists elucidates the genre explicated by Roussève "as dance for camera, but narrative driven—narrative short films that involve dance."²⁴² Similar to Roussève's film script *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams*, he contributes to a kind of feminist filmmaking, a genre that Sherry Ortner persuades audiences from confusing with ideals of "post-feminism" in films such as *Sex in the City* that function within the constraints of consumerism.²⁴³ Ortner defines feminist films as offering important allegories of the possible vulnerabilities and threats to women in the neoliberal economic structure. Roussève's film does not concern itself with neoliberalism in the manner discussed by Ortner, namely, an individual's freedom to purchase objects in the market and how this focal point directs attention away from global challenges of poverty. *Bittersweet* provides a different type of feminist filmmaking that narrates the connections across different experiences of women of color. When the voice of an elderly woman speaks throughout the film about her intimate experiences, viewers are equipped with another tool to comprehend the future events of physical

²⁴² David Roussève, interview by author, April 29, 2015.

²⁴³ Ortner, *Not Hollywood*, 195.

violence in four women's lives. Her voice provides a poetic accompaniment to the images of women grappling over their relationship contexts and the narrative she expresses also turns an expository tone to an experimental practice because the words help to guide audiences toward comprehending the film while being articulated in a creative fashion. The *Bittersweet* narrative is in the overvoice of a "disillusioned old woman" who is "trying so hard to understand life;" her poetic, yet accessible verse provides a snapshot or scope of the women's stories to be explicated. In this sense, the narrator exemplifies how feminist filmmaking can accomplish the process that bell hooks describes as digging into memory to exceed the limitations of centering white representation in the black imagination.²⁴⁴ Through the focus on women of color stories, the film engages in hooks's interest in destabilizing the colonizing gaze or hegemonic modes of thinking so that blackness gets imagined in terms of liberation and with awareness of how control over images remains primary in racial domination.

Roussève's way of writing and performing reveals his commitment to evaluating both the power dynamics and fluidity of gender as a social category. As the narrator, he enlivens the female voice that remembers the different experiences of the women characters and he offers a platform from which to discuss how non-women of color directors can use the filmic method to examine their own position as the director of an artistic production that focuses on women of color stories. *Bittersweet* features one man, the husband of Ms. Sally Mae Brown who is depicted by Roussève and whose death in the film becomes immediately cognizant to viewers through the distressed Ms. Sally Mae Brown who attempts unsuccessfully to move his breathless body. Roussève's willingness to embody the single role given to a male body, one that is actually not physically alive in the cinematic contexts, attests to his interests in a primary focus on women of

²⁴⁴ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 170.

color experiences. This male position goes against the grain of the patriarchal dynamics assessed by hooks as follows: how representing the power of the black male sexual organs exacerbates capitalist discourses seeking to exploit black male labor and how the black male embodies “rebel” power in the white imaginary.²⁴⁵ Rather than a primary concern for strengthening the authority of black masculinity, Roussève places himself in the position of a husband who has died at the hands of his wife, Ms. Sally Mae Brown. Additionally, Roussève refuses to depict black men in roles for white heterosexual consumption by intersecting masculinity and femininity to portray the voice of the narrator, an elderly woman. In this second position, Roussève renegotiates the notion of gender itself, a form of displacement that gender theorist Judith Butler examines as “a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities.”²⁴⁶ Butler focuses on the performance of drag as playing with the differentiation between “the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed” and revealing “that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin.” Using Butler’s analysis of drag, Roussève plays with a higher pitch and softer tone in his voice to perform a feminine identity, illuminating how gender categories get constructed rather than having an automatic origin in nature. Although, he negotiates the distinction between masculine and feminine subjectivity in his performance as narrator, his spoken text is not written with comedic effect, as would be typically the case with parody. Instead of constructing a humorous narration, his stories frame the larger imagery surrounding the women’s desire for intimacy and resistance against physical abuse in partnerships.

²⁴⁵ hooks, *Black Looks*, 96.

²⁴⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 138.

While Roussève speaks, four different artists perform gestures and full body movements, namely Julie Tolentino, Cheng-Chieh Yu, taisha paggett, and Raquel Monroe. As Roussève narrates each woman's story, a dancer moves through a set of gestures and movements by themselves or alongside their partner. While Roussève speaks the part of the older woman's tale about "Ms. Georgia Clifford," founding company member of Roussève's dance company REALITY, Julie Tolentino, may be lifting from her chair or walking to the banks of a river. When the voice-over discusses the memory of "Rebecca," UCLA professor of choreography Cheng Chieh-Yu may be gently clawing her fingertips across a person's neck or dragging her body along the floor. As the narrator recalls her own life experiences, UCLA MFA of choreography taisha paggett may be hanging her body over backwards or hovering over the still body of Cheng-Chieh Yu. When the overvoice discusses the experiences of "Ms. Sally Mae Brown," PhD of UCLA in culture and performance Raquel Monroe may be flapping her arms across her torso or holding the still body of David Roussève.

Artists worked on specific images and Roussève positioned such ideas in relationship to other visuals through narrative. For instance, Tolentino recalls the shift taking place in working with Roussève based on how he incorporated her ideas. While in discussions about the film, Tolentino had envisioned an image of berries being smashed onto her face as well as her body floating on top of water. Tolentino's actions take place while Roussève narrates the life of Georgia Clifford whom she describes as having committed suicide to prevent living with a husband she did not love. The narrator had learned from the "beautiful Georgia Clifford" about life such as "when she shot Sammy Budrow with a sling shot for cheating her at checkers, or for believing that he could." From these kinds of accounts for Georgia Clifford's existence that occur as Tolentino dances, the film ends with Tolentino floating lifelessly on water before

smashing berries in her face in the blinding sun. When thinking back to the final editing of the work, Tolentino remembers viewing how the imagery of her body was placed in relationship to Roussève's narrative, and through this poetic storytelling, alongside the other stories being accented by the three artists.²⁴⁷ Tolentino offers evidence of the separation and relationship between the narrative and dancing on film. Additionally, these general descriptions of the characters begin to reveal how the depiction of gender identification and expression in the film might differ from Judith Butler's account for drag performance that "fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity." Roussève does not mock the position of the four characters during his narration, but rather brings forth the realities of violence and death in their lives through movement and images. The film more broadly associates with Butler's statement about reframing the connections between identification, or the initial meanings given to gender, and the resulting gender experience.

The narration and the movement create the gender meanings of these women's lives on film. When the narrative voice expresses her experiences in first person voice, the screen focuses on the movements of Taisha Paggett. In the first images of *Bittersweet*, Paggett's body hangs over while Yu claws her neck with fingers. The narrator expresses how Rebecca embodies the "greatest joy" she had ever known as she was able to lie on her back with Rebecca beside her. While the voice-over discusses her experience with Rebecca, Paggett dances with Cheng-Chieh Yu. Paggett and Yu's full body movements take the form of contact improvisation, because their exchanges consist of sharing the weight of each other's bodies. On the other hand, Raquel Monroe creates sharp isolations and rapidly moving gestures of the upper torso. Monroe

²⁴⁷ Julie Tolentino, interview by author, February 23, 2015.

performs as the voice-over speaks about Ms. Sally Mae Brown being the first woman the narrator met “ who owned books and knew how to read them.” Both narrative and movement share in illuminating the context of Georgia’s experience of death, or as the narrator explains, her disappearance “by that lake two days after she met the man who owned it.” Meanwhile, Julie Tolentino walks to the water and disappears underneath its surface. When the narrator discusses Ms. Sally Mae’s marriage to that “evil ass man from round yonder,” Raquel Monroe beats herself with her own arms as she sits near her husband’s dead body. The narrator thinks about lying with Rebecca near crickets who “whispered the secrets of a better life to come” and paggett holds Yu in her arms, lifting her up from the floor. *Bittersweet* interweaves the narrative and the movement, one informing the other equally. The spoken text sets the pace, establishes the narrator’s voice, and connects the experiences of these four women whereas the dancing brings forth emotion and physically materializes the aspects of intimacy and loss. All the while, the editing cuts and juxtaposes those different images in which dancing is being highlighted.

Roussève’s films can be appropriately discussed through Douglas Rosenberg’s recommendations about the predominant role of camera in filming the body as well as bell hooks’s focus on how filmmakers reconfigure negative representations of persons of African descent. Rosenberg defines screendance as moving “beyond the simple migration of dance from the stage (with the inherent motivations and logic of dance intact) and re-sites bodies in motion in a filmic or screenic space” that is “often at odds with choreographic logic, which has been conceptualized in *actual* three-dimensional space.”²⁴⁸ In Rosenberg’s terms, the work of camera editing and dance-making share common ground in the larger storytelling and purpose to uncover the dynamics of women of color stories in *Bittersweet*.

²⁴⁸ Douglas Rosenberg, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 155.

The relationship between narrative, dance, and screen, and whether the latter maintains a hierarchical position, can be further explicated through an analysis of *Bittersweet*'s participation at a film screening event directed by Douglas Rosenberg. On July 7, 2006, *Bittersweet* was included on the screening schedule for American Dance Festival's 11th Annual Dancing for the Camera Film and Video Festival at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. In conference director Douglas Rosenberg's opening remarks as part of "Proposing a Theory of Screendance," he first, lays out the problematic inheritance of screendance as being an "extension of dance." Rather, Rosenberg recommends that conference attendees understand how dance film or video dance perhaps owes "more to the media side of things" based on how the film's director must dissect the dance to create moving images with greater cinematic quality. By conceptualizing screendance under certain theoretical terms, he begins to outline a plan for films being screened at the conference. He suggests focusing on how the camera acts as the carnivore that "recorporealizes" the body, because it crops arms and motion and enlivens the movement on screen.²⁴⁹ As part of the "Screendance" conference, Roussève's *Bittersweet* can be understood as prioritizing media over dance or working equally between these mediums. Rosenberg criticizes books such as Judy Mitoma's *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video* for suggesting that "dance film" is an extension of choreography and losing sight of the ways that the camera plays the vital role in constructing the work. Moreover, Rosenberg understands how choreographers have worked through queer identity to deconstruct dynamics of the "male gaze;" even so, he continues to place emphasis on the potential predatory angle of the camera in discussions of desire in performance.

Roussève fits into the category outlined by Rosenberg of dance-makers whose works

²⁴⁹ Douglas Rosenberg, "Screendance: The State of the Art Proceedings," (Paper presented at American Dance Festival conference, Duke University, Durham, NC, July 6–9, 2006).

challenge spectators' perceptions about sexuality, yet Roussève's experimentation with the camera leads to an alternative potential in feminist and racial analysis. According to bell hooks, filmmakers create a counterhegemonic glorification of African American existence in their acknowledgment of ancestors and when making use of melodrama to explore the complexity of everyday life.²⁵⁰ The dramatic voice of the elderly woman in *Bittersweet* offers an example of the priority given to ancestors or the stories of deceased women of African descent whose experiences play a role in understanding current conditions. When such decisions about the racialized moving body are imperative to filmmaking, it calls for expanding Rosenberg's analysis toward understanding how decisions about the camera are made based on kinesthetic sensations associated with race. This analysis of the corporeal exists between an emphasis on the workings of screen and a counterhegemonic narrative. Functioning between these two modes of screendance outlined by Rosenberg and the radical feminist approach to comprehending film recommended by hooks, Roussève's works approach the filmmaking medium through a radical lens of narrating women of color experience. *Bittersweet* became a film of Roussève's that uncovered the integrating theories of screendance with critical race theory and that revealed his method of choreographing work with artists in the UCLA Culture and Performance program.

Bittersweet reveals how Roussève's filmmaking process includes the performance contributions of dance students, as a result of his shift from directing the REALITY dance company in New York to taking on a tenured professorship in the university. Through his use of narrative in the film, Roussève creates a platform to examine the complexities of gender identity and expression based on an aim to assess the realities of women of color lives. Although the film highlights dancing between artists and intricate gestural work, it places emphasis on juxtaposing

²⁵⁰ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 142–3.

images of this dancing to explore larger questions of gender and sexuality. This priority given to the editing of images enables an analysis of the term “screendance” in order to prevent decisions around choreography being given a hierarchical role in the making of the film. Overall, *Bittersweet*'s attention to the layers of physical abuse and desire in women of color lives leads his work to be positioned as part of counterhegemonic art forms.

Stardust

The dance that David Roussève made eight years following *Bittersweet* calls for associating theories of sexuality with settler colonialism and attention to how he develops and stages choreography through working with both undergraduate and graduate students. I explore how the 2013 dance *Stardust* expands on earlier investigations of black women and queer of color life by following the coming of age of a gay black boy through jazz and Hip-Hop performance. *Stardust* continues to expand on the politics and methodology of earlier dance series, such as the Creole Series, by constructing written text and dance movement for his REALITY dance company. The production displays a series of short phrases on the backdrop screen and utilizes Hip-Hop and jazz dance to express the underlying emotions of a young gay boy named “Junior.” This main character never becomes visible onstage and I suggest that Roussève's experimentations with undergraduate and graduate artists culminated in his utilizing his dancers' movements to convey Junior's larger emotions. REALITY company artist taisha paggett's gestures explore the dynamic contradictions of his experiences. I aim to discuss how Roussève's embodied focus on paggett leads the production to forge a coalition between gay boys and black girls and women. Through performance analysis of narrative and dance movement, I associate studies of queer of color critique, and performance with settler colonial theories in order to make sense of Roussève's choreographies on the basis of an ongoing, enduring emphasis on relationships between women and queer persons' livelihoods. This layered

inquiry into choreography of queer and women of color experience leads to intersectional analyses of solidarity across identities of sexuality, gender, and race. Moreover, I suggest that these dances might create new dialogues on the position of intersectional black bodies and their relations within a settler colonial context, a circumstance that Patrick Wolfe defines as the structural elimination of indigenous people. As Wolfe goes on further to discuss settler colonialism through the targeting of both native groups and people of African descent in terms of blood quantum policies for indigenous persons and the history of one-drop rule designation for black bodies, his account opens up space to examine blackness within settler colonial norms.²⁵¹

In *Stardust*, this character of a gay black boy never appears, visibly onstage, in a body, and discussions by artists of REALITY dance company unearth how this main character's invisibility creates a complex world of queer of color experience and critique. In the earliest set of written phrases displayed on the backdrop screen, Junior requests that the "internet land" listen to him through each of the messages that he sends to an unknown number. When messages get displayed on the backdrop, they are written in the form of brief text messages from the main character of the dance, a black youth named Junior who sends these notes to an unknown number as part of his own desire to connect with others. Dancers enact emotional dynamics of his life and a woman of African descent embodies the duality of his experience. REALITY company member Nguyen Nguyen discusses how Roussève universalizes his work because he wants audiences to find a connection. A spectator may not find a linkage through the specificity of Junior's story, but by locating some aspect associated with his feelings of loss. They may be able to relate to his world, or as Nguyen names it, a "mind," or a way in which his "body is present for this thought that exists on stage." Based on his knowing that he cannot erase himself, he

²⁵¹ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 no. 4 (2006): 388.

“bring[s] Nguyen into the performance because “[w]e are the bodies that represent different aspects of that character.”²⁵² The basis of the dance in an invisible gay, boy and the physicality of multiple dancers might then offer an important framework for queer of color critique, coined by sexuality theorist Roderick Ferguson as creating potential beyond the limitations of race and other normative parameters.²⁵³ Performance can be analyzed within this framework based on how queer of color critique establishes “antagonisms to contemporary globalization,” or the “normalization of culture and agency” and challenges notions that “designate the imagination as a social practice under contemporary globalization” in Ferguson’s terms. In the absence of a physical gay black male body onstage and the overflow of REALITY artists bringing numerous emotional contexts to life, performance unveils the possibilities for imagination to be rooted in layered, queer of color lives.

Using one’s body to illustrate the layers of an invisible gay youth brings forth different sorts of challenges for professional artists, because much of the initial choreography was created from Roussève’s classes with undergraduate students. Roussève began to construct movement for the dance through the instruction he provided in a course titled “WAC 174 Faculty Projects” (W74). Roussève worked with undergraduates and graduate students toward a longer choreographic work to be performed alongside the works of other instructors of choreography in a shared concert. This final result of Faculty Projects culminated in “Culture Crossing,” a platform in UCLA’s Department of World Arts and Cultures (WAC) that allows departmental courses to present short works before an audience in the main theater of Glorya Kaufman Hall. Roussève held auditions with his colleagues in WAC, because of the dance technique focus and

²⁵² Nguyen Nguyen, interview by author, October 18, 2013.

²⁵³ Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 26.

his aim to experiment with the choreography he taught them. In specifically looking for dancers with a certain proficiency in movement, Roussève taught dancers a specific phrase to ensure artists could articulate the fundamental movements of the technique.²⁵⁴ Roussève describes this latter W74 process as distinct from the first:

The very first year, all I knew was intimacy and technology. I taught them material and they came up with phrases—kind of the *Stardust* process of learned material and their manipulating. As they had more material, the process changed. It became less of their developing material as time went on. By the second year, I had material from the professional cast so it was helpful to see it on them and change it.²⁵⁵

In her senior year in WAC, Leanne Iacovetta enrolled in W74, the second time that Roussève taught it. Iacovetta also worked outside of W74 on Roussève's materials in her role as assistant to Roussève for the *Dancing to be Dumbo* project with the Dancing Wheels company in Cleveland. She worked for weeks one-on-one with Roussève making movement together. "He would do something, I would translate it on my body," says Iacovetta. From traveling to Cleveland twice, she learned from Roussève that he envisions the "big picture right away" in maintaining the "ultimate goal in his brain."²⁵⁶ Emily Beattie who was a MFA graduate student at UCLA also remembers how Roussève developed phrase work from his own body and then requested that artists re-perform their very best impressions of his movement. Recalling when she began working with Roussève on W74, she states, "None of us had moved that way before," exclaims Beattie when she remembers her difficulty in responding to the different technique directions posed by Roussève. Central to Beattie's challenge involved Roussève's request that

²⁵⁴ David Roussève, interview by author, CA, April 29, 2015.

²⁵⁵ David Roussève, interview by author, April 29, 2015.

²⁵⁶ Leanne Iacovetta, interview by author, October 10, 2013.

they move from the bones because in “a physical sense, the ballet training, the modern dance training was very muscular.”²⁵⁷

As a result of the dance being built from W74 classes and having to learn movement that had been generated through undergraduate dancing bodies, REALITY artist taisha paggett considers the age difference of college students to be distinct from an earlier dance company process. For the 2009 dance *Saudade*, she, five MFA alumni of UCLA, and Olivier Tarpaga worked in collaboration so that artists engaged in the forms of their own training and Roussève would find ways to further enhance their creative processes.²⁵⁸ She describes the continuous experimentation with movement as follows: “David pulled from/utilized our individual, physical aesthetics—which represented an array of practices and Western and non-Western traditions—and made them material/teased them out further for *Saudade*.”²⁵⁹ The *Stardust* process required her to focus on learning phrases and participating in constructing a cohesive vocabulary. Also differentiating between *Saudade* and *Stardust*, artist Nehara Kalev explains how Roussève searches for different “things with *Stardust* because the whole thing hangs on a different structure,” because “*Saudade* had all these different monologues but they were different characters.” *Stardust*, however, has “one invisible character.” Though the work places emphasis on Junior’s story, Kalev does not feel like a character, but rather “part of the ensemble that ravel from mood-to-mood.”²⁶⁰ Corroborating Kalev’s account of the focus on Junior’s life and the emotions attached to him, Roussève says the character Junior “never appears on stage and his

²⁵⁷ Emily Beattie, interview by author, October 31, 2013.

²⁵⁸ taisha paggett, interview by author, January 5, 2014.

²⁵⁹ taisha paggett, communication with author, November 25, 2016.

²⁶⁰ Nehara Kalev, interview by author, October 14, 2013.

story is told only through a series of text messages that he is sending to a phone number he does not know. It's meant to be a desperate plea to 'be known or heard.' The texts are projected in video and his emotional life is portrayed through ongoing, full throttle dancing."²⁶¹ While the screen displays a narrative of Junior's life, the dancing illustrates a set of emotions associated with Junior's texts. In order for dancers to move outside the restrictions of a character, the dancing would have to be a connected, though distinct, layer of the performance.

For instance, artist taisha paggett stands in front of the screen, observing and tracing her fingertips across the words displayed before her body. As she faces the screen, audiences can view hair that is wrapped in locks and partially shaved around the head so that they can begin to make connections between her body and Junior's narrative. Junior's texts start to speak of how students fail to appreciate the "ashy nappy nigga girl." Junior articulates his desire to hold this black girl who is mocked and persecuted at school but rather than forming such a relationship, he chooses to laugh, call her "dumb ass ho," and fill himself with hatred for her so that he may stab her in the ear with a pencil. Junior's emphasis on "nigga" and "ashy" girl, can be understood as referring to her undesirability in a conventional, stereotypical sense that she does not make regular use of mainline cosmetic products to beautify her skin. As an African American woman with the kinds of hair known disrespectfully and controversially as "nappy" because of its thickness and curliness, I cringe at Junior's iteration of a term that has wrongfully described persons with my appearance. Her position seems to be the opposite of bell hooks's insisting on black women talking back to articulate creative power, "an act of resistance, a political gesture

²⁶¹ David Roussève, interview by Kingsley Irons, "An Interview with David Roussève," February 20, 2013, <http://dancesmadetoorder.com/blog/2013/02/an-interview-with-david-rousseve/>.

that challenges politics of domination that render us nameless and voiceless.”²⁶² Although, the careful movements of paggett provide means to situate black feminist thinking as part of this moment. paggett’s tightly coiled locks, beautifully shaping her head, also get restricted to a negative connotation of “nappy,” yet, her body remains focused on Junior’s every word. paggett demonstrates how bodies of women of African descent connect to a world in which young black boys struggle to find a voice to be heard. bell hooks describes the terms of black women “talking back” as an defiant action of oppressed persons who speak in a manner that enables them to heal, to liberate their voices from exploitation and colonization. An effort to “talk back” comes into fruition here through the black feminine body that focuses intensely on the daily subjugation of a gay black boy.

Even as Junior’s texts profess an unachieved hope for connection with young black girls, taisha paggett seems to bring this possibility into full realization through her concentration on his story. This technique creates the kind of nonhierarchical relationship between moving bodies and images recommended by film studies scholars Chrissie Harrington and Aparna Sharma who resist a disciplinary problem of privileging dance over digital media, or vice versa, by seeking out the possibilities of interdependence between these mediums.²⁶³ Coining the term “Dance Moving Image (Dance-MI)” performance, Harrington and Sharma describe an artistic process that dialogically relates dancing bodies to moving images in a manner that aims to refute the possibilities of one genre existing as subordinate to the other. The authors use the hyphen to indicate a collective space of interaction between these artistic mediums. Harrington and Sharma’s process enables the moving image to develop meaning through its interaction with the

²⁶² bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End, 1989), 8.

²⁶³ Chrissie Harrington and Aparna Sharma, “Practices of Un-Disciplining: Notes on the Interface and Moving Image in Performance,” *Choreographic Practices* 4 no. 2 (2013), 153.

dancing, moving, live body, a concept related to taisha paggett's dancing based on how she positions her body between other REALITY artists and the screen that display's Junior's text messages. Key to the practice of "un-disciplining" in dance-image performance involves losing the particularities of specific forms in order to develop a sense of the present moment, touch, and dialogue across different medias, explain Harrington and Sharma. taisha paggett creates this kind of un-disciplined method by taking on a gesture of simply pointing to the screen and outlining the words with her fingers. By forging connections between the spaces produced onscreen and in the dancing bodies, the authors create a dynamic whole that removes distinctions so that they generate a collective feeling.

Although taisha paggett's body enacts more plain movements, these actions have important resonances in theories of sexuality. When Roussève decides to open the story of Junior's quest for liberation by establishing a relationship at a layered intersection of race, gender, sexuality, he creates new potential for coalitions between gay men and women of different sexualities. David Gere identifies a major problem that applies to Junior's descriptions of his behavior that violated a young black girl's body: "Having internalized the prejudice in American culture, at large against effeminate boys and adult gay men—the very men who might be expected to embrace the coded meanings of effeminacy, the identification with oppressed women, the struggle to gain power—instead practice open abhorrence of any trace of their own effeminacy." Gere clarifies some of the context tied to Junior's journey in describing the oppression in which gay boys live and how supporting the black girl who was made fun of by her peers might reveal a "trace" of his "own effeminacy," defined by him as "an epithet flung

exclusively at aberrations of masculinity.”²⁶⁴ Overall, Gere persuades readers to recognize how effeminate gestures, as performed on a gay male body, contribute to transgressing the “measure of societal limitations on gender and sexuality.” However, at this point in the production, Junior remains subject to his own internalization of the normative constructs of male bodily expression, because he specifically uses hardened, powerful blows to mutilate the girl’s body. Rather, audiences will have to be attentive to paggett’s embodiment of masculine and feminine gestures to visualize the potential for relationships between young, gay boys and black women and girls.

Roussève sets up Junior’s reality dialectically in the sense that he divides his world in two, a constant battle between discovering his feelings of rage about his everyday life and his emotions of hopefulness about the possibilities for connection. As the text messages progress, Junior reveals the failures in his attempts to make intimate connections with other male students and his relationship with a school counselor who becomes the first person that leads him to pose questions about the dynamics of his existence as gay. When Junior announces in his texts that he had discovered “a love jones” for a student named “Big Man D.,” audience quickly learn that his desire is not reciprocated because Big Man D. punches Junior and knocks out his front teeth. Junior has the opportunity to communicate his feelings about the context of his inability to make connections with others through his regular sessions with the school counselor, a privilege that became required of him after he stabbed the young black girl. The counselor asks Junior why he things that he is not loved by God and he responds: “Rev. Johnsen say god don’t love fags.” These sessions function as a major step in Junior’s process of humanization as he is guided toward posing questions about his daily life. Junior further expresses his confusion about

²⁶⁴ David Gere, “29 Effeminate Gestures: Choreographer Joe Goode and the Heroism of Effeminacy,” in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities on and off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 358.

whether the “people in his head” are “street niggas or angels,” an assertion that illuminates how Junior grapples with the dualistic conditions of his world. As Hip-Hop studies scholar A. Dee Williams describes Hip-Hop as young people who have considered “themselves as subjects, found their identity and humanity, and created a place to develop their critical consciousness,” she opens dialogue on how this performance form’s expression of anger also becomes a conduit through which artists can grapple over their daily reality and develop knowledge. Junior’s questioning might begin to create a “language of critique and transcendence” which “represents the development of the awakening of critical consciousness,” in the framework of A. Dee Williams. She describes Paulo Freire as one of the founders of the knowledge base known as critical social theory based on how he framed critical dialogue as working “toward the spiritual growth of students in the face of oppressive and debilitating social, political, and economic regimes.” As Williams outlines how Hip-Hop “was founded on such critique and the hope in the lyrics of the emcee, the moves of the b-boy/b-girl and the pieces of the taggers,” she provides analysis to comprehend how cultural forms are connected to many searches for connection and expression in Junior’s life. When Junior speaks of how he “krunk dance to kill,” REALITY artists articulate Hip-Hop movements from the style known as “krumping” by rapidly pulsating their chests toward one another. Offering the analysis of bodily technique for such a moment, dance and African American studies scholar Thomas F. DeFrantz describes how “Hip-hop dancing gathers energy as it broadens its contours and revels in its own accomplishment as an aggressive, masculinist style that conditions its dancers to demonstrate their power.”²⁶⁵ This degree of aggression translates into dancers walking hastily across stage, pausing to contract and release their torsos in a show of strength. In other modes, dancers articulate a softer mood when

²⁶⁵ Thomas F. DeFrantz, “Hip Hop Habitus V.2.0,” in *Black Performance Theory*, ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 230.

Junior discusses the new pet hamster application that he purchased as a result of the school counselor's advice that having a pet would help him to experience unconditional love.

As Junior articulates how he works through a sense of rage and joy about his experience in the world through Hip-Hop dance, paggett's body again expresses the feeling of anger and its opposite. A great challenge surfaces between REALITY dancers paggett and Michel Kouakou whose bumping chests against one another concludes with Kouakou grabbing his crotch and yelling out a reverberating chicken "bawk!" The private-part attacking insult sends paggett into a screaming fit in which she "bawks" repeatedly and moves frantically across the stage jumping her chest outward. She approaches center-stage and with her flowing movements and rhythmic jazz steps, transforms her body from hard to soft, from tension to ease. Jazz dance has the technical capacity to embody this moment of physical contradictions: "jazz and other contemporary forms of African American musics emerged from a line of continuity...that has its roots in African forms of syncopation, polyrhythms, repetitions, and microtones," as dance historian Brenda Dixon-Gottschild defines.²⁶⁶ Thomas F. DeFrantz also speaks to the possibilities embedded within jazz in describing how black performance aesthetics align with invention rather than the presence of preexisting regulations as, for instance, jazz musicianship is an "action that reveals the possibility of the unprecedented."²⁶⁷ The very moment in which paggett embodies this tension of aggression and softness can be explained under the terms of jazz as black social dance or a method of a collective percussive attack, personal expression in a bigger ensemble, repetitive movement for vigorous purposes, and profound dependence on

²⁶⁶ Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 238.

²⁶⁷ Thomas F. DeFrantz, "Hip Hop Habitus V.2.0," in *Black Performance Theory*, ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 236.

breaks or sudden rupture of the steady rhythm or multilayered, rhythmic framework.²⁶⁸ DeFrantz analyses are integral to this discussion of paggett's crossing between Hip-Hop and jazz dance, because his focus not only highlights the potential of jazz performance but also the larger effect of Hip-Hop dances that merge "joy of controlling an emotional and physical self in a blankly powerful manner that suggests social dynamism." Paggett expresses the shared capacity for both Hip-Hop and jazz dance, as black vernacular forms, to generate the social dynamics of a queer of color youth's life.

As paggett transitions from sharp, outward punctures of the chest to a soft flow, she articulates a layered sense of nuance in her own body that reiterates the potential for coalition between gay boys and women. As Roderick Ferguson indicates, the categories 'lesbian,' 'coalition,' 'difference,' emerge "to theorize capital and culture as racialized sites of gender and sexual heterogeneity."²⁶⁹ Also taking a stance on coalition politics, David Gere states that the common bond between "gay men and lesbian and straight women" is anger "transformed into political action." In the case of *Stardust*, awareness about bodily negotiations between the categories of black and queer operates alongside the experiences of black women.

When expressing anger as part of coalition politics becomes relevant in the duet, different concerns about how the dance challenges colonial dynamics surfaces. In the scene between paggett and Michel Kouakou, when the latter grabs his crouch and yells out a screaming "bwak!," Kouakou offers audiences no comprehensible terms at this moment. We are left as spectators to come up with our own scenario of precisely what words could have been spoken by him to make paggett enter into such rage. As paggett shifts from rage to joy, however, she shows

²⁶⁸ Thomas F. DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 102.

²⁶⁹ Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 118.

how the depths of her experiences are not restricted to any single emotion. When Junior expresses these opposing forces of anger and pleasure, paggett's body demonstrates how finding a relationship between contradictions leads to healing. Rather than reiterating the settler colonial norm where queer of color activists frame places such as rural areas as a form of sanctuary for queer subjects and thereby seek to claim a sexual modernity, according to Scott Morgensen's analysis, Roussève's imagined sanctuary, or space in which a gay boy's story can be expressed, is rooted in the bodies of women of African descent.²⁷⁰

As Roussève interrelates women and gay men of African descent in ways that offer queer of color critique on the limitations of racial norms, his work has implications as settler colonialism is concerned. As Morgensen cautions, nonindigenous and queer of color persons have crafted a sexual politics that eliminates indigenous sexuality or marks the terms of native sexual practice as primitive. Morgensen questions whether "gay men of color identify with the white settler queer primitivism...then their racial and sexual liberations may track the routes of white colonial desires."²⁷¹ As Roussève inaugurates his analysis of women of color and queer of color alliances through a Creole body that he defines as mixed with indigenous heritage, his search for home can be explored within Morgensen's dilemma and concerns for decolonization, a project defined by Morgensen in terms of practices that offer a logic and approach to understanding relations between indigenous people or provide an alternative knowledge to the effects of settler sexuality by denaturalizing the conditions of settler society. This research intends for coalitions between black women and gay men to challenge the targeting of black bodies and the elimination of indigenous communities. As Patrick Wolfe defines it, the single

²⁷⁰ Scott Lauria Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 139.

²⁷¹ Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*, 150.

most vital marker of modernity is the history of removals in the 1830s of Cherokee in the catastrophic Trail of Tears, a displacement caused as a result of the expansion of slave plantations in the South.²⁷² Roussève and REALITY's ongoing inquiry into relations across women and gay men of African descent shows how an inextricably linked history of oppression—that is, colonization and slavery—can resonate in performance.

²⁷² Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 391.

II. From the Environmental Justice Series to the Quartet Against Systemic Violence

From 2007–13, the Ananya Dance Theatre (ADT) company and its choreographer and artistic director Ananya Chatterjea created the Environmental Justice Series and the Quartet Against Systemic Violence Series of six different dances that focus on areas of social justice. The Environmental Justice Series includes three distinct artistic productions from 2007–9, namely, *Pipaashaa: Extreme Thirst* in 2007 that examines pollution and health risks, *Daak: Call to Action* in 2008 that interrogates the issue of land loss in native communities, and *Ashesh Barsha: Unending Monsoon* in 2009 that assesses global climate change challenges. The Quartet Against Systemic Violence encompasses the three dances produced from 2010–3: *Kshoy! Decay!* in 2010 that discusses how people of color are forcibly displaced from their lands; *Tushaanal: Fires of Dry Grass* in 2011 that examines the relationship between sexual exploitation and gold mining; *Moreechika: Season of Mirage* in 2012 that explores the human impact of the global oil industry; and *Mohona: Estuaries of Desire* in 2013 that focuses on the pollution and depletion of water. All of these dances work within the frame of their larger choreographic series utilizing contemporary Indian dance to uncover the daily social abuses endured by communities of color. Each begins this larger exploration through Chatterjea’s reflections on South Asian communities.

This chapter utilizes a methodology of choreographic analysis, ethnography, and archival sources to discuss two of ADT’s dance series. Through choreographic analysis, I look closely at how Chatterjea experiments with the Indian forms of classical Odissi dance, *vinayasa* style to yoga, and Chhau martial arts as well as how artists perform within these aesthetics onstage. My ethnographic practice involves analyzing my interviews with artists and my personal experience performing with the company. Archival sources such as dance reviews of ADT’s works provide additional observation on the choreography. This chapter begins with an assessment of how the Environmental Justice Series evolves through experiences related to social justice and dialogues

that helped to establish the thematic structure of the dance movement. Second, I analyze the formation and broader vision of the Quartet Against Systemic Violence through theories of diaspora. Overall, the philosophical terms of ADT in *Yorchha*, *Aanch*, and *Shawngram* will be integral to each section's analysis.

Environmental Justice Series

For the first dance of ADT's Environmental Justice Series in 2007, *Pipaashaa, Extreme Thirst*, the company focuses on the global effects of pollution in communities of color as well as the kinds of local environmental challenges being faced by people of color. The transnational framework of the dance series emerges from Chatterjea's daily life as a person of South Asian descent existing between the nation-states of India and the U.S. Her reflections on the environmental challenges shared across these countries leads to the company's globalized investigation. Chatterjea begins choreographing *Pipaashaa, Extreme Thirst* as she grapples over her experiences traveling between the U.S. and India. She becomes dismayed with how the market can have destructive influences on the livelihoods of women and children around the world because Indian women who once gathered firewood for subsistence now sift through garbage areas or are employed in hazardous industrial facilities.²⁷³ She learned about farmers who had committed suicide because companies such as Coca-Cola had taken control over their water.²⁷⁴ Chatterjea starts to understand the relationship between her home in South Asia and her home in the diaspora in the U.S. as a process of using the concert dance stage to examine women's environmental experiences.

²⁷³ Marianne Combs, "Pipaashaa Means Thirst," *MPR News*, September 4, 2007, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2007/09/05/pipaashaa/>.

²⁷⁴ Sara Nicole Miller, "The Toxicity of Our City," *MN Daily*, September 6, 2007, <http://www.mndaily.com/2007/09/06/toxicity-our-city>.

In terms of Chatterjea's growing awareness of U.S.-based pollution crises, she learns about the harmful amounts of arsenic that had been discovered from soil tests in 2004 in the most impoverished district of southern Minneapolis known as Phillips community.²⁷⁵ Chatterjea commences the choreographic process by choosing to create movement for the first piece of her environmental justice trilogy with the support of community activists Cecilia Martinez and Shalini Gupta from the Women's Environmental Institute in the Twin Cities. The set of workshops and dialogues between ADT artists and community activists are titled "Madness Workshops," and they help dancers to understand the politics of environmental challenges in both local and distant regions.²⁷⁶ Through *Pipaashaa*, Chatterjea makes connections between her global reflections on South Asia and locally in Phillips and she does so in collaboration with artists, environmental activists, and community members. Expressing how the dance-making process also contributes to the community activists' aims to support local neighborhoods, Cecilia Martinez posits that *Pipaashaa* provides an important means of communication in which dancers speak to emotional experiences without incomprehensible jargon so that communities hopefully become inspired to change the pollution problems. Shalini Gupta specifically described how ADT exhibited a type of control over their bodies that enabled the dance to have an activist power, a sense of hope, and to illuminate the possibilities of an ensemble of women working toward change. ADT's partnership with activists allows community members to bear witness to the emotional conditions associated with environmental injustice.

Early explorations into the collective experiences of persons in South Asia and the U.S. were equally prevalent in the second dance in the Environmental Justice Series, albeit with its

²⁷⁵ Sara Nicole Miller, "The Toxicity of Our City."

²⁷⁶ Combs, "Pipaashaa Means Thirst."

focus on industry and native communities. Chatterjea's journeys led her to study the issue of indigenous people's land loss for *Daak: Call to Action* in 2008. Chatterjea spoke with individuals about monsoon season in West Bengal, India and recognized the sense of discontentment as she became aware of the difficulties in negotiating the shifting patterns of monsoon in the region.²⁷⁷ Discussing the context of her dialogue with persons during an interview with *MPR News*, Chatterjea posits that she learned how the government had seized land from farmers for industrial purposes and broadly how persons were being uprooted from their homes.²⁷⁸ For instance, Chatterjea conversed with a woman who expressed her awareness about the owner of the land on which she grazed her livestock, but still felt the palm tree on this property was her own. Chatterjea considers how the concept of private control in a region where communities had inhabited the land for generations seemed inconceivable. Chatterjea's idealistic thoughts about Bengal as a place of "green rice fields in the villages" had changed considerably with these return travels because she opened her eyes to the struggles surrounding the growth of enormous industries in the area.

Chatterjea enhances her choreographic process through voyages between the U.S. and India, concerns for the land challenges faced by communities, and with new artistic alliances. Her co-collaborator for *Daak*, theatre director and choreographer Dora Arreola, creates a partnership that deepens the company's research on personal, local, and global linkages. Arreola observed the human impact of land rights violations in her home in Tijuana, Mexico and witnessed how families were displaced so that industrial space could be reserved to assemble

²⁷⁷ Ellen Chenoweth, "Ananya Dance Theatre: Spreading A Politic of Defiant Hope," *Left Turn*, July 28, 2008, <http://www.leftturn.org/print/867>.

²⁷⁸ Marianne Combs, "Dancing for the Land Beneath their Feet," *MPR News*, June 12, 2008, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/06/12/dancingforthelandbeneaththeirfeet/>.

televisions for purchase in the U.S. Adding her voice to the *MPR News* feature, Arreola describes ADT as one of a few dance companies that focus on social justice based on their aim to increase awareness of the complicity of U.S.-based consumers in global land struggles. Connecting Arreola's comments to Chatterjea's journeys, dancing in *Daak* entails building a relationship between stories rooted in ADT rather than being designed to represent women's stories from across the globe. ADT's creative process distinguishes itself from putting women of color lives on display and connecting stories of ADT artists to the lives of communities of color. Through the daily experience of women such as Chatterjea and Arreola, ADT establishes alliances in dance. Artists investigate the complexities of their own histories in order to intersect cultural, racial, and ethnic differences.

Chatterjea's descriptions of the histories of women of color, the shared experiences of colonialism in communities of color, and the importance of building relationships amongst the historically disenfranchised reveal her aims to create solidarity between diverse groups. Chatterjea speaks to a desire for relationships across racial distinctions when she analyzes the last dance in the trilogy, *Ashesh Barsha, Unending Monsoon*. Prior to the making of *Ashesh Barsha*, Chatterjea gets interviewed by Ellen Chenoweth, a dialogue in which Chatterjea discusses the radical transformation in how she choreographs and how she redefines hope under the terms of her dance-making and the contemporary moment. To begin the interview, Chenoweth examines Chatterjea's theory of the politics of defiant hope in *Butting Out*. Chenoweth describes how Chatterjea analyzes the choreography of Chandralekha who works in Madras and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar whose company Urban Bush Women is based in Brooklyn. Chenoweth posits that Chatterjea challenges the conventions of whiteness and postmodernism in

cultural production and reveals the practices of marginalization in contemporary dance.²⁷⁹

Through Chenoweth's views, Chatterjea examines how these choreographers illuminate the "politics of defiant hope" by making the body a site of resistance. Shifting to a dialogue on the relationship between Chatterjea's theory and ADT, Chenoweth persuades readers to comprehend how Chatterjea structures ADT around the lives of women of color.²⁸⁰ Although Chenoweth makes a clear association between Chatterjea's concept on women of color choreography and ADT's works, the politics of defiant hope takes on a very different context in the Environmental Justice Series. In contrast to previous performances of *Pipaashaa* and *Daak* that conclude with a hopeful note, the final dance in the series offers no solutions to the environmental challenge of climate change. As a result of increasing depletion of the world's minerals, Chatterjea felt that the contemporary moment exceeded the potential to conclude with hope.²⁸¹

Although the emotional arc of each piece shifts, the company maintains its emphasis on how abstraction allows the choreography to continuously reconfigure Indian dance forms. In her descriptions following the staging of *Ashesh Barsha*, Chatterjea posits that dance works through metaphor to provoke certain questions about an individual's position in the environment and about how to respond to social problems.²⁸² *Ashesh Barsha* may have resisted a specific image of hope; however, Chatterjea's exploration of classical movement created an uplifting experience

²⁷⁹ Ellen Chenoweth, "Ananya Dance Theatre."

²⁸⁰ The term "women of color" is defined here as communities that must be defined through historical processes, rather than the simplistic terms of merely giving priority to the experiences of non-white women.

²⁸¹ Marianne Combs, "Dancing in Response to Climate Change," *MPR News*, September 10, 2009, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/collections/special/columns/state-of-the-arts/archive/2009/09/dancing-in-response-to-climate-change.shtml>.

²⁸² Ibid.

by revealing the relationship between multiple life forces. The artist examined in Chatterjea's *Butting Out* known as Chandralekha has her own analysis of dance and abstraction based on her discussion of the social origins of dance. Chandralekha demonstrates how Indian structures of creativity emphasize the role of the human body in every aspect of cultural formation because principles such as the *mandala* help to conceptualize the relationship between the self, community, and cosmos.²⁸³ By connecting Chandralekha's ideas to ADT's work within classical Indian movement, *Ashesh Barsha* provides a bodily framework to understand everyday life. Chatterjea's form of abstraction examines how the urgent crisis embedded within daily realities requires a focus on taking action through contemporary reconstructions of classical movement.

Yorchha, *Shawngram*, and *Aanch* are the philosophical terms through which ADT actualizes its inquiry into environmental justice in *Pipaashaa*, *Daak*, and *Ashesh Barsha*. Artists execute the company's basis in technique or *Yorchha*, *Shawngram* or resistance, and *Aanch* or heat gets in the choreography. For example, in *Pipaashaa*, Chatterjea's body leans over to the side until she turns her chest flat and shifts it open, rises it back up, and then gazes right. She folds her legs over in the shape of the yoga pose Cow Face with the right thigh over the right and shins tucked into the sides of the thigh bone. She sits back on her tailbone, opens her chest to the left and then kicks one leg out to the side with the foot flexed. To face away from audience, she crosses her right foot over the left leg and binds all fingers together overhead. Having made a full half circle on the floor, spectators can view the curve of her spine until she faces back to front, lifts up in a squat and then to standing. She gazes downward while circling around herself. Srija, artist and daughter of Chatterjea, runs out with plastic in hand and Chatterjea comes to sit in double *chauk* by bringing the legs wide apart and lowering hips down to floor.

²⁸³ Chandralekha, "Militant Origins of Indian Dance" *Social Scientist* 9 no. 2/3 (1980): 84, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3516927>.

This section reveals the technical foundation in Odissi dance through positions such as double chauk as well as spinal work with the spiraling open of the chest while seated on floor. Additionally, yoga practice emerges in Chatterjea's dancing as she integrates poses alongside Odissi. Her body cultivates a sense of heat in moving swiftly from sequence of movement on the floor to the double chauk posture. An understanding of resistance builds also in this section as Chatterjea's gazing away from her child playing with toxic materials begins to reveal the crisis of environmental pollution in communities and the urgent need to radically shift daily circumstances of women.

The philosophical elements of ADT are further illuminated in examples of ensemble work. The arms of all dancers open overhead as we lean over torso to the left and reach the right hip out. Our torso shifts over to the right and our body opens up slowly to the left. After moving softly through the other side, our hands create the *pitaka* gesture by straightening the fingers out and closing the gap between them. Facing front, we lower our bodies into the open limb position of double chauk with the hands framing the heart. We lunge to the left by bending the front leg and lengthening the other straight behind. The arms reach out long until the left foot comes through to cross over the right. While sitting in double chauk with hips downward toward the earth, the hands embrace the floor as the torso shifts from left to right. The ensemble splits off into two groups as flakes begin to fall from ceiling. With hands in the gesture of *hamsasya* with thumb and index fingers touching and the other joints spread out and lengthened, our arms flow from left to right and the torso comes down toward the floor. In this sequence, the ensemble carries out the layers of company technique in Odissi dance, from hand gestures to hip work, to build the heat generated from multiple dancing bodies toward shifting environmental landscapes. From the image of a mother unable to observe her child's demise in a polluted community, or the

dancing alongside the production elements, in this case, the release of material that creates the image of falling snow or rain—offers audiences a sense of hope in the possibilities of mobilizing women toward environmental justice.

By paying attention to movement technique, dance reviewers connect the dancing to environmental conditions in ways that uncover how artists articulate aspects of the company philosophy. Dance critic Sara Nicole Miller understood the dance in terms of pollution, resistance, and home as a result of how dancers reacted to the external substances and materials on their bodies while performing onstage. Miller expresses how the piece succeeded at illuminating broader viewpoints of environmental pollution as dancers contracted muscles, jerked, vigorously waved their limbs, crawled, wailed, and let out deep exhales while pieces of colored-dirt in mixed tones of a blood-marked melon and sickly-colored seaweed dropped onto their heads.²⁸⁴ The story was unpleasantly precise, unfinished, and without defect, explains Miller, as dancers pressed their feet on dark flakes underneath them and they wrapped their bodies in plastic remnants. Miller's comments about the resonance of pollution in the dance are supported by Marianne Combs who describes how hazardous liquid seeped throughout the stage, overtaking the dancers and penetrating their attire as dark powder descended from overhead and plastic string strangled their bodies.²⁸⁵ Based on Miller and Combs' perspectives, elements of resistance are founded on a thorough exploration of struggle with artists being overtaken by set props such as plastic. Many can also be envisioned from reviewers' words based on how sudden, gasping exhales produce the release of heat from the body and the combination of movements

²⁸⁴ Miller, "The Toxicity of Our City."

²⁸⁵ Combs, "Pipaashaa Means Thirst."

enacted by the ensemble from convulsions to footwork require artists to utilize extensive energy to execute.

As Miller begins to assess how our movement articulates resistance, *Pipaashaa*'s form of contemporary Indian dance expresses the relationship between the environment, everyday life, and the body. Miller encourages audiences to explore the piece as a narrative of caution, a site of critical dissension, a space of resistance, and a painful interaction embedded with chaos that rocks the senses. Seventeen dancers clothed in fluid, brightly colored wraps and sleeveless shirts tagged with a single bloodstained liquid drop, she remembers, twisted back and forth across the stage. Appearing to be unbalanced beings, they cried and turned amidst the rapid environmental explosion of commercial life. Eventually acknowledging the mysterious toxins on their bodies, recalls Miller, dancers attempt to anxiously grab and tear away the substance. Through the laughter and insanity, they drop onto the floor as if fish out of water while maintaining their concretely skilled artistry and the specific details of each stance. With the combination of bloodstains stamped onto their costumes, being torn off-center, and their bodies shifting in the changes that evolve from an industrial world, Miller considers how dancers' technique illustrates the effects of environmental pollution. As Miller evaluates how dancers execute technique while removing the toxicity off their bodies and falling emotionally unstable, her emphasis on how dancers sustained their technique can be further explained as the role played by ADT *Yorchha* in exploring the politics of today's world. Understanding how the company's movement aesthetic accomplishes an inquiry into daily issues can be comprehended through pioneer of contemporary Indian dance Chandralekha who demands that "traditional" dancers are engrained in a way of reiteration and reproduction of measurable principles. Chandralekha posits that such actions counter the values of integral to Indian dance such as *rasa* that focus on liberating human

existence through the unity of self, nature, and society in a time of social disjuncture.²⁸⁶

According to Chandralekha, contemporary Indian movement extends the reach of cultural practices through its own historical conditions and interdisciplinary frameworks. Chatterjea's choreography exemplifies this type of work through positioning the classical aesthetics of Odissi dance to raise awareness about environmental challenges in the present moment.

The technical foundation of *Pipaashaa* in Yorchha expands on the kinds of social conditions that it explores when bringing attention to experiences of diaspora. Miller shows how the practice of an unsettled, moving body enables the dance to delve into realities of home in spite of its decaying existence.²⁸⁷ Miller discusses how Chatterjea examines the experience of a mother performing the misalignment of a body permeating with toxins through her lifeless sockets that moved about the stage in a state of disillusion. Miller describes how she moves her body to the sounds of drills, cranes, and grinding machinery and how she becomes increasingly oblivious to her child who gestures for console beneath her. Miller reflects on how the musical composition added a discomfiting medley of industrial sounds such as the horn of a large vehicle backing up and banging metal to dull-toned drones. As Miller identifies the movement of eyes as a mother's lack of attention towards her child, her account recognizes how ADT's technique expresses women of color's experiences of environmental injustice. To extend Miller's review, I intend to refocus her emphasis on home as part of a larger conversation on diaspora. The duet between Chatterjea and her daughter Srija Chatterjea-Sen can be explained through analyses of feminism and South Asian diasporic lives such as Vijay Agnew's discussion of home. Agnew posits that the South Asian diaspora cannot be marked by a mere aim to return to a

²⁸⁶ Chandralekha, "Contemporary Relevance in Classical Dance: A Personal Note," *National Centre for the Performing Arts Quarterly Journal* 13, no. 2 (June 1984): 61.

²⁸⁷ Miller, "The Toxicity of Our City."

homeland but rather the capacity to reinvent an identity in multiple locations.²⁸⁸ Agnew's discussion applies to ADT's work based on how Chatterjea has recreated Indian dance forms to make dances with diverse women of color. Agnew seeks to reveal how migrants employ their knowledge and sociopolitical resources to forge identities that work across physical and social constraints, refuting ideologies that such persons are predominantly "victims who are acted upon by" broader society. By creating a dance production that investigates how women of color endure and challenge environmental injustice, *Pipaashaa* puts Indian dance into practice in the manner suggested by Agnew. Moreover, she posits that the "alternate archives" of feminists provide insight into the daily experiences of women and produce a better understanding of migrant's conditions than academic methods, such as oral histories, interviews, and ethnographic studies. *Pipaashaa* exemplifies the kind of feminist archive produced by ADT: a dance that shows how the body can be both implicated in and transform environmental conditions.

Continuing the process of documenting women's lives in the second dance of the Environmental Justice Series, the explanation of technique in *Daak: Call to Action* reveals different elements of heat and resistance in ensemble movement. Using a circular formation of the group, dancers form a flat back with their spine parallel to floor and their knees bent. Some artists squat their hips down toward the earth and walk with hands bound behind their backs and gaze downward. They fall to floor, keeping the legs close to one another. To tighten the circle, they crawl backward on knees. Dancers face their bodies away from circle, toward circle, and finally with backs at the audience. Sitting their hips down low toward the floor and knees open in *chauk*, they move to lunge to the side with the front leg bent and the back leg stretched long and foot on the floor. Keeping the feet parallel, they slap the earth and step back. The right foot taps

²⁸⁸ Vijay Agnew, ed., *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 4.

to the floor, followed by the ball of left foot. Their torsos fall and lift up. Returning to chauh stance with an upright torso and bent legs, they lift and lower the right foot and then the left. From dropping the head down, they kick the legs up. This time in double chauh with the feet twice as far apart as chauh, artists move from their heels to the balls of feet. At stage left, dancers form a clump structure and reach their torso and arm to the right while sitting in the tribhanga stance with one leg forward of the other, both knees bent and the left hip reaching away from the body. A few dancers such as Omise'eke Tinsley hold each other's shoulders. *Aanch* becomes a major force of this section as dancers build heat by fixating their bodies in upright positions and moving swiftly to gathering together on the floor. Artists also present a concrete embodiment of technique through the clear articulation of the spine, feet, and limbs as well as the opening of the hips in chauh, double chauh, and tribhanga poses of Odissi. Movements such as the clapping of the hands to the floor and the will to create collective movement in a circle reveal the building sense of Shawngram in the dance. Circular formations also deepen the company's expression of resistance in ways that emphasize solidarity between women's lives, because the action of facing toward and away from one another illustrates a desire to continuously establish connections. Also, turning their bodies away from spectators offers an indication of their will to search for a form of internal and collective strength, undisturbed by external forces of oppression.

Critics' descriptions of *Daak* demonstrate how Chatterjea's choreography reveals the importance of alliances in a world where American consumption impacts the land struggles of communities. Offering indications for the makings of Shawngram in building fury, Camille LeFevre of *The Star Tribune* says that the work has transformed the dancers as a result of intense, poignant, and tireless choreography packed with elegance and structured with rage.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Camille LeFevre, "A 'Call to Action' through Haunting, Graceful Dance," *Star Tribune*, June

Their bodies become objects in a larger system, explains LeFevre, but they manage to develop their own voices while compressing and tossing their limbs as if mechanical valves. As they glide onstage in lines that reflect the action of gears colliding, LeFevre notices how dancers enact a small part of the “postcolonial machine.” Marianne Combs supports this latter descriptions when she discusses how dancers appear to be warriors using hand brooms, grabbing hold of each other’s arms to form a secure space, and being repeatedly led by a dancer who moves with a drive towards action.²⁹⁰ She reveals how body parts seem to be thrown across and onto the stage to embody the constant work of machines and to uncover the industrial process that manufactures objects for commercial exchange. Contrarily, LeFevre says the rhythm of the ensemble articulates the possibilities of “solidarity” amongst them. To further analyze the critic’s descriptions of how dancers move onstage in a rhythmic pattern to reflect machinery in a “postcolonial” moment and grab one another’s bodies in “solidarity” in their potential to enact change, I use Alessandra y Royo’s framework that distinguishes between different types of contemporary Indian dance. According to y Royo, such forms can stage work outside of standard repertoire or deconstruct the idea of the classical and rather focus on present challenges. In the latter category, for instance, contemporary Indian dance choreographers might deploy their investigations of movement and their own understandings of Hindu texts to interrogate socially and politically conservative ideologies to place emphasis on women’s experiences.²⁹¹ Through y Royo’s concept of the “post-classical,” contemporary Indian dance unsettles certain norms

13, 2008, http://www.startribune.com/templates/Print_This_Story?sid=19911909.

²⁹⁰ Marianne Combs, “Dancing for the Land Beneath their Feet.”

²⁹¹ Alessandra Lopez Y Royo, “Classicism, Post-classicism and Ranjabati Sircar’s Work: Re-Defining the Terms of Indian Contemporary Dance Discourses” *South Asia Research* 23 no. 2 (2003), 162.

associated with classical performance that stages repertoire outside a focus on everyday social issues. Applying y Royo to *Daak* pinpoints the company's larger thematic focus on the environmental crises faced by women of color. However, the term "post-classical" becomes misleading if it suggests that Chatterjea choreographs outside the possibilities for gesture and movement within classical Odissi dance and yoga and Chhau traditions. Dancers exist as part of the social problem of consumption and possibly for alliance-making to create alternatives; yet, Chatterjea constructs all these actions through experimentations with classicism and tradition.

Daak's ensemble work raises concerns about how to assess dynamics of tradition as the dancing promotes solidarity amongst women. Describing the connection built between artists, LeFevre suggests that, as the dancers rhythmically pound their feet, "the Earth" appears to be resounding with dissatisfaction. The ensemble movement offers different emotional descriptions of difficulty and determination and removes each dancer's "individualism." Fourteen dancers strenuously practice and enthusiastically enact a "ritual" as they embed the challenges of women of color into their dance through the choreographer's "singular" dance aesthetic that provides an efficacious and emotional mixture of Indian movement. A full year of practice, exchange, inquiry, dialogue, and social activism that unite these dancers in a "ritual" of creative expression because dancers handle parcels of weeds as if these objects are forms of equipment or, more abstractly, as excess baggage. Based on LeFevre, Chatterjea reveals a call to action by creating a "women's ritual" that seems to function outside critique because viewers observe as admiring but uninvited spectators.²⁹² Frédérique Apffel Marglin conceptualizes the dance ritual of temple workers as evolving into a daily act of communication in which bodily emotions and reflections are refined so that audiences can appreciate the results of an actual "physical-emotional-

²⁹² Camille LeFevre, "A 'Call to Action' through Haunting, Graceful Dance."

cognitive experience.” Marglin utilizes this hyphenated term to make a sharp distinction between other notions that might describe the history of the maharis through limiting terminology.²⁹³ As Chatterjea seeks to challenge certain perceptions through Indian dance, her deployment of ensemble work in *Daak* might be comprehended as an action of solidarity and alliance-making rather than a “ritual” that relies on a “singular” dance aesthetic. Comprehending how the dance establishes alliances between women rather than as “ritual” might enable viewers to participate in the dance as invited observers. The term “ritual” does allow for reflection on the origins of classical Odissi dance in the ritualistic practice of the maharis, albeit outside the notion of “singular.”²⁹⁴ *Daak* experiments with classical repertoire to explore land displacement in communities of color and as a result of its roots in the historical practices of the maharis, exceeds the restrictions of any singular category. Despite asserting a “women’s ritual,” LeFevre describes how viewers leave knowing that ADT seeks to show how dance might transform the world.²⁹⁵

Other dance critiques indicate that the dance’s capacity to build alliances with indigenous politics illuminates the company’s broader vision. Marianne Combs describes how dancers dropped forcefully onto the stage to connect to the women and children who had prostrated for protest purposes in the middle of roads, offering a continuous reflection of the land under

²⁹³ Frédérique Apffel Marglin, “Refining the Body: Transformative Emotion in Ritual Dance,” in *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India*, ed. Owen Lynch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 220.

²⁹⁴ See previous chapter for more on the formation of classical Odissi dance on the basis of the ritualistic practice of the maharis.

²⁹⁵ Camille LeFevre, “Ragamala, Katha, Ananya: A Bounty of Dance Styles,” *Minnpost*, June 5, 2008, <http://www.minnpost.com/arts-culture/2008/06/ragamala-katha-ananya-bounty-dance-styles>.

audiences feet in Minnesota that belonged to the Dakota people.²⁹⁶ As Combs identifies the layers of indigenous people's realities deeply connected to Chatterjea's choreography, she highlights the ways that *Daak* connects with native people's land experiences and illustrates how to make alliances across borders. ADT aims to discuss how environmental injustices existed in communities such as West Bengal, India and Tijuana, Mexico as well as in Leech Lake and the Lower Sioux Reservation of Minnesota.²⁹⁷ "In *Daak*, dancers portray ordinary women defending their land," says Marianne Combs, because the movement illuminates an engagement with indigenous people's claims to land. While critics identified connections across the multiple references to struggles with pollution and communities in *Daak*, critics grappled over the politics of the final dance in the Environmental Justice Series, *Ashesh Barsha: Unending Monsoon*.

Connecting to some of the issues analyzed in *Daak*, critic Jon Behm posits that *Ashesh Barsha* intends to respond to concerns about how alliances have been neglected and indigenous ways of knowing destroyed across the globe.²⁹⁸ He describes how *Ashesh Barsha* focuses on reparations and the problematic handling of hurricanes and tsunamis. While he considers such political aims to be significant, he wonders whether the broader descriptions create a mixed bag of humanistic concerns, environmental problems, discrimination based on race and sexuality, the degradation of indigenous knowledge, and consumerist tendencies. These politics may be connected, says Behm, but attempting to explore each politic in a one hundred-minute

²⁹⁶ Combs, "Dancing for the Land Beneath their Feet."

²⁹⁷ Susan Budig, "Dancers Rouse Audiences to Fight Environmental Racism," *MN Spokesman-Recorder*, June 11, 2008, <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/article/2008/06/11/dancers-rouse-audiences-fight-environmental-racism.html>.

²⁹⁸ Jon Behm, "'Ashesh Barsha': A Vaguely Feminist Praxis from Ananya Dance Theatre," *Twin Cities Daily Planet*, September 14, 2009, <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/news/2009/09/14/dance-ashesh-barsha-vaguely-feminist-praxis-ananya-dance-theatre>.

performance might be too ambitious. The dance develops an important relationship between racial politics, sexuality, and an environmental agenda; however, he thinks that the metaphors struggle to link consistently to environmental problems, the visuals lack nuance, and that “other than raising awareness in a very generalized way, the performance offers very little by way of encouraging the audience to get involved with the issue.” Unknown to Behm seems to be the company’s aim to focus on broad-based issues of social justice and to do so in abstract metaphorical thinking in works created by artists of color and in the genre of contemporary Indian dance. Behm’s critique also reveals the kind of struggle spectators may endure in making connections to the dance without thoroughgoing analysis of both politics and technique.

Illuminating the terms of collective energy in the dance, Marianne Combs analyzes how the piece starts with dancers dressed with vividly blue attire, moving elegantly together to deploy the various stylized gestures and footwork of Chatterjea’s aesthetic.²⁹⁹ As the piece developed, describes Combs, the dance and music quickened and the movement became rigid and percussive as if rain were dropping heavily onto the street. Speaking to the terms of the self and the ensemble, Combs recalls how the overpowering sounds shifted the grace amongst dancers as they made an upsetting image of women contracting with popped eyes and limbs askew. While Jon Behm simply states, “dancers are enveloped by a giant white sheet,” Combs explains concretely how the piece shifted from stomping rain to unbearable heat, and from visuals of a “glacier building and receding.” In broader, holistic terms, she persuades viewers to observe how the work emphasizes environmental concerns as dancers frequently stared at a dark streak outlined on their feet—a metaphor of examining the carbon footprint on bodies.

²⁹⁹ Combs, “Dancing in Response to Climate Change.”

MN Artists critic Lightsey Darst also questions whether an artist can outwit a spectator into examining challenging concepts, but she posits that viewers' perspectives about the success of the piece relies on what techniques they perceive to be politically significant.³⁰⁰ She believes that viewers can engage in the dance, because Chatterjea does remarkable things with Odissi so that the elevated energy of the aesthetic and precise angles appear to be stylized movements of workers weaving or conducting agricultural work with a sense of pain and loss of home. Darst intends to conclude with a "note of hope" by discussing how Chatterjea's daughter Srija Chatterjea-Sen seems to exceed her limit as a dancer because "her dancing always promises more and its plenty spreads absolution through the theater." Additionally, Darst focuses on performance of the ensemble where "everywhere you look, you see the same intensely directed eyes, sharp arms, intricate hands, and rhythmically stamping footwork." She further clarifies how "it's not just their uniform quality that makes ADT's dancers impressive" but going "past their limits in the adrenaline of performance "with "extreme backbends, deep knee flexions, and long-held but fully-exerted standing poses." Critics best comprehend *Ashesh Barsha's* multiple political inquiries when interviews illustrate the makings of technique and heat in choreography.

Quartet Against Systemic Violence

ADT builds on its philosophical underpinnings in *Yorchha*, *Aanch*, and *Shawngam* through its collaboration with co-director Laurie Carlos in the *Quartet Against Systemic Violence Series*. Whereas the theatrical director's collaborating with Chatterjea for the *Environmental Justice Series* changed from *Pipaashaa's* Gulgun H. Kayim, *Daak's* Dora Arreola, and *Ashesh Barsha's* Dipankar Mukherji, three of the four dances of the *Quartet Against Systemic Violence (Quartet)* were co-directed by Laurie Carlos. Moreover, the *Quartet*

³⁰⁰ Lightsey Darst, "Dancing the Unending Monsoon," *MN Artists*, September 23, 2009, <http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=244526>.

highlights poetry, vocal work, and dancing of artists of African descent in new ways. ADT's structuring of dances in a choreographic series, broadly, enables an enduring inquiry into larger challenges faced by communities of color and women through dancing in *Yorchha*, *Aanch*, and *Shawngram* and specifically allows for alliances across Asian and African diasporic practices.

To bring context to the formation of Afro-Asian choreography in ADT, I begin by examining how the Quartet emerged through Chatterjea's reflections on the lives of women of the South Asian diaspora. Chatterjea's initial ideas for the Quartet involved women and violence because her work with a South Asian Women's shelter in New Jersey led her to think about how violence functions. Specifically, she considered how domestic violence does not merely operate as "one man beats up one woman," but rather entails how "we exist in the context of state-sponsored patriarchy." From Chatterjea's comments, the term "diaspora" becomes relevant based on her focus on persons of South Asian descent in the U.S. and experiences of domestic abuse. In Chatterjea's case, diaspora or the transnational action of living across the territories of nation-states such as the U.S. and India, comes into fruition through her past work with South Asian women's experience of violence. Chatterjea's desire to create a choreographic series of four dances to examine gender-based violence also further exemplifies Vijay Agnew's concept of the alternate archive because choreographies of Indian movement forms for ADT lead to critical commentary about the everyday lives of women struggling with the effects of structural oppression based on sex and gender in their communities.

According to Chatterjea, a Quartet of four dances allows ADT to "pull the frame out and look at gender violence" and to consider how the phenomenon works. *Kshoy! Decay* discusses experiences of land loss in its 2010 staging, *Tushanaal: Fires of Dry Grass* examines how sexual exploitation undergirds the gold mining industry in its 2011 production, *Morechika* discusses

how mass oil production impacts communities in its 2013 premier, and the preservation of rapidly depleting water sources is the main focus of the 2013 dance *Mohona: Estuaries of Desire*. The quartet begins in very specific concerns linked to the choreographer's reflection on gender and violence in terms of South Asian women's lives and greatly broadens to investigate the interplay of these processes in the global production of vital resources. Such a framework brings forth the most important function of diaspora, according to Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur who suggest that inquiries into diaspora renew dislocated areas as forms of contestation to "hegemonic, homogenizing forces of globalization" and reconsider the rigid structures of nation and nationalism.³⁰¹ Addressing the everyday impact of globalization, ADT's Quartet looks at how the exploitation, pollution, and consumption of resources transcend boundaries of race, culture, and national territories. By working from a focus on specific communities of color dispersed across the globe such as South Asian women in the U.S. and placing these stories in the context of global commodities and essential resources, the company examines issues of hegemony in terms of how political leadership and multinational corporations sponsor violence against women in communities of color. As these stories come together in choreography, the Quartet also illuminates Braziel and Mannur's recommendation that studies of diaspora shift to examining how the subjectivities of these communities are "practiced, lived, and experienced" and away from discussing how identities are constructed. ADT discusses how global exploitation of land, gold, oil, and water impacts communities of color, how organizers resist these challenges, and the specific stories of women's survival. ADT's expression of contemporary Indian dance is positioned within the kinds of representations that challenge standard practices of dance under globalization.

³⁰¹ Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, ed., *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 7.

Part Three: Decolonizing Alliances in Afro-Asian Choreographies

Through ongoing experimentations with forms of the African and Asian diaspora, choreographic works can lead to a practice of developing alliances across differences. Distinctly, choreographers David Roussève and the REALITY dance company and Ananya Chatterjea and Ananya Dance Theatre work in different cultural forms—that is, aesthetics rooted in the African diaspora for Roussève and the Asian diaspora for Chatterjea; however, these artists integrate both performance aesthetics from these diasporas in their productions. In Part One, I examine how Roussève and REALITY’s 2009 *Saudade* and *Two Seconds After Laughter* connect its multiple dance forms to Asian performance practices of Bharatanatyam and Indonesian dance and how Chatterjea and Ananya Dance Theatre’s 2012 production *Moreechika: Season of Mirage* interrelates Indian dance practices to African American performance work in the jazz aesthetic. *Saudade* is a dance that focuses on an African diasporic experience of slavery and the 2005 Hurricane Katrina crisis in southern regions of the U.S. *Two Seconds After Laughter* is a film that focuses on the return of dancer and choreographer Sri Susilowati to her home of Indonesia after having spent twenty years in North America. *Moreechika* highlights the historical devastation of chemical disasters, oil spills, and communities’ resistance in countries such as India, Nigeria, and Ecuador. To analyze the relationship across Afro-Asian diasporas in REALITY and Ananya Dance Theatre, I produce an interdisciplinary inquiry into dance and diaspora studies. This essay explores possibilities for radical intersections across sexuality, gender, race, and nation that trouble the category of “World Dance.” Dance theorist Marta E. Savigliano defines World Dance according to a constructed archive where the practices of non-Western forms get collected to capture “that dancing that occurs out there in the world.”³⁰²

³⁰² Marta Elena Savigliano, “Worlding Dance and Dancing Out There in the World,” in *Worlding Dance*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 174.

Savigliano posits that World Dance functions as a process through which bodies get disciplined into erasing both the values of the forms and the experiences of bodies performing. World Dance also responds to dynamics of legitimization, as “otherness” becomes acknowledged within specific dance disciplines presumed to be outside of Euro-American expression. To undo the presumptions of otherness that the World Dance classification bears, Savigliano recommends focusing on the possibilities for developing “decolonizing or postcolonial critical factions” that allow for “a resistance to globalism.” Alongside this approach to World Dance, I include an analysis of diaspora by arguing that decolonizing potential only arises in Afro-Asian choreographies rooted in specific cultural forms. In the case of Chatterjea and Roussève, this involves their enduring exploration of Odissi, yoga, and Chhau or contact improvisation, jazz, Hip-Hop, and Euro-American modern dance. I discuss how these artists can build alliances with aesthetics that exist outside the context of these forms and that carry different histories of territorial dispersion. I focus on how they connect these other forms with the dance styles that they have long experimented with and that are always based on critical ideas about sexuality, race, and feminism. Furthermore, each section of this chapter analyzes politics of gender and sexuality through analysis of narrative and choreography. For instance, *Saudade*’s focuses on memories of sexual violence during slavery and *Moreechika* places emphasis on deploying Odissi dance as a mechanism to explore queer of color bodies and global figures of authority.

I. Saudade

The 2009 dance production *Saudade* is an hour and forty-five minute work with spoken texts written by Roussève and with choreography by Roussève and artists of the REALITY dance company. In *Saudade*, Roussève delivers monologues about death, sexual violence, trauma, and social and political neglect endured by persons of African descent. Roussève animates each story with a unique voice and speaking pattern as well as distinct gestures and bodily composure. His stories feature four diverse characters: a slave girl named “Sally” who learns to write but is violently raped at the age of fifteen by her slaveowner; a sullen man who cares for a stray cat until he eventually finds the pet dead; a person nearly dying in a hospital whose partner becomes a reason to continue living; and a mother who lost her partner and barely saved herself and her children during the Hurricane Katrina crisis in Louisiana in 2005. Appearing onstage as a narrator, Roussève tells the story of each narrative during the performance. While speaking these narratives during the performance, he makes very carefully placed steps at a diagonal across the stage. Roussève calculates his walk so precisely that only by the final conclusion of the performance does he accomplish moving from the upper left corner to the lower right side of the stage. Meanwhile, the seven REALITY collaborating dance artists Esther M. Baker-Tarpaga, Nehara Kalev, Marianne M. Kim, taisha paggett, Sri Susilowati, Olivier Tarpaga, and Anjali Tata add to the dimensions of his spoken texts with expertise in diverse mediums based in West African movement, the classical Indian dance form known as Bharatanatyam, contact improvisation, Indonesian dance, and/or Euro-American modern dance. Roussève further layers *Saudade* with video by Ashley Hunt and sound design in the genre of Portuguese Fado music by David Karagianis. Overall, *Saudade* connects dance forms that differ, even as it positions black people’s experience of sexuality and structural oppression at the center of its narrative concerns.

The terms of the African diaspora become central to *Saudade* as a result of the movement basis and thematic context of the work. Since 1989, Roussève has choreographed works for his company REALITY that explore the contemporary lives of persons of African descent through Euro-American modern dance, contact improvisation, and performance forms of the African diaspora such as jazz, Hip-Hop, and West African-based movement. His works often discuss sexuality, gender, race, and systemic violence. For example, the 1989 dance *Pull Your Head to the Moon...Tales of Creole Women* explored narratives about sexuality through a focus on African American women's experiences of womanhood and physical and sexual assault. In several works, Roussève also grapples with the global circulation of stereotypes about black bodies as supposedly hypersexual and uncontrollable in their sexual desire. In this sense, REALITY productions contribute to an analysis of diaspora formulated by Paul Gilroy as more complex than a mere metaphor of racial authenticity; rather, black culture is a hybrid form of the Black Atlantic that resists reductions to race and recognizes the new practices created in the modern world.³⁰³ The 2009 work *Saudade* also deploys dance and narrative to explore how sexuality becomes an underlying experience of the lives of persons of African descent. And yet, Roussève's emphasis on a series of global dance forms creates a platform from which to envision African American dance as central to understanding alliances within and across differences in global histories of colonial oppression. In this sense, the platform of diaspora and sexuality in *Saudade* expands beyond constructions of the Atlantic to create a physicality that historian Jayna Brown defines as the site through which historical economies of sexualized commodification

³⁰³ Paul Gilroy, "'Jewels Brought from Bondage': Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity," in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 101.

became associated across geographies to produce critique.³⁰⁴ Our consideration of *Saudade* can further reveal underlying tensions of globalization and even challenge easy dynamics of otherness by following Marta E. Savigliano's framework to examine the principles associated with multiple dance forms deployed in the piece and highlight the specifics of its dancing bodies.

Saudade connects the ravages of black American slavery to the conditions surrounding Hurricane Katrina as processes based in histories of global systemic oppression. Roussevè speaks in the voice of a slave named "Sally" who learned how to write. She recalls how the slaveowner, himself, beat her. She had never seen him beat a slave with his own hands before. Further in this sequence, Sally describes how her sister's tears dropped into the palm of her hand as she was being raped by her slaveowner. She remembers forcing herself to breathe to prevent the master from stealing her "soul" and she recalls the tears that fell into her palm as her sister held her hand through a hole in the wall. Sally then proclaims her newfound awareness about taking part in "a life that I would never understand" and she utters "The End" in proclamation that her life will no longer be confined to a slavery that prohibits literacy and allows rape.

The sequence shifts to explore the experience of a mother during the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe of 2005. Cultural critic Henry A. Giroux describes Katrina as a wage of global systemic racialized oppression. Katrina was a natural disaster that rapidly shifted to a socioeconomic crisis as African Americans were stranded on rooftops, packed in the Superdome, or left alone on dry highway patches without food; the poorly-constructed humanitarian response forced the U.S. to confront the problem underlying New Orleans's appearance as a "Third

³⁰⁴ Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 96.

World” country with too many dead bodies visible, floating on sheets.³⁰⁵ In this sequence of the dance, taisha paggett and Olivier Tarpaga support each other in an image of death, with Tarpaga floating on paggett’s shoulder. Here, Roussève tells the tale of a mother’s survival of Katrina. The mother relates how “letting go of the person I loved most in life” defines her will to carry on, even as she masks an underlying state of grieving and vulnerability. As the mother, Roussève speaks of: her children who only needed a “glass of water” to survive; having no “memory of begging the Lord to take my life;” and having saved her children from “a world that just tried to kill them.” From narratives about the slave girl whose oppression was known by her being enslaved, raped, and forbidden to write, to the story of a mother’s immense loss due to Katrina, *Saudade* emphasizes women of African descent and their stories of systemic violence.

paggett and Tarpaga dance the layers of emotion that underlie the mother’s story. Their bodies move asymmetrically by turning on the floor with the side of one hip touching the earth. Lifting off the ground, they use the palm of one hand to balance on the floor while extending the legs in the opposite direction of that steady hand. When they transition to sitting on knees, they shake the head side-to-side. Quickly, they bring the crown of the head to the floor, and as they balance the head there, they stretch their legs wide and open to the side, switch to rolling the body on the floor, and repeat this phrase. Setting up contradictory movements, paggett rises slowly off the floor while Tarpaga speedily taps his palms to thighs and then immediately opens them out toward the audience. Simultaneously, he lifts and lowers the head and he repeatedly taps the feet up and off the floor. He then squats his hips low to the earth and quickly lifts his entire body off the floor with legs spread open wide. Continuing the practice of opposing movement, paggett reaches toward him but the connection fails as Tarpaga frantically circles

³⁰⁵ Henry A. Giroux, *Stormy Weather: Katrina and the Politics of Disposability* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 7–11.

arms and then comes down to the floor so that he can hover off the earth in a plank position. While holding this stance with the body taut and legs extended behind him, he moves the arms in two different positions: from resting on the elbows to balancing on his palms. Once again, paggett reaches hands toward Tarpaga, but this time, the center of his body shakes and vibrates rapidly. When paggett touches his shoulder, he stops and they gaze at each other. paggett steps away for a moment and goes further upstage as if to gather strength from others. He lifts his hands and tilts his head back in laughter until paggett returns to lift his arm, place him on her shoulder, and carry him off with his head leaning back and legs circling.

In this sequence, the dancing clearly shifts between African-based movement and contact improvisation. Tarpaga and paggett engage movement repetition, physical contradictions, variations in speed, and complex rhythmic gestures, all of which are central to historian Brenda Dixon-Gottschild's description of Africanisms.³⁰⁶ In this way, *Saudade* actively prioritizes an Africanist presence to articulate the unspeakable, bodily effects of Katrina. Additionally, *Saudade* demonstrates what Dixon-Gottschild describes as postmodern African American choreography that recreates, deconstructs, and maintains Euro-American culture while also preserving its own styles on the concert dance stage. *Saudade* also utilizes black cultural forms in the ways that Gilroy envisions the black Atlantic as an expression of cultural particularity that gets molded to fit changing conditions.³⁰⁷ As the physical articulation of artistic forms gets placed within larger circumstances of womanhood and sexuality and specifically lives of women of African descent, black femininity becomes the driving force of the dance's narrative.

³⁰⁶ Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 3.

³⁰⁷ Paul Gilroy, "Jewels Brought from Bondage," 81–2.

Although *Saudade* highlights African-based dancing, it does so by focusing on the specificity of dancers' bodies and by developing solidarity across difference. Tarpaga's dancing with paggett is connected to other sections of the choreography in which his body reworks an Africanist premise of irony that Dixon-Gottschild defines as playing with power dynamics among dancer and spectator.³⁰⁸ In one sequence, Tarpaga suddenly kicks his legs and hips away from the center of his body and then forces Roussève to applaud him for his dancing. This moment of *Saudade* comments on how West African dance practitioners might perform certain standards of tradition to appease spectators eager to appreciate dance in the blank mode of World Dance. In another scene, Tarpaga asks fellow performer Esther Baker-Tarpaga to join him in "the dance of pure joy," revealing how certain representations of African dance can restrict artists to expressing a given aesthetic. To disrupt this scene, and to dispel the facade of "pure joy," performer Nehara Kalev crosses the stage clad in a scanty two-piece bathing suit while displaying the signs "I Think They're Faking it Because in Real Life They're Married."

Saudade also destabilizes the singular conventional structures of World Dance forms by positioning his narratives on blackness and femininity alongside group dancing in ensemble sequences. As Roussève articulates Sally's story of being violated by the slaveowner, the entire ensemble stands in the background, their arms down by their sides with palms open toward the audience. They lift hands up to chest and slowly lower them. Ripples and sudden waves of the chest move through their torsos. From rubbing their hands across the chest, they open palms out again, lower them down, and then fold their bodies over halfway by bringing the torso parallel to the floor and then down toward the legs. Short hiccups of breath can be heard from dancers as Sally says, "This is a life I would never understand." Juxtaposing such ensemble movement

³⁰⁸ Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance*, 13.

alongside stories of black women's subordination has certain implications given Jayna Brown's account for how chorus performers have the capacity to construct the color line on sexual terms in American social structure.³⁰⁹ In a second example, an ensemble also forms behind paggett and Tarpaga during their duet. When Tarpaga's body begins to shake from the height of the shoulders and down to the hips, Anjali Tata, Esther Baker-Tarpaga, and Nehara Kalev shake with their torsos folded over so that their chests touch the legs. Their hands are held tightly together. When Tarpaga lifts his hands and begins to laugh, Esther Baker-Tarpaga smiles as if she takes part in experiencing his plight. By positioning ensemble movement alongside this narrative of subjugation and survival, *Saudade* suggests cross-cultural solidarity through the context of black feminism.

Ensemble dancing not only reveals how the choreography forges an alliance with stories of persons of African descent but also how its movement intersects with the experiences of REALITY artists in ways that provide different inquiries into World Dance, such as Anjali Tata's duet with Nehara Kalev and its experimentation with classical Indian dance. Kalev brings out a chair and a boom box onstage and hits the start button to play Portuguese Fado music. Entering the stage rhythmically, Tata presses her left foot flat onto the earth, steps the right leg out to the side and plants the right foot down. She crosses the left leg behind the right foot and then lifts up to balance briefly onto the balls of both feet. Her arms lift and lower with the palms revealed and fingers extended. Kalev comes over to her angrily, shaking her and insisting that she "stop!" With the music now shut completely off, Kalev binds Tata's feet, but when Kalev returns to the boom box to hit play, Tata smiles, reaches her head upward, lifts arms open wide, presses the palms together, and stretches arms out to the side and brings them into the chest.

³⁰⁹ Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 219.

Kalev then binds her arms, but Tata continues to shift the head from side-to-side. Kalev makes the final move to place a black bag over her head. Having by now restricted both Tata's legs and hands, Kalev kicks her face and strikes her body so that she lies on the floor with her back and hands facing the audience. Tata begins to shift legs, to move arms back and down further toward her hips. She opens hands, lifts arms up, and shifts her body slightly to the side so that she can get to the boom box. She then rolls her body onto the stomach, lifts up arms again, and begins to articulate her fingers.

This section brings new context to the ensemble's binding of arms that took place during paggett and Tarpaga's duet and more broadly extends *Saudade's* investigation of oppressive dynamics. In Roussève's own words about this sequence, he sought to explore the following when working with Tata: "It's this denying of her power. When she seems to have the ultimate defeat, the tips of her fingers are still dancing." Moreover, Roussève knew he wanted to explore what might occur if you "keep binding the Bharatanatyam dancer" as part of his larger interest in how "World Dancers, dancers from many world forms, are not asked to do crazy, experimental ideas."³¹⁰ Here, Roussève delves into an understanding of identity that exists outside Gilroy's resistance to blackness being comprehended merely as a collective memory of slavery. The action of binding wrists together certainly has deep resonance in *Saudade's* choreography and more broadly its narratives on the conditions of black women's enslavement; however, the terms of diaspora are expanded in Roussève's work to encompass an experimentation of the relationship between African and Asian communities. Roussève's comments seem to reflect theoretical frameworks for classical Indian dance proffered by historian Janet O'Shea's that compel Bharatanatyam practitioners to define classical dance as an experimental practice in

³¹⁰ David Roussève, interview by author, April 20, 2015.

order to provoke questions about globalization.³¹¹ Roussève encourages artists toward this effort by supporting them as “they were inspired to push the boundaries of their form.” He finds ways to intersect artists’ own aims to reshape guidelines of the forms that they dance within by, for instance, integrating the action of binding in different sections.

Dance reviews recognize how *Saudade* prioritizes an inquiry into artists’ individual dance forms, yet their discussions reiterate some of the inherent problems in the World Dance category. Charles McNulty of the *Los Angeles Times* acknowledges the terms of World Dance in *Saudade* in describing REALITY as a “transnational” and “multiethnic” company that expresses narratives in a “kaleidoscope of video projections,” “eclectic world dance selections,” and surges of dance theatre that appear to be constructed from improvisational processes.³¹² Robert Johnson of *The Star-Ledger* describes how REALITY “cast members, an international community have brought their own dances from far-flung homes in Asia and Africa.”³¹³ Deborah Jowitt of *The Village Voice* offers clarification on some of the backgrounds of artists in stating that *Saudade* includes “African Americans, an Indonesian, a native of Burkina Faso, and a dancer who studied India’s Bharata Natyam for 22 years.”³¹⁴ Reviewers also acknowledge the specificity of dancers’ bodies in their descriptions. McNulty notices how artists “press upon us an awareness of their

³¹¹ Janet O’Shea, *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), xi–xii.

³¹² Charles McNulty, “Spoken Words, Flowing Limbs: David Roussève’s ‘Saudade’ Weaves a Bittersweet African American Tale,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 2009, http://www.davidrousseve.com/saudade_latimes_04032009.html.

³¹³ Robert Johnson, “Saudade: Rousseve Asks Ultimate Question with Mesmerizing Style,” *The Star-Ledger*, February 13, 2009, http://www.davidrousseve.com/saudade_newark_02132009.html.

³¹⁴ Deborah Jowitt, “Dean Moss, Yoon Jin Kim, and David Roussève Practice the Art of Displacement,” *The Village Voice*, March 4, 2009, http://www.davidrousseve.com/saudade_villagevoice_03042009.html.

corporeal life” whereas Johnson and Jowitt examine the struggles linked to artists’ own articulation of dance technique and personal experience. Johnson posits that REALITY members “add their own themes as dancers fight or try to prevent individuals from expressing themselves.” Jowitt recalls, “People fall and roll on. Some crawl along roped together, and others free them. They dance slowly, awkwardly together as if drugged by pain.” Furthermore, dance critiques pay detailed attention to the dance’s focus on experiences of persons of African descent and the role of Roussève’s narratives. McNulty notes that the past seems to be a burden of present conditions as challenges in African American life depicted here, such as social and economic inequality, HIV/AIDS, and abuse “register in the body” of Roussève whose “imagination” is overwhelmed by death and attached to the paradox of slavery and freedom. Other critics place emphasis on how the different “images” or dance “vocabularies” of artists enhance the context of Roussève’s stories. “Transplanted to the American South,” says Johnson, “these movement vocabularies point to the universality of human experience as a bittersweet, Roussevian party-mix of tears and joy.” In her concluding thoughts, Jowitt provides the following reflections: “When I ponder what I’ve seen, images that seemed isolated during the performance coalesce in my mind and link more securely to Roussève’s themes.”

Dance reviewers sufficiently posit REALITY as a group of dancers whose cultural and ethnic identities encompass the borders of multiple nationalities and they also recognize the work’s firm grounding in Roussève’s memories, African American communities, and dancer’s own histories as it concerns cultures of Asian and African descent. However, more remains to be explored about how *Saudade* as an expression of World Dance, can resist the politics of globalization. For instance, McNulty does not seem to entirely grasp the production’s alliances when he wonders whether some of the visuals may “seem overwrought” or “jejune” in their

“wearying” presentation. In order to comprehend how the layers of World Dance in *Saudade* push the expectations of dance forms, viewers can focus on dancer’s capacity to articulate movement within histories of systemic violence, the ensemble’s ability to create solidarity with one another’s stories and with histories of women of African descent, and the gestures that intersect artists’ shared practice of dancing outside rigid guidelines. Additionally, naming racial diversity or calling attention to a desire to grapple with cultural differences can only achieve so much in a larger review of how Roussève collaborates with REALITY artists and utilizes their dance techniques in *Saudade*. Here, I refer to Jowitt’s introductory concerns about the relationship between self and other that choreographers frequently confront in the postmodern dance domain. “In the crosscultural kitchen of postmodern dance drama,” she explains, “it’s sometimes hard to tell whether the chef has embarked on a creative process to discover more about himself and his roots or more about the Other. Most often, it’s a bit of both.” Even a statement this useful and informative about the position of choreographer and other communities can become subject to the problem of World Dance when such an assertion does not lead to analysis of how artists perpetuate and/or destabilize the limitations and rigid guidelines of dance forms. The gaps in critics’ descriptions provide an opportunity to reflect on the significance of thoroughly examining the dilemma posited by Marta E. Savigliano, albeit with critical focus on diaspora and the ongoing historical violence associated with sexuality, gender, and race. Through *Saudade*, the World Dance problem—that is, how artists’ dance forms get positioned under very conflicted conditions of globalization— can be overturned if we critically assess how artists mold the boundaries of the category and actualize decolonizing potential when articulating narrative that intersects experiences of multiple social categories and movement to forge alliances with others.

II. Two Seconds After Laughter

Saudade develops an exploration of artistic forms of the Asian diaspora that leads to making a film *Two Seconds After Laughter* about choreographer Sri Susilowati's journey to Indonesia. As part of the four-year, dance-making process that led up to the choreographic work *Saudade*, Roussève guided artists to produce responses to specific choreographic tasks. For instance, he would ask artists to use their own form to capture "the essence of bittersweetness," for example, and provide them with "physical parameters: needs to come out of the floor, go front point A to point B."³¹⁵ For another assignment, Susilowati responded to Roussève's direction to complete an exercise on "endurance" by eating hot chilies. Inspired by her performance, Roussève came up with the idea to film her as she chews the peppers and to include a video of her consuming the substance in the dance. Adding to the layers of *Saudade*, Susilowati's devouring moment evolves to be a memorable act in the writings of dance reviewers. Unveiling the objective behind the initial, "endurance" task that Susilowati finished during rehearsals, Jean Battey-Lewis of *The Washington Times* suggests her chewing of red hot peppers contributed to filling the stage with strength.³¹⁶ Underscoring the thematic context of *Saudade*, Deborah Jowitt of *The Village Voice* not only describes the video of Susilowati shoving peppers into her mouth with tears running down her face, but also remembers the several instances throughout the work that Susilowati tried to get dancers and Roussève to try a red pepper but none would; Jowitt wonders if the peppers build concern for how we devour life, no matter the burns.³¹⁷ Roussève employed the eating of chili peppers as an invitation for the

³¹⁵ David Roussève, interview by author, April 20, 2015.

³¹⁶ Jean Battey Lewis, "'Saudade:' Rousseve Considers Human Condition," *The Washington Times*, February 9, 2009, http://www.davidrousseve.com/saudade_washtimes_02092009.html.

³¹⁷ Deborah Jowitt, "Dean Moss, Yoon Jin Kim, and David Roussève Practice the Art of

viewers to challenge the validity of his narratives, according to Robert Johnson of *The Star-Ledger* who insists *Saudade* grapples over the meanings of life by filling the theatre with contradiction, inspiration, and a continuous deconstruction of our notions of truth.³¹⁸

By reconfiguring Robert Johnson's perspective and assessing Susilowati's daring act as a space to question and reconfigure our comprehension of the past, chilies operate as an object that signifies an imperial past. Growing up in an environment in which she saw chilies growing everywhere "like weeds," everyone eats green chili peppers, according to Susilowati, who not only considers the pepper a "main spice," but an historical search for spices to be a reason Indonesia had been colonized.³¹⁹ As Susilowati evokes colonial memory into her dialogue about chilies with Roussève, she fulfills his aims for *Saudade* to intersect the artists' embodied acts with his approach to choreography and spoken narrative. Susilowati's actions in the dance and its colonial resonances also link to the potential embedded within World Dance to mobilize artistic form in resistance to these histories.

In the early stages of transforming Susilowati's work in *Saudade* into a film, Roussève makes choices about structuring Susilowati's experiences based on his self-reflexive position. He deploys an approach to *Two Seconds After Laughter (TSAL)* that focuses on Susilowati's life without children through the lens of his own familial experiences. she enjoys the moments of laughter and humor with her family, but following such joyful exchanges, she struggles to engage with a subject of vital importance in her culture: children. Through his experience of African American culture in Houston, TX, Roussève discusses how he shares something in

Displacement."

³¹⁸ Robert Johnson, "Saudade."

³¹⁹ Sri Susilowati, interview by David Roussève, June 7, 2010, transcript, University of California, Los Angeles, CA.

“common emotionally” with Susiowati because he relates to her experience of having no children and shares her inability to discuss the memories that evolve from having children.³²⁰ As the film becomes rooted in this relation, it connects with the form of filmmaking known as observational film by placing emphasis on the impossibilities of objectivity and rather revealing the importance of relationships between filmmaker and subjects.³²¹ *TSAL* becomes a film made in 2012 by Roussève that explores the return of choreographer Sri Susiowati to Indonesia after her separation from the country for twenty years.³²² In order to highlight the emotional displacement between Susiowati and loved ones, he structures the film around ten specific shots of bodily gestures that signify the comedic rigidity of her contemporary life in Indonesia. As Susiowati verbalizes a specific “Laughter Number __x__,” viewers see close-ups of her body to alert them to the specificity of her hand gestures. When the screen zooms to her upper body, she speaks to the camera in Indonesian and the words “This is number one” appear onscreen. Such a filmic process reflects Aparna Sharma’s descriptions of how techniques seek to specifically remind viewers that they are watching a “constructed artifact.”³²³

The film proceeds to explore the dynamics of laughter attached to numbers one through ten, returning to a close-up of her head, neck, and chest while she announces to spectators that her story will transition into the next laughter, or the next phase of her experience. The cinematic

³²⁰ Ariel Osterweis Scott, “Longing: The Global Postmodern Poetics Rousseve’s ‘Saudade,’” *In Dance*, March 2009, <http://arielosterweis.com/publications/feature-articles/longing-the-global-postmodern-poetics-of-david-rousseve’s-“saudade”/>

³²¹ Aparna Sharma, *Documentary Films in India: Critical Aesthetics at Work* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

³²² *Two Seconds After Laughter*, directed by David Roussève, co-choreographed by David Roussève and Sri Susiowati, photography directed and edited by Cari Ann Shim Sham, 2012, Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/66005208>.

³²³ Aparna Sharma, *Documentary Films in India*.

apparatus focuses on Susilowati as she walks down an alleyway toward the camera with her suitcase, and off screen, Susilowati's expository voice discusses her memory of being immensely popular despite feeling too loud and physically overweight to dance. In this way, *TSAL* provides images that reveal "social aesthetics," a framework that Aparna Sharma utilizes to discuss how filmmaker David MacDougall begins his "film by establishing the home's" arrangement and daily operations and prioritizing "the social nature of activities."³²⁴ Here, *TSAL* connects to an earlier film by Roussève *Bittersweet* based on its method of revising traditional approaches to an expository voice-over in film by placing emphasis on a woman of color capacity to narrate her own experience. Differently, *Bittersweet* relies on Roussève's long-term inquiry into embodying an elder black woman's narrative through the seven dances of "The Creole Series" from 1989–1992. *TSAL*, on the other hand, presents an interpretation of Susilowati's experience from Roussève's life history interviews with her and includes her narrating the text that he has written. Additionally, *TSAL* includes moments of Susilowati narrating her memories in Indonesian and English, but the subtitles end and she speaks only in English after exclaiming that she could never live where her family and community make her an outcast for having no children. Shifting conventional uses of an expository approach, Susilowati narrates her own understanding of this decision as opposed to having experts postulate their ideas on the subject. Beneath this narration are a set of bodily movements, co-choreographed by Susilowati and Roussève.

Roussève creates a conversation about embodying states of in-between-ness in *TSAL* as a result of the film's diasporic association with Indonesian history. As part of the life history interviews that Roussève held with Susilowati in the making of *TSAL*, she discusses having been

³²⁴ Aparna Sharma, *Documentary Films in India*.

raised in post-war Indonesian society in the 1970s with very little money.³²⁵ Recognizing her mother's role in her early dance practice, Susilowati's gratitude to her mother for her "art appreciation" and recognition that she fulfills her mother's dreams illuminates the contexts of historian Rachmi Diah Larasati's analysis of dance in Indonesia as an embodied memory from which women covertly transmitted creative aesthetic forms onto their children.³²⁶ This post-war era posited by Susilowati consisted of a mass genocide in which over a million persons disappeared during the large-scale retaliation against potential Communists or those who may have been considered a political radical in Indonesia. Prioritizing performance in her discussion of this era, Larasati produces an account for the dances that had been banned during the 1965–66 massacres and that latter received state support as it standardized dance technique in the mid-1990s, a period in which forms emerged as curriculum at the Yogyakarta Arts Institute—the facility where Susilowati graduated. As part of its national agenda to reclaim popular forms after having stigmatized these very practices, Larasati suggests that the state achieves its goal to preserve cultural forms and to control representations of Indonesian identity.

Larasati's comments provide vital context for Roussève's recorded dialogue of Susilowati in which she remembers her love for the "Javanese, Yogya style" as a result of it being "so heavily stylized" and more difficult to "learn because of simplicity." Offering the information to globalize Susilowati's insights on the ways that her dancing in Roussève's work would be "recognized by dancers in Yogya," Larasati traces the Javanese aesthetic to a "high" or refined court culture that the present-day state privileges to institute "sway over the nation's

³²⁵ Sri Susilowati, interview by David Roussève, transcript.

³²⁶ Rachmi Diah Larasati, *The Dance that Makes You Vanish: Cultural Reconstruction in Post-Genocide Indonesia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 61.

diverse groups through hegemonic over-representation.”³²⁷ Larasati offers some context from which to analyze the term “hegemony,” but differently than the previous assessment of Roussève’s film *Bittersweet* in chapter two that deployed bell hooks’s call for counterhegemonic art to actively dismantle ideologies of oppression, this section focuses on Larasati’s account for how states prolong oppression in their decision-making about dance. In Larasati’s discussion, embodied practices are “displaced and re-appropriated,” because dancing bodies produce a replica of previous practitioners that creates the global commodification of traditional practices.

Challenging overarching conditions of hegemony rooted in current displays of Susilowati’s chosen aesthetic requires paying close attention to present-day life. The contemporary dancing of Susilowati exists at the margins of Larasati’s account for hegemonic multiculturalism as potentially oppressive in the global sphere. Susilowati’s practice diverges from this depiction of the displaced classical Indonesian body because the multicultural gaze of audiences on her work neglects to recognize her underlying radical and political aims. The term “contemporary” provides vital assistance in comprehending Susilowati’s form that may make decisions about classical or traditional repertoire while simultaneously choosing to examine social issues, rather than the standard practice of choreographing works that, as Susilowati indicates, may focus on highlighting beauty in nature.³²⁸ Susilowati’s interest in contemporary politics transfers to the *TSAL* film as it examines the cultural and national displacement of a woman of color dancer living between the worlds of the U.S. and Indonesia.

In *TSAL*, Roussève explores ways of healing from familial discomforts by recreating expressions of gesture and movement. Susilowati applies makeup with a white toothpick, the

³²⁷ Rachmi Diah Larasati, *The Dance that Makes You Vanish*, 93.

³²⁸ Sri Susilowati, interview by author, November 15, 2013.

camera gazing at the golden balls and intricate jewelry adorning her head. Returning to the backstreet, Susilowati lowers to the earth in her golden dress and with a gasp of breath, the camera watches her from behind as she walks away. He pays detailed attention to Susilowati's movements as she dances in unison with her classmates through a deserted town. The camera pauses to watch Susilowati move in the center of an ensemble of women dancers dressed in black with colored scarves cinched at the waist. Here, the camera develops an acute interest in the virtuosity of movements being articulated in specific areas of the body. It focuses on the ball of the foot to witness dancers place their bodies in unison on a dirt road, the level of the neck and shoulder blades to view chins shifting from left to right, and centers at the hips to observe hands flip scarves, right palms face toward the camera, and thumbs touch between the middle and pointer fingers. The camera positions her in the center as she moves alongside her former dance classmates surrounded by trees, but her position in the formation with other dancers does not remain stagnant. Her torso begins to burst out of balance with the other dancers, her head shifts out of place, and her hands move rapidly as her classmates maintain a slower, rhythmic pace. This sequence reveals how Susilowati's movements differ from those persons that she had danced with two decades prior because her movements have transformed into quick, sudden, rapid, and displaced gestures.

In the end of the film, the camera shifts from close-ups of Susilowati's swiftly moving gestures to long distant shots of her standing in a mound surrounded by a vast horizon of sky and green landscape. Roussève captures this viewing in rigid snapshots that move calculatedly from close to far visuals. Susilowati's final dancing appears as different images that freeze her ten laughs into photographs she might have gazed upon repeatedly in her home in the U.S. Roussève employs long shots for observers to witness her from a distance and to view how

separated Susilowati has become from Indonesian culture and dance. The final series of short, medium, and long distance shots visualize healing in recreating an understanding of home as a space in which dance embodies the division between U.S. and Indonesia.

TSAL offers new progressive stylistic choices are illuminated through full-out movement and gestural vocabulary that converge in the body of Susilowati. For instance, she stands in front of a graffiti wall slapping her body with her own arms. As the screen continues to focus primarily on Susilowati's body, observers can view her standing in stillness on the higher elevation of a building from sunset to sundown, her body illuminated by the emerging headlights of vehicles speeding in the background. Having adorned her arms, wrists and ears, and attached a crown of jewels to her head, she wears a strapless black and gold dress with a jeweled belt tied at the waist, and a long yellow fabric and three-layered necklace hanging down the centerline of her body. While the camera withstands the drops of rain that fall on its lens and the area grows darker around her body, the screen speeds up the time of the event, making her eyes rapidly blink and her fingers quickly twitch. The screen transforms the real pacing of her body's shift from side-to-side into a rushed and off-centered pulsation. Later, to express her long-lasting distance from her homeland or place of origin, she stands in the rain, ripping out the ornaments and hair-piece meant to beautify her skull. *TSAL*'s movements explicate the larger narrative about her existence as both linked and set apart from family and Indonesia. While *TSAL* illustrates the complexities of one dancer's journey, the production continues to operate within the conditions of the independent industry that can cause filmmakers to make difficult decisions such as abbreviating a multilayered woman of color story.

Roussève, director of photography and editor Cari Ann Shim Sham, and Sri Susilowati had great difficulty in editing *TSAL* down to half its original content. Remembering the

difficulties in letting go of “images we loved” and that “were so gorgeous,” Susilowati “wanted to put them all” but “artistic decisions and the time” prohibited including every visual.³²⁹

Providing agreement to Susilowati’s reflections in terms of stories, Roussève posits that the “editing ended up being an artistic decision of what is the core of the piece,” although there were three times as many stories that “were all good and equal.”³³⁰ According to Cari Ann Shim Sham, “we needed it all, it all felt equally important. It wasn’t until we got back and saw it with a bit of detachment that we realized that some of the shots/scenes were repetitions of the same idea, so we ended up choosing the most compelling one.”³³¹ Even further, Roussève feels that they “had a stronger film at thirty minutes,” but Shim Sham articulated to him that if he wanted “it to screen then get it down to fifteen minute.” In Roussève’s terms, “the beauty of that artistically is learning to be succinct.”³³² Some of the main losses in shifting from the 30-minute edition to the fifteen-minute edition of the film entail the detailed, visual attention paid to the creativity and politics associated with a woman of color’s childhood. Absent from the second edition is the song vocalized by the child who depicts young Susilowati, gazing up to the sky. Meanwhile Susilowati’s over-voice expresses: how “we’d lay on our backs on the porch, close enough to feel each other breathe. We’d find the neighbor’s face in the clouds...then in the Beringin trees...then in the big house where cigarettes are smoked for pleasure instead of

³²⁹ Sri Susilowati, interview by author, November 15, 2013.

³³⁰ David Roussève, interview by author, April 29, 2014.

³³¹ Cari Ann Shim Sham, interview by author, November 3, 2013.

³³² David Roussève, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, October 1, 2013.

hunger.”³³³ Also not included in the second edition is another childhood element where the images of the toy rabbit and train car get captured from behind the shadows of kneeling bodies.

Most significant to the absences consist of young Susilowati’s experiences that create a dialogue on women of color and political regimes. As the camera follows the young Susilowati walking to bargain in the market, her hand points to indicate the fruit she desires, shakes to articulate her disagreement over price, and opens to agree to pay the most feasible cost as well as to accept the product. The first film shows visuals of the girl child walking to market to negotiate the price of food on behalf of her family, the camera focusing on her finger pointing, shaking, giving money, and taking bananas. Narrating this experience for the screen, Susilowati describes the joys of this experience being how she forced “those men from 500 [rupiah] to 400 made me forget that I could not choose the colors I wore without caring what the aunties thought.”

Contrasting with this moment of empowerment, Susilowati describes the difficulty in receiving her city identification when a policeman refused to give her the permit without a bribe: “From the way he looked down at me as I looked at the floor, we both knew my mother did not have it. I left with no permit, thinking about all of the wrong things. I had no choice but to pay.” Offering a response to the removal of these kinds of images and stories, Roussève remembers an early reflection that he received to the first draft involving a question about whether the film was “about her or Indonesia.” In response, he was “sorry to see the critique of Indonesia go” because Susilowati did not want “to see those things let go of such as her harsh Aunties” and she “wanted a harsh critique of Indonesia.”³³⁴ These conflicts endured by Roussève to ensure the broader

³³³ *Two Seconds After Laughter*, First Edition, directed by David Roussève, co-choreographed by David Roussève and Sri Susilowati, photography directed and edited by Cari Ann Shim Sham, 2011, DVD.

³³⁴ David Roussève, interview by author, April 29, 2015.

screening of *TSAL* illustrate how films become shaped to fit independent cinema requirements.

Independent financing for black filmmaking leads film studies scholar Jim Snead to use the term “independent” with caution because of how reliance on multiple funding sources can inhibit a filmmaker’s desire for autonomy. Roussève’s level of independence is based on university financing and protocols on academic freedom, because a primary funding source of both *TSAL* and his previous film *Bittersweet* was the School of Architecture at UCLA where he serves in the role of professor of choreography. Black independent filmmakers negotiate their marginal location or their lack of financial backing by major studio distribution and marketing.³³⁵ Roussève navigates monetary disparities through his academic position that puts him in close contact with MFA graduate students at UCLA such as Sri Susilowati and Cari Ann Shim Sham for *TSAL* and UCLA graduate students taisha paggett and Raquel Monroe for *Bittersweet*. For instance, Roussève explains how Cari Ann Shim Sham is a “choreographer who understands filmmaking and filmmaker who understands choreography. What I love about her video work is the very timing, the rhythm of her cuts, and the way that she edits.”³³⁶ Professional and highly skilled artists in the form of graduate students at UCLA offers a vital resource with which Roussève negotiates the challenges of circulation independent film work such as *TSAL* that deeply expresses the layers of women of color experience.

³³⁵ James A. Snead, “Images of Blacks in Black Independent Films: A Brief Survey,” in *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives on Black Independent Cinema*, ed. Mbye B. Cham and Claire Andrade-Watkins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 17.

³³⁶ David Roussève, interview by author, April 29, 2015.

III. Moreechika: Season of Mirage

Moreechika is the third part of our investigation into human contact with natural elements, and the systemic violence our greed has unleashed, particularly endured and resisted by women in global communities of color. Each piece, so far, has revealed its own life and stories, carrying us in a very particular journey of discovery. As with every piece, we found tremendous resonances between what was happening in life around us, and what we were working on in Moreechika. The mirage of a desirable notion of “progress” where we relentlessly consume material objects, not realizing that we are also exhausting our reserves of non-renewable vital resources, has plagued me throughout this creative process. While I realize there is no simple “going back”, there is perhaps a way for us all to walk together with greater respect for the earth, its resources, and all life that inhabits it. Ever single little gesture counts.

—Ananya Chatterjea³³⁷

Clear the smoke...nothing is hidden...Oh yes my skin dissolves...and loosens and falls
Talking through the sleep...I have yet to be again...Raw to the sky to you...This is the long held
note

Nothing is hidden...The broken cups burn...Clear the
smoke...Dream...Danzas...Smooth...loosen

Halt the digging...use our powerful hearts...The flames of grass...

For us for you for us for us for us for us for you...Nothing is hidden

The world burns up grasping over spills of oil drips. We are surrounded with the artifice of the products from petrol and unable now to even walk through water or wake from the haze of gas. Some of the world fight for the forest and re-appropriate undrinkable water burns the body, burns the wings of birds and chokes fish gills. The mirage of progress. The quest for nurture.

—Laurie Carlos³³⁸

The choreographer and artistic director of Ananya Dance Theatre (ADT) Ananya Chatterjea and the company’s theatrical collaborator Laurie Carlos offer description and poetic accounts to audiences about the 2012 dance *Moreechika: Season of Mirage*. In the program notes, Chatterjea informs spectators that *Moreechika: Season of Mirage (Moreechika)* becomes the third of four dances to explore women’s experiences of systemic violence in communities of color. As Chatterjea suggests above, each dance of the series has investigated how “we relentlessly consume material objects” through the company’s enduring inquiry into the impact of global

³³⁷ Ananya Chatterjea, in program for *Moreechika, Season of Mirage*, Minneapolis, MN: Southern Theater, 2012.

³³⁸ Laurie Carlos, in program for *Moreechika, Season of Mirage*, Minneapolis, MN: Southern Theater, 2012.

consumption of non-renewable resources and its ongoing search for possibilities outside environmental and bodily devastation. *Moreechika* follows behind the very first dance of the series titled *Kshoy!!Decay!* produced in 2010 to discuss the forced displacement of people of color from land and also comes after the series's second dance *Tushanaal: Fires of Dry Grass* staged in 2011 to examine the underlying conditions of women's lives in the gold industry. Continuing the framework of analysis on vital resources, *Moreechika* explores the human impact of the global oil industry. This dance is fueled by the company's long-term interests in how women of color deal with the effects of global consumption and depletion of essential resources and Laurie Carlos draws audiences into an awareness of how a poetic approach will be communicated during this production. Her demand that "nothing is hidden" in the program notes introduces spectators to the fact that rhythmic narrative will be part of the many layers of the performance and that such creative expression has been integral to the direction that she has provided to the company. As Carlos's theatrical process becomes a driving force in ADT's choreographic experimentations with Indian dance forms, their collaborative effort leads to alliances across Asian and African diasporic communities. Alliances deepen ADT's inquiry into cultural intersections as a result of dancers moving in duets, constructing a narrative for their performance in relationship to puppetry, and being in solos that explore queer of color critique.

A methodology of dance analysis and archival research leads me to examine the global impact of choreographies that connect practices based in different diasporic communities. My assessment of life history interviews with choreographers and artists and field notes of rehearsals and performances consist of the foundation of my ethnographic practice. A method of autoethnography emerges in my inquiry of ADT's work because I discuss how my participation in the company as puppeteer contributes to the intersections across Afro-Asian diasporas. While

researching the company's work, I performed as the puppeteer for *Moreechika*, manipulating five transparent figures that are in Chinese and Tibetan mythology known as "hungry ghost." Through this lens, I am able to discuss alliances based on collaboration between choreographer Chatterjea and director Carlos, research and performance of ADT artists, and the juxtaposition between dance movement and production elements such as music. I put forth an ethnographic practice of examining my relationship to the research. I rely on understandings of the complex role of the feminist in ethnographic practice such as Lila Abu-Lughod's essay "Writing Against Culture" on the conflict presented by merely objective analysis so that I can discuss how I conduct research on ADT from an interest in my connection with individuals of study and the position of specific bodies within the larger historical processes.³³⁹ In this regard, the field notes that I have conducted on the company through observing dance rehearsals, interviewing artists and collaborators, touring with the company in three locations, and performing in the *Moreechika* production, leads me to focus on the making of cross-cultural alliances in multiple perspectives that include my own experience. For archival research, I discuss dance critiques to incorporate their understandings of the choreography as it concerns different cultural relations.

Moreechika focuses on how communities of color organize an effort to confront the effects of oil production. Four stories are integral to the dance. First, ADT delves into the memory of a chemical crisis in Bhopal, India in which a disastrous spill led to numerous fatalities. Second, the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa, Nigerian poet and activist of the Ogoni people, helps the company to think about the Nigerian concept of governance and ways of

³³⁹ Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1991).

organizing people on the destruction of land, according to Chatterjea.³⁴⁰ As a result of Saro-Wiwa's work in mobilizing persons to hold Shell Oil Company accountable for its oil spills, the government sentenced him to death by hanging in the 1990s. His unfortunate death becomes integral to the very first section of *Moreechika* that remembers ancestors subject to an untimely death as a result of the struggle over oil manufacturing. In addition to Saro-Wiwa's activism in West Africa, the company delves into story of the Kichwa community of Ecuador.³⁴¹ The company is inspired by the film *Crude*. This documentary follows the trial against Texaco-Chevron Oil Company, a court case that emerges as a result of health and environmental hazards from oil spills. Fourth, artists examine the authority held by a woman leader in a Brazilian petrol company in order to assess how femininity can be invested in politics potentially catastrophic to communities of color. As artists of Asian and African descent build solidarity with one another under such contexts ADT explores gender-based violence in the terms of globalization, outlined by scholars of diasporic studies. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur focus on multinational corporations when discussing the most vital work of diaspora studies in anti-imperialism efforts: "export industry and manufacturing jobs, economic migrants stay home and migrate and the international discussion of labor more sharply divides those who have and those who have not."³⁴² ADT positions *Moreechika* in bodies of Asian and African descent whose performance work inquiries into the effects of producing vital resources. *Moreechika* demonstrates how Asian and African diasporas align specific histories of oppression through artistic practice and finds

³⁴⁰ Ananya Chatterjea, Ananya Dance Theatre Rehearsal (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN, June 23, 2012).

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 111.

ways to extend these alliances to the indigenous resistance to multinational corporations such as Shell and Chevron.

The program notes offer audiences a broader outlook on the dance. Describing first section of the dance “Almost Gone,” the brochure focuses on the tragic death of persons from the “explosion of a gas pipeline” and bodies that desperately “scrape their way back to life.” The full company moves slowly inside of massive pieces of black plastic to connect with the physical impairment endured by persons surviving a chemical explosion. “Almost Gone” explores the history of the gas tragedy in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India in 1984 in which a chemical spill killed many thousands and injured many more overnight as they were sleeping.³⁴³ With closer analysis, builds this section from reflection on South Asian person’s experiences to a creative African American process of poetically examining history, community’s resistance, and experimentation with classicism and tradition.

The choreography begins to establish alliances in resistance to the negative impacts of globalization by utilizing yoga-based movement to investigate chemical spills that have impacted the lives of South Asian communities. Chatterjea choreographs a landscape of carved plastic with bodies: remaining upright while wrapped in plastic, lying underneath an extended plastic stretched across center-stage, and balled up inside the plastic and crunched over toward the audience. Within the prop, dancers begin in stillness, breathing inside of their individual parcels of plastic. With slow motion, each carefully spills out of their tarps in the extension of a limb, the momentary peaking out of their face with elongated tongues and a wide-open mouth, their bodies enacting images of being submerged in toxicity and being mutilated from the inside out. The yogic practice foundational to ADT’s intersection of Indian forms emerges here as some roll on

³⁴³ Ananya Dance Theatre Rehearsal (University of Minnesota Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN, July 2, 2012).

their backs with knees into the chest and flexed feet in the form of Supine Twist Pose. This movement offers a complex reworking of a yogic philosophy designed to bring the body in union with an inner self, or as stated in the yoga sutras, in communion with God.³⁴⁴ Experimenting with yoga through contemporary analysis of multinational corporations, dancers move in yoga poses to evoke the memory of persons that have passed away horrifically from chemical spills.

Beyond the Bhopal catastrophe, “Almost Gone” adds to its memory of past industrial crises experiences of communities of African descent; an intersection that evolves as a result of the poetic narrative articulated by Laurie Carlos. She walks through the audience with the assertion “Clear the smoke/ Nothing is hidden/ Oh yes, my skin dissolves and loosens and falls/ Talking through the dream, I have yet to be again” as dancers walk with their plastic onto the stage and begin to set up. Her spoken text brings the audience into the performance through statements such as “nothing is hidden.” In stating that her “skin dissolves,” she also connects directly with the gestures being enacted onstage with extremities outstretched, pulled, and overextended. Her voice builds in tension by questioning, “Where is Bhopal?” She announces that the “refinery blew up in the night” while walking through the scenery of scathed bodies. Toward the end of her narration, she exclaims, “Dance your anger and your joy, dance the guns to silence.” This poetry incorporates a portion of Ken Saro-Wiwa’s poem that calls on people to “Dance oppression and injustice to death. Dance the end of Shell’s ecological war of 30 years. Dance my people for we have seen tomorrow.”³⁴⁵ The multiple connections of Carlos’s text and movement include walking through audience, performing alongside dancers, and linking

³⁴⁴ B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 20.

³⁴⁵ “Remembering Ken Saro-Wiwa – the Ogoni People & the Greed for Oil,” *African Perspectives*, July 22, 2011, <http://afriperspectives.com/2011/07/22/remembering-ken-saro-wiwa/>.

histories of South Asia and Africa. She becomes exemplary of how *Moreechika* intersects the lives of persons of African and Asian descent in performance practice and emphasizes community's resistance against the multinational petroleum industry.

While "Almost Gone" recognizes a history of mass death and native community's resistance through Indian dance and African diasporic theater, Chatterjea intends for an Asian puppetry practice to further enhance *Moreechika*'s intersectional politics. While the ensemble created a devastating landscape that unveiled the memory of persons' death from industrial spill, puppets were also displayed on the back wall of the theater. Designer Annie Katsura Sullivan had constructed the image of five transparent creatures known as "hungry ghosts," beings with extended tongues, spooked mouths, and protruded bellies. In an ADT rehearsal, I learned from Sullivan about how the puppets were based on a Chinese legend and mythology that reflects on the addictive, insatiable effects of greed. The hungry ghosts were ill-contented beings who offered a general haunting of what can result from being careless with human life.³⁴⁶ As much as this context provided by the designer became a vital source of knowledge on the meaning of hungry ghosts, this information also clarified the philosophy of persons of Asian descent that underlie the puppetry. Chatterjea decided in July 2012 that I would be the manipulator of these puppets in order to articulate a moment in history through memory and visualize the broader piece occurring in my "consciousness" as a storyteller.³⁴⁷ I would need to understand my position as an African American woman carrying out this type of puppetry.

³⁴⁶ Annie Katsura Sullivan, Ananya Dance Theatre Rehearsal (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN, July 9, 2012).

³⁴⁷ Ananya Chatterjea, Ananya Dance Theatre Rehearsal (National Academy for the performing Arts, Trinidad and Tobago, July 26, 2012).

By gradually developing skills in puppetry for *Moreechika*, I learned firsthand about how Afro-Asian alliances emerge through research conducted by artists. Carrying out the puppetry work of *Moreechika* entailed extensive training and research because I had to, first, comprehend Chatterjea's vision for the puppets in terms of consciousness, and second, master Carlos's guidelines in jazz aesthetic. Within the puppetry work, Chatterjea's ideas about envisioning *Moreechika* through consciousness were coupled with her encouragement to "write this autoethnography" when I expressed my deeply felt interest in the dance movement.³⁴⁸ My reflections on puppets became a multidimensional inquiry because of my own understanding of the term "consciousness" as a theory that works against oppression and the term "autoethnography" as grounding puppetry in dynamics associated with my experience. This latter term forms a specific ethnographic approach in which a researcher relies on "autobiographical data to analyze and interpret their cultural assumptions," according to anthropologist Heewon Chang.³⁴⁹ Autoethnographers place the context of their own lives at the center of their analysis, explains Chang who defines autoethnography as an important approach for social scientists and anthropologists to be immersed in comprehension of self and others and engagement with diverse cultural histories. While autoethnography provides an analytical account for how the history of self relates to others whereas Chatterjea's call to envision the dance through my own lens entails an aim for radical thought.

"Consciousness" is defined here as an approach to creating solidarity across difference according to an interdisciplinary inquiry into theories based in postcolonial literature and gender and sexuality studies. Postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon creates a dialogue on consciousness

³⁴⁸ Ananya Chatterjea, *Ananya Dance Theatre Rehearsal* (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN, August 7, 2012).

³⁴⁹ Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2008), 9.

through his call to radically overhaul the systemic structure that oppresses native groups and privileges the history of white settlers.³⁵⁰ Postcolonial scholars such as Paulo Freire have placed themselves in dialogue with Fanon to discuss the complexities of a dialectical world in which the opinion of the oppressor gets internalized into its opposite, namely, the oppressed. The term “consciousness” can be deployed to examine how artistic work dismantles colonizing representations through Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that defines the term according to how critical acts lead persons to understand their historical position as subjects in search of self-affirmation.³⁵¹ To extend Freire’s analysis into a discussion of the cross-cultural solidarity deeply rooted in ADT, gender and sexuality studies scholar M. Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing* suggests recreating histories of disembodiment to encourage living relationally, so that we enact “The Crossing” or reinvent the past traditions, aesthetics, and culturally-based histories of the historically disenfranchised. She frames her theory of “The Crossing” as a major metaphor for the Africans that were enslaved from the fifteenth through the twentieth century in European empires of Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands.³⁵² Her concept functions as a metaphor of The Middle Passage and those enslaved Africans who were disembodied and the experiences they still might be longing to articulate. Consciousness, then, includes a process of inquiring into personal history and experience to build relations with others. Chatterjea seeks for ADT artists to carry out a layered investigation of consciousness so

³⁵⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1963).

³⁵¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Marla Bergman Ramos (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), 20.

³⁵² M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 2.

that our bodies bring themes of gender and violence into performance and our reflections situate the dance in a pursuit of liberation.

To utilize self-analysis for the purposes of visualizing a cross-cultural form of liberation reality, I remain attentive to how founding company members such as Hui Wilcox connect with the hungry ghosts through research and performance. Artists who have been with the company since its earliest formation in 2004 are founding members who have long been engaged in a practice of shifting the everyday realities of oppression through interpreting dynamics associated with the self. Founding company artist Hui Wilcox discovers ways to locate her body in the first section of *Moreechika*'s "Almost Gone" based on movement and the images of hungry ghosts displayed above her. By describing how the hungry ghosts resonate with her familial past as well as her daughters, she exemplifies how to explore her own history and assessing these dynamics as knowledge. Through the visuals of the five hungry ghost figures with large heads and bellies and thin limbs, Wilcox recalls her grandmother's experience enduring multiple famines in China and how she stored bags of grain, rice, and flour in fear of whether such a travesty might resurface. For Wilcox, the hungry ghosts operate as a sign of the physical results of starvation or suffering from ingesting unhealthy food. She constructs a story for how she might exist as a hungry ghost: "I had this narrative to myself. I am a hungry ghost. Reincarnated in different forms. In 'Almost Gone,' I'm wrapped in plastic. My tongue—capitalism—clogged in a machine. We are a hungry ghost. So I try to connect those pieces."³⁵³ Wilcox's practice of exploring her grandmother's memory reflects the kinds of suggestions that Heewon Chang makes for autoethnographers to produce a "kin-gram" to collect data about memory. Wilcox's interpretation leads to autoethnography when she examines herself in her grandmother's past,

³⁵³ Hui Wilcox, interview by author, October 7, 2012.

illuminating how bodies continue to pass down histories. Yet, the results of autoethnography greatly differ in Wilcox's case, because live performance becomes the final result rather than the textual forms of writing recommended by Chang.

In "Almost Gone," Wilcox comes from stage left, the stretching of her plastic momentarily turning the screen of hungry ghosts to complete blackness. She moves one step at a time with an arm reaching high and the other held parallel to floor, creating a triangular shape with the plastic as she walks. She turns her body clockwise with arms remaining in the same position and she tightens the plastic more closely around her legs. After continuing to turn, she then crouches down to the floor to begin crawling off and her arms and head are slowly revealed as she scrapes her way off stage. Through dance, her autoethnography offers a performative analysis of how the hungry ghost image leads to remembering histories of extreme food scarcity. As Wilcox's practice fits outside a textual process of writing history, her autoethnography specifically resembles the description of performances by sociologist Patricia Leavy that are informed by ethnographic research data and that are created to be represented on stage, to develop additional data, or to revise text for analytical purposes.³⁵⁴ Although Leavy's accounts for performance as research clarifies Wilcox's dancing as an inquiry into cultural histories, textuality continues to be privileged when suggesting that researchers begin performance ethnographies by producing a written script. In ADT's process, the writing of a script or text does not lead to a deeply analytical, artistic production, rather the structure of dancer's bodies in the performance itself establishes the cultural investigation. Wilcox's investigation shifts into a dialogue on daily forms of structural oppression when Wilcox translates her movements in this section as being entangled in the effects of capitalist enterprise. She delves into her

³⁵⁴ Patricia Leavy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice* (New York: Guilford, 2009), 143.

grandmother's memory, associates familial history with the visuals of hungry ghosts, and then positions these analyses within the section's objective to focus on the chemical spills caused by corporations. Her investigation also reveals how a focus on women and histories of violence in communities of color emerges even as sections such as "Almost Gone" place broader emphasis on industrial disasters. Artists' own autoethnographies continuously reach toward a reality that reflects on past disadvantages and takes embodied action to cultivate the possibilities for a world outside oppression.

Differently than Wilcox, my own autoethnography focuses on my grandmother's story while placing emphasis on memories of labor among persons of African descent in the U.S. South. While Wilcox recalls her grandmother's experience with famines in China, my grandmother is a former sharecropper who worked in an agricultural system in the American South. My family was furnished by a white landowner to plant cotton, and at harvest time, they repaid the landowner for the advance and half the crop earnings. I understand my historical position as a descendant of African American farm laborers who worked under conditions of extreme economic disenfranchisement whereas Wilcox's autoethnography remembers the history of her family surviving a national food disaster as a person of Asian descent. Our stories bring forth different historical analyses because the labor of the sharecropper has been described as cultivating soil in early spring when plants sprout, picking cotton in the fall, and for women, also preparing meals, doing domestic work in the fields, as well as handling the year-end settlement.³⁵⁵ Moreover, sharecroppers have been described as part of a system in which landowners took advantage of a "more submissive class" when cotton prices fell, moved poor whites back to the hills, and replaced them with black workers. Even as cotton prices increased

³⁵⁵ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1990), 35–6.

in value in World War II, farmers were held down with obligation debts and were also stripped of the possibility to sell their crops and nevertheless farmers existed under the problems of racial subjugation and economic peonage.³⁵⁶ On the other hand, the famines in China have been discussed by journalist Yang Jisheng as the history of thirty six million deaths between 1958 and 1962 as a result of the Great Leap Forward created by Mao in which the “mandated rapid industrialization” led to “exaggerated production reports from below, but which could not actually be delivered.”³⁵⁷ Jisheng posits that the state provided no assistance when food became scarce and by the end of 1960, China’s population was ten million less than the previous year. The contexts of our grandmother’s stories greatly differ, yet we both connect these memories to a hungry ghost practice of remembering past tragedies.

Wilcox intersects philosophies deeply rooted in communities of Asian and African descent. She prioritizes theories associated with the African diaspora by discussing the importance of “a coalition and building an understanding of self,” because when “we are telling our stories, we are talking about ideologies.”³⁵⁸ In this statement, she utilizes M. Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing* to suggest that these coalitions “start from a place of healing instead of injury” because “everybody has her/his Middle Passage.” Though Alexander’s concept of “The Crossing” begins in a discussion of the enslavement of bodies of African descent and how these stories can be reframed to comprehend present conditions, Wilcox engages in this theory to understand how she can build solidarity with others across difference.

³⁵⁶ Theodore Rosengarten, *All God’s Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), xvii.

³⁵⁷ Yang Jisheng, “China’s Great Shame,” *The New York Times: The Opinion Pages*, November 13, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/14/opinion/chinas-great-shame.html?_r=0.

³⁵⁸ Hui Wilcox (roundtable, New Waves! Dance and Performance Institute, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, July 28, 2012).

The possibilities of Alexander's work come into fruition during a discussion between Wilcox and I. We specifically discuss how her two daughters would consistently try their hand at the hungry ghosts while I practiced at rehearsal. As I handled the puppets, Wilcox's two daughters sat with me, observing and occasionally demonstrating their own ideas about how to maneuver the figures. In response to my discussion of our shared experimentation, Wilcox posits that the "hungry ghosts probably resonate somehow."³⁵⁹ She speaks further about dreaming for her children to "have a community, a real community, of real women," because "my kids are my future—that's also part of healing." In order to create community with others, she connects these sorts of theories that have been constructed from the lives of persons of African descent while remembering her family's survival from one of the worst human catastrophes.

To expand on ADT's practice of being grounded in ways of knowing in communities of African and Asian descent, my research as puppeteer entailed focusing on understanding the meaning of "anguished spirit" in terms of my familial history of racial violence. Under the framework of the hungry ghost, my grandmother's body maintains certain memories long after her life as a sharecropper. I sat down and conducted interviews with my grandmother about her experience and history in 2011. As my grandmother reflected on her history of laboring as a sharecropper, she also remembered how my great, great grandfather was forced to move our family from Mississippi to Louisiana when the white supremacist organization known as the Ku Klux Klan expelled us from our farm of one hundred and twenty acres. She describes, "He had to start making preparations to move. They gave him, I think it was a month to get away and get everything he could take away. Because see he had cows, hogs, mules, wagons and everything. Guineas, turkeys. They give him, I think it was a month to get all of his stuff. But they only let

³⁵⁹ Hui Wilcox, interview by author, October 7, 2012.

him bring two of his mules from Mississippi.”³⁶⁰ I began to understand her memories within the context of puppets through reading *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, a book that I studied after I had learned from designer Annie K. Sullivan about how hungry ghost philosophy emerges in both Chinese and Tibetan mythology. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* describes the context of anguished spirits as being reduced to the constrictions of unsatisfied craving.³⁶¹ The teachings of Padmasambhava in this text examine how difficulties endured by ancestors continue to negatively impact contemporary life without rigorous action in the present.³⁶² These assertions shed light on how my grandfather’s history of systemic oppression still exists in the present-day existence of my grandmother. According to Padmasambhava, the only pathway to liberation from such histories is the “skillful transformation” of the ordinary states of human reality. Applying the writings in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, I intersected the hungry ghosts and my grandmother’s experience by projecting the puppets alongside the bodies of dancers to reveal connections across historical injustices. Accomplishing Chatterjea’s call for consciousness entailed an inquiry into my family’s experience of racial violence and dispossession so that I could comprehend how a reflection on these past disadvantages lead me into solidarity with others such as Hui Wilcox.

Bringing these into puppetry technique involved working one-on-one with Laurie Carlos on how to manipulate hungry ghosts through the theatrical jazz aesthetic. She advised me to refuse simply landing on a rigid, singular practice and instead, to focus on experimentation and

³⁶⁰ Granny, interview by author, December 18, 2011.

³⁶¹ His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama, “Introductory Commentary,” in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (The Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States), PadmaSambhava, trans. Gyurme Dorje (Penguin Books, NY: 2006), xvi.

³⁶² Padmasambhava, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (The Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States) trans. Gyurme Dorje (Penguin Books, NY: 2006), 20.

improvisation.³⁶³ Carlos guided me toward this exploration of continuous reinvention while also directing me to remember my history of dancing in former ADT pieces so that the puppets could participate in the work of breath and movement happening onstage.³⁶⁴ Through her encouragement to bring a history of past performance labor into the present, I could recall my dancing in ADT's *Pipaashaa, Extreme Thirst* in 2007. A section of value from this dance, for instance, involved the ensemble's movement in a restrained manner as a result of our waists being wrapped in plastic. In comparing this moment to *Moreechika*, Wilcox also became strapped into the fibers of black plastic, but she could hear the breath of artists alongside her within the plastic. As puppeteer, I envision this collective action while moving the hungry ghosts above dancers. I place the belly of puppets so that their large torsos crowd the screen, just after dancers have arrived onstage and positioned their plastic. As dancers move inside of plastic, the puppets remain in stillness in order to give audiences a moment to observe the place of dancers onstage in relationship to puppets. Reflecting the slow shifts in movement onstage, the head of one puppet moves around while the torso of another puppet on the left side shifts downward. Dancers start to move offstage with their bellies facing up to the ceiling, limbs stretching out along the floor, and their tongues revealed. The puppet with the largest crown moves in closer and the limb of the adjacent puppet touches his head, and brings his arm to his own belly until the bigger puppet pushes it down and off screen. The puppets engage in the dance through the specificity of body position, careful attentiveness to the performance, and precise physical movements. I learn to move the puppets through the artistic intelligence of Carlos who is informed by an African diasporic practice of jazz. I am in the position of a person of African

³⁶³ Laurie Carlos, Ananya Dance Theatre Rehearsal (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN, July 9, 2102).

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

descent who manipulates puppets deeply connected to East Asian philosophy of persons of Asian descent and deeply impacted by the guidelines of African American cultural forms.

Following solidarities constructed in puppetry, dance, and poetry, alliances across Asian and African diaspora communities continues to build in the next section's duet titled "Vision." The exchanges between Ananya Chatterjea and dancer Sherie Apungu bring forth the possibilities of coalition between persons of Asian and African descent as a call for resistance against oppression. According to the *Moreechika* program, their dancing expands on the inquiry into industrial disasters as discusses how the continuum of "past-present-future" comes from "the shadows of death" to provide "a vision terrifying, horrifying, epic." "Vision" deepens the investigation of anguished spirits, or as clarified by *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the larger forces that remind us of historical terrors. Additionally, "Vision" shows how brown and black bodies struggle to change the ongoing damages of oil spills as it builds out of the conditions of the previous piece "Almost Gone." Sherie Apungu rolls to center stage in black plastic with arms and legs outstretched. Her body exists outside the images of bodies in plastic around her because she is fully exposed and she convulses her abdominals while others more fluidly lengthen a limb or turn slowly. In order to lay behind Apungu, Chatterjea manages to fight her way out of her plastic so that more than one body becomes fully revealed to audience members.

Chatterjea and Apungu begin to find the connection between their different bodies through yoga movements. Chatterjea forms a Low Plank posture over Apungu's body by pressing the palms of both hands into the floor, straightening the arms and reaching both legs long behind her. She then reverses the pose by opening the front of the body upward to the ceiling and relaxing the head back. Following Chatterjea's last movement, Apungu rises from the floor with her hips open and then rises over Chatterjea's body, first in Low Plank and then in

Side Plank pose by pressing only one hand into the floor, lifting the other to the ceiling, stretching the legs out long to balance on the side edges of the feet and opening the body sideward. Meanwhile Chatterjea's body lies back in Hero Pose by lying back with her spine on the floor, knees together, and the shins touching the floor. As Chatterjea and Apungu then embrace one another's bodies, this series of yoga poses enables them to search for the connections between their bodies and to find unity across their different cultural histories.

The technique shifts from flowing through yoga poses to articulating Odissi dance when Chatterjea sits in the square position of *chauk* with the feet apart, knees bent, hips sitting low to the floor, and torso upright. Apungu further escalates the switch to this classical dance form as she also creates the same amount of distance between the feet. Deploying the classical movement to produce dialogue on contemporary life, Apungu's chest leans forward as if taking in the vision of terror from the previous dance section "Almost Gone." When Chatterjea lifts her leg onto Apungu's left thigh, they oscillate forward and backward with the upper torso, flowing in a shared embodiment of having witnessed themselves and other women being completely entangled in plastic—that is, toxicity. Calling for attentiveness to the horror that she has observed, Apungu launches Chatterjea forward until her face meets the center of her own palm with outstretched fingers in the hand gesture *alapadma*. Apungu offers Chatterjea a charge forward in the direction of her view by binding her hands to the backside of her waist and reaching her arm forward in front of Chatterjea. With third finger and thumb touching in the *mayura* hand gesture, they bring the hands over the mouth, flex the toes up and bring the right heel to the earth, shift their gaze to the right, and lean slightly with the upper torso. The force of Apungu's movements becomes impetus to propel Chatterjea into concrete focus, a connection that continues to develop. When the tap of each heel quickens with the sound of their breath,

Apungu asks Chatterjea to pay further attention to her surroundings by gesturing her face to the floor. Chatterjea rises up in a lunge with the elbow lifted and head high. Apungu offers a lasting burst of vitality by stepping into double chauk, grabbing hold of Chatterjea, bringing her body left, shifting her to the other side, and swinging her around with Chatterjea's knees bent and feet crossed at ankles. In a gesture of gratitude for Apungu's capacity to push her toward awareness, Chatterjea embraces Apungu's head as she lowers her to the ground. Leaving her to put the newfound tools of memory to work on her own, Apungu's torso circles from the side, and then up and down to the floor with her hand in the open palm of alapadma. As Chatterjea had done earlier, Apungu faces her hand as it forms this gesture. She then forms a figure eight with her body by circulating the arms as she lifts one leg gracefully to floating off stage. The intersections between Apungu and Chatterjea illuminate the potential for black and brown bodies to be in solidarity with one another's struggles against the pitfalls of multinational corporate development in communities.

As "Vision" shifts into Chatterjea's solo, the movement recalls some of the gestures from the duet, signaling that her body has integrated the movement she had articulated alongside Apungu. She starts by squatting low to the earth, moving the arms to the side and pressing the palms down, stacking the thighs over the backs of the arms to hover her chest over the floor. From Side Crow position, Chatterjea carefully comes to the floor with one leg bent at ninety degrees and another straight behind. Now in Half Pigeon pose with the front leg forming a triangle on the floor, she embraces the ground and lifts. In duet with Apungu, Chatterjea's hands formed the lengthened hands and rounded hand of alapadma after Apungu lounged her toward this hand gesture. Alapadma comes with shaking arms, knees bent, and parallel legs. Though Apungu's has affected her body, Chatterjea still searches for her own grounding.

In Chatterjea's solo, she also interacts with the hungry ghosts. She turns to the back-wall and gazes directly at the single puppet being featured at that moment. Chatterjea highlights more of the curvature rooted in Odissi than previously as her body forms the shape of an "S" with her chin tilted to the right, elbows left, hip out to the right, and knees bent and pointing left. Chatterjea incorporates different sets of jumps by lifting to bring heels to tailbone or turning in consecutive circles to her left while pivoting on the left foot. She highlights not only *alapadma*, but also the hand gesture *tripataka* with fingers straight up and touching and just the fourth finger bent halfway down. To articulate *tripataka*, she presses the right hand forward and brings the left hand to the face. She frames the eyes with the hands as she had done with Apungu in a gesture of being focused and attentive to the conditions surrounding her. Whereas the duet formulates a transition from yoga to Odissi, her movements intersect these forms. She moves from the Chair Pose with the hips hovering parallel to the floor and arms straight up to lifting the left foot and then right foot in the open legs of *chauk*. She folds the body over forward with the hands to feet in Forward Fold. She then steps back and lifts the right leg, grabbing the right big toe to form Hand to Big Toe Pose and then sits with hips down toward floor and the feet wide apart in Odissi's double *chauk*. Finally, she leans to her left with the arms open, back leg straight, and front leg bent ninety degrees to lengthen the body in Warrior II Pose. Chatterjea circles her arms in a figure eight as Apungu had done during her exit. Yet, she continues to accent the relationship between yoga and Odissi, because she repeats the series of shifting between balancing on one leg and grabbing big toe to landing in double *chauk*. She goes back to the beginning yoga pose of bringing hands to floor and balancing thighs over the backs of the arm. By returning to where she had started, her body exemplifies the program's account for this dance section as exploring a terrifying vision. Between the two Side Crow poses, Chatterjea

accomplishes the philosophical work attached to the hungry ghosts of exploring the dance through one's own consciousness.

“Vision” is built from Chatterjea’s frame of thought as well as the thematic ideas of the company and an enduring engagement with Apungu’s dancing throughout productions of the Quartet. ADT artists carried out a specific thematic mapping of this section, discussing a series of conditions such as being alone, corrosiveness, as well as history or an epic that offers a horrifying sense of foreshadowing.³⁶⁵ The transition between sections “Almost Gone” and “Vision” illustrate how these dialogues evolve into movement as Apungu lies solo in the center of stage, her body shaking and twitching while surrounded by artists constraining their bodies with plastic. To carry out the thematic exploration that she had discussed with other ADT dancers, Apungu “dig[s] deep into the stuff that is me” to “consolidate foreign stories into my own story and then transform the movement space to convince audiences to take the emotional journey in the piece with me.”³⁶⁶ Apungu examines here the importance of intersecting her own story with others and defines the choreographic process as based on a series of emotions outlined by the company. Apungu then traces the cross-cultural intentions of the dancing to Chatterjea based on her belief “in Ananya’s passion, and her intentions to do right in the communities from which she is from and those communities that are oppressed” and her postulate that “Ananya and I did not meet by chance, I do believe our paths were destined to interact.” She clarifies how her process of linking her experience to others more broadly contributes to comprehending the linkages across different oppressions. Moreover, her statement about the exchanges between their life journeys underscores the relations across racial and ethnic difference in the company.

³⁶⁵ Ananya Dance Theatre Rehearsal (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN, July 25, 2012).

³⁶⁶ Sherie Apungu, interview by author, January 27, 2013.

To establish the aims of the company in cross-cultural interactions between persons of Asian and African descent, as demonstrated in “Vision,” Chatterjea’s choreographic practice provides an ongoing rather than an ephemeral inquiry into history. The very first installment of the Quartet *Kshoy!!Decay!* in 2010 features a solo of Apungu as part of the dance’s discussion of the displacement of women in countries enduring civil conflict. Apungu’s dancing in *Kshoy!* has the potential to shift a conventional focus of viewers away from images of African bodies in recurring ethnic clashes and rather into the image of women of African descent coping, resisting, mourning, and surviving the historical tensions and charges toward peace in their communities. Such a framing for Apungu’s participation in *Kshoy!* reveals how *Moreechika* expands on Chatterjea’s attentiveness to the struggles of persons of African descent through dance techniques and theatrical practices of communities of Asian descent.

Apungu and Chatterjea’s movement in specific dance positions and my manipulation of puppets demonstrate how forms rooted in Asian diasporic practices can create intersections across difference. These artists both articulate the Odissi dance position of double chauk, also known as a *mandala*. This term has been discussed by both Chatterjea and contemporary Indian dance choreographer Chandralekha as a physical posture that expresses an abstraction of reality. According to Chatterjea, the mandala is a position with the feet wide apart that can develop an abstraction of women’s collective bodies onstage with both a lack of interest in iconographic images and a rigid Hindu aesthetic.³⁶⁷ “Vision” deploys the shared dancing of two women whose different racial, cultural, and national specificities move toward bearing witness and calling out atrocities in communities of color rather than religious ideologies. Similarly, Chandralekha defines the mandala as an abstract position and from this account, she clarifies its larger meaning

³⁶⁷ Ananya Chatterjea, “In Search of a Secular in Contemporary Indian Dance: A Continuing Journey,” *Dance Research Journal* 36, no. 2 (2004): 112–3.

as an ongoing creating and breaking of geometrical figures that bring the body in unity with circular processes of the cosmos.³⁶⁸ Additionally, Chandralekha elevates the mandala's work as moving through every aspect of material existence to express the human body as a fundamental framework from which to understand everyday labor and objects. Apungu and Chatterjea sit the hips down toward the floor in mandala with their hands just under their eyes. This movement with deeply open lower extremities becomes situated in a larger cosmic universe, in part, through the hungry ghosts.

Introductory comments by His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* offer ideas that connect to the meaning of the mandala as rooted in the complex order of the universe; he describes the relationship between the present, past, and future life as parts of a causal continuum or cause and effect. Part of what anguished spirits “under the sway of attachment” teach us in the present life concerns the natural law of cause and effect or how habitual inclinations generate the path of our future existence.³⁶⁹ Apungu and Chatterjea witness the possibilities of the past repeating itself again, the image of hungry ghosts expands on their memory of industrial disasters and the lives lost that continue to be present. Puppetry deepens *Moreechika*'s abstract work by utilizing hungry ghost philosophy that reflects on ways of ending the historical tendencies damaging communities of color.

The hungry ghosts connect with a four-part framing of the dance in terms of gaze, touch, theatrical transition, and emphasis on the body. As Chatterjea and Apungu gaze out at the destruction that they have viewed and connect their own bodies at different points, the puppets reflect this process. Three puppets gaze out at these dancers until a small puppet's head slowly

³⁶⁸ Chandralekha, “Militant Origins of Indian Dance,” *Social Scientist* 9, no. 2/3 (1980): 82.

³⁶⁹ His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama, “Introductory Commentary,” xvi.

rises in the center. It meets the face of another hungry ghost and uses one arm to caress the other's figure. While the emotions articulated between dancers consist of care as well as an urgent push toward action, touch between hungry ghosts frequently involves a lack of compassion in order to underscore the habitual cravings these figures represent. After one puppet engages in the routine of touching his belly, it moves the other puppet down. Even this once territorial puppet eventually gets pushed down with the limbs of the largest puppet. The gradual focus on one puppet follows the theatrical transition onstage as Apungu has twirled off. Chatterjea and the hungry ghost remain fixed on one another's bodies as Chatterjea faces the puppet and its hand moves down toward Chatterjea. This solo puppet mirrors the priority given to physicality in her dancing, for as she grabs her foot, the puppet shifts over to reveal its belly. The hungry ghosts contribute to the technical roots of the dance in cosmic force by connecting with the movement and structure of "Vision."

Moreechika emphasizes how systemic violence gets "endured and resisted by women in global communities of color," as indicated by Chatterjea in the program; yet, a specific part of the dance titled "Plastic Desire" persuades audiences to unsettle certain biological conventions by integrating a gay black male body into contemporary Indian dance practice and into the exploration of oil production. "Plastic Desire" moves from the understanding of oil spills in communities of color as part of a tragic epic witnessed by women of color, to examining how a politics of femininity contributes to the exploitation of vital resources. The program explicates how this piece delves into the role of "power and femininity" in a "world run by the grab for resources." This section features dancer Orlando Hunter who moves onstage from the shadows in a slow walk, shifting his hips from right to left, grabbing the plastic and lifting it up to his chest, and walking with parallel, flexed feet. Differently than "Vision," Hunter begins this section with

elements integral to Odissi dance rather than yoga. The extension of the hips further out to the side reflect the company's training in Odissi and certain exercises with *tribhangi* pose in which dancers bring the weight onto the left foot, reach the right foot forward, slightly out at a diagonal, bend both knees, and extend the hip out further to the right. Hunter's use of the feet also comes from *tribhangi* training in which dancers maintain the position previously described, but lean entirely on the left foot to lift the right foot off the floor, bring it in toward the body, and lower the ball of the foot to the floor to create a half-moon shape. Although Hunter completes his walk in parallel instead of *tribhangi*, he still executes the hip extensions and lift and flexion of feet. When he suddenly grabs the plastic, whips it around, and continues walking toward the audience in a slow, sultry manner, he gradually finds his place, just off to the side of audience's view. Hunter has given spectators ample time to reflect on the layers of femininity that exceed a mere discussion of cis-gender female bodies who identify with the sex given to them at birth. As he articulates the hips, he opens an opportunity for observers to consider how the body expresses power by quickly throwing a stretch of plastic well-over fifteen feet long.

Hunter shifts into the next movement that expands notions of gender expression by bringing further attention to his hips in making the garment worn traditionally by Indian women. According to historian Priya Srinivasan, the sari is linked both to the concept of a model Indian female and the principles of an Indian cultural nationalist discourse.³⁷⁰ Through cultural nationalism, posits Srinivasan, female bodies of South Asian descent in diasporas such as the U.S. emerge as inversion of normative white identity, a preservation of heteronormative, patriarchal, and typically Orientalist features that point to an ideal citizen. She calls for a kind of rejection to the disciplining in dance spaces that reiterate notions of cultural nationalism. In

³⁷⁰ Priya Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 119.

“Plastic Desire,” Hunter delves into the complexities of femininity, culture, and nationalism associated with sari and does so through research on global leaders in the petroleum-based business. He turns to face away from the audience and to form the sari halfway around his hips and circles around to bring the plastic over to the right. He leans down to grab the plastic in order to make pleats, stretching the plastic and folding it around his left hand. He bends knees low in tribhangi and shifts between hips. Completing the sari, he lifts plastic over the shoulder to stretch the fabric across his chest and behind his body. For final touches, he lengthens the sari down over legs, tightens it around his waste, pleats again near his right hip and then steps over onto tribhangi. To fully showcase his newly crafted ensemble, he executes one of the tribhangi exercises by establishing the stance with left hip out and right foot forward and then stepping onto right heel, lifting and lowering back foot, and returning right foot flat to floor.

Hunter designs a plastic sari around his waist to embody the feminine and masculine roles played by authority figures in the global petroleum business. He shaped this traditional garment around his hips to focus on how leaders become complicit with environmental hazards of the oil industry. Authority held by corporate women frontrunners such as Maria das Graças Foster, leader of Brazil’s state-controlled petroleum company, play a major role in the research he conducted for this piece. Chatterjea provided him with articles and they both discussed the intersection of Maria das Graças Foster’s “emotions as a woman who is the head of this huge oil company that is predominantly male driven in that industry and the fact that the oil company is harming women and children and water resources.”³⁷¹ For instance, an oil spill unleashed three thousand barrels at Chevron’s Frade Field development project in 2012 where Brazil’s Petrobras

³⁷¹ Orlando Hunter, interview by author, September 20, 2012.

petroleum company is a partner.³⁷² “Plastic Desire” explores the slippage attached to the roles male and female bodies are supposed to play in a structure of power ruled by multinational corporations as both femininity and masculinity get wrapped up in a grab for global resources.

As Chatterjea envisions the possibilities of *Moreechika* through the lens of the lives of South Asian women and gay African American men, the sari and Hunter’s dancing connect different cultural histories. As Chatterjea indicates, she aims to “deconstruct the sari on her body” as a result of the past conditions in which classical aesthetics were formed in postcolonial India. She intends to pose questions about what it means to claim a radical space in order to replace the merging of realities into an ideal beauty or the preservation of form as having a seamless history with a choreography’s direct address to internal hierarchies of gender and class and relationships across difference.³⁷³ When Hunter’s experience is associated with Chatterjea’s aims to locate the sari in progressive thought as it concerns social categories, developing new ways of understanding how bodies express themselves with feminine and masculine qualities and highlighting queer sexualities becomes vital to *Moreechika*’s goal to deal with corporate power’s hold on essential resources. Hunter constructs his intentions as follows: “There is this archetype of black male dancer that people have in their mind and I don’t want to be that. That’s why taking on this femininity is definitely breaking that boundary. A lot of time, gay men are placed in that heteronormative role. It’s counter to their everyday life, being able to express themselves

³⁷² Rodrigo Orihuela and Peter Millard, “Petrobras First Female CEO Is Rousseff’s Response to Delayed Oil,” *Bloomberg.com*, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-06-01/petrobras-first-female-ceo-is-rousseff-s-response-to-delayed-oil>.

³⁷³ Ananya Chatterjea, “Dancing Fugitive Futures” (roundtable, University of Minnesota Twin Cities, September 11, 2012, Minneapolis, MN).

and have their whole idea onstage.”³⁷⁴ Chatterjea and Hunter’s exchanges in the making of “Plastic Desire” lead to a radical intersection of positioning South Asian women’s traditions alongside gay men of African descent’s objective to perform outside heterosexual norms. Moreover, this dance section produces reflection on how choreographic representation can bring queer sexuality into analyses of multinational corporations. Black masculinity takes on the weight of respectability for societies across the world, pinpoints M. Jacqui Alexander.³⁷⁵ As such body politics enable imperialism to exist and for new boundaries around sexual practices to be maintained, she calls for a liberatory engagement that works to dismantle the power of heterosexual myths. According to Alexander, the state commodifies the nation by constantly making way for the needs of multinational capital. In the process of carefully accenting the hips while constructing a sari marked by conflicted roles of women in the corporate realm, the exploration of Hunter’s body reveals potential for a deconstructed sari to unsettle hierarchies.

Dialogues on femininity and resources expand as the music evokes an inquiry into how petroleum gets directly applied to bodies. While Hunter’s body moves through Odissi dance to express the power of femininity in contributing to oil development crises, the voice of Laurie Carlos sings of having “used always one hundred percent petroleum jelly/ Royal Crown/ Dixie Peach/ Tar Road/ Flames in the kitchen/ Flames/ Nooo!/ Nooo!/ Nooo!/ Nooo!/ Nooo!/ Nooo!” Carlos’s words are accompanied by background noises that reflect the sounds of a horse carrying a chariot on the road. Her voice gets punchy and irritated as if her face were clenching tightly. When she allows for pause between words, it seems as if she takes a moment to remember each time that she may have treated dry skin with petroleum jelly. When listening to Carlos’s poetry, I

³⁷⁴ Orlando Hunter, interview by author, September 20, 2012.

³⁷⁵ M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 60.

think of a pressing hair-comb that is used to straighten curly locks by placing the tool on the stovetop to be heated. Carlos's poetry and vocals offer further means to enhance the cross-cultural dialogue on femininity to include beautifying practices in lives of bodies of African descent. The phrase "Flames in the kitchen" reminds me of how petroleum was utilized on my own locks for proper straightening as I sat beneath my grandmother in the kitchen as she carefully moved the comb through my thick, long hair. The abstract composition of Carlos's narratives offer an opportunity to explore a conundrum: how petroleum gets entangled into how persons beautify themselves or become complicit with consuming vital resources in daily life.

Moreechika further explores this problem of the everyday practices that underlie the depletion of a resource through ensemble movement, small group dancing, and puppetry. Following "Plastic Desire," the next section "Progress-nightmare-progress" engages audiences in the perils of a world ruled by an exchange of buying and selling as the brochure discusses life in capitalist societies "fueled by consumption" that ends in "a graveyard from where we cannot emerge, returning to a linear notion of progress till we drop useless." This section features the entire ensemble dancing in a tightly unified group, until their solid structure begins to break with shaking limbs and the grave moment starts as dancers nearly poke their eyeballs out of their sockets. During this horrific period, the hungry ghost with the largest face and most open mouth appears onscreen alongside the moving belly of another puppet. As the leg of a puppet goes across the other's chin, dancers open hands, step to the side, lift arms, bring elbows to face and above, and then bring hands to ears. Artists squat, fall, and crawl offstage and the face of the puppet moves down and reveals its belly. Moving across to center, its stomach moves down slowly with its limbs wrapped around its belly. As the foot of puppet moves off and up to the left corner, Hui Wilcox walks in and the conversation builds on how competitive behaviors might

cause persons to experience mental and physical self-destruction. I remove puppets from the projector and place black embroidered cloth that could be cut from intricately sewn leggings or tights. Wilcox's entrance and the shifting of the backdrop from hungry ghosts to a stagnant, yet pretty design, launches into the next section of *Moreechika* titled "Beauty." A chorus troupe forms behind Wilcox with dancers Ananya Chatterjea, Lela Pierce, and Renée Copeland as Wilcox prances elegantly about the stage holding a long, draping thread of plastic while completely oblivious to the dark lipstick scattered across her cheeks. The brochure describes this piece as a "ruthless" quest in which "cosmetic notions of beauty" produce "toxicity, physical, emotional, and mental." Her obscure stupor resonates with how individuals apply petroleum-concentrated cosmetics to beautify their bodies. My awareness of beauty focuses on the use of petroleum for hair straightening and intersects with Wilcox's performance of the effects of make-up products on the body. Even as the different backdrop visual allows for complete focus on dance movement, Wilcox's swift run in a circular formation around the stage with plastic flying behind her offers an alternative lens through which to comprehend the physically restrictive behavior that she previously articulated in "Almost Gone."

In this section, *Moreechika* culminates in analysis of how femininity can play a major role in exacerbating the already devastating impacts of petroleum consumption. The intersections across Asian and African diasporas reveal how multiple communities can be implicated in this destruction. *Moreechika* reveals these layers through critical uses of solo, duet, group and ensemble dancing as well as poetry, music, and puppetry.

Dancing Indigenous and African Diaspora Resistance

The world premiere of *Moreechika* in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad formed as a result of the alliance between Ananya Chatterjea and Makeda Thomas. While Chatterjea choreographs and artistically directs ADT that is based in Minneapolis, MN, choreographer and educator Makeda

Thomas is based in New York City and Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. The different worlds of these artists converged at the New Waves! Dance and Performance Institute in Port-of-Spain, the organization for which Thomas holds the artistic director position. Thomas commissioned ADT's *Moreechika* as part of the New Waves! Dance and Performance Institute's (Institute) annual summer program in 2012. Leading up to this world premier, "Ananya was first an artist-in-residence with the Institute in 2010. Then she became a core founding faculty of New Waves! in 2011."³⁷⁶ Thomas continued to connect with Chatterjea regularly by using the internet-based application known as Skype. Through the conversations and face-to-face visual provided by Skype, Thomas gathers that Chatterjea had "been supporting what I've been doing—spent hours and hours on Skype and that kind of support is invaluable."³⁷⁷ Explaining further, Thomas says, "it was really, I think, the culmination of years of investment on her part in the Institute and what it stands for." When providing an account for the Institute's activities, Thomas describes the Institute as an international community of artists who participate in a two-week, intensive study with faculty, artists, scholars, and writers from its residency program. The Institute utilizes all monies received for housing, programing, and accommodation rather than organizational building, explains Thomas.³⁷⁸ Broadly, Chatterjea supports the Institute through envisioning a role for its work beyond financial and structural constraints. With the Institute's financial limitations in mind, Chatterjea frames Thomas's organization under the terms of "radicalness," or dreaming in a place without resources and making things happen under difficult conditions. Specifically, Chatterjea serves as an Institute instructor by teaching contemporary Indian dance

³⁷⁶ Makeda Thomas, communication with author, December 4, 2016.

³⁷⁷ Makeda Thomas, interview by author, November 3, 2012.

³⁷⁸ Makeda Thomas, interview by author, November 3, 2012.

and she also participates in courses taught by other instructors, moderates two Institute dialogues, and directs ADT as it prepares for its world premier in Port-of-Spain.

The 2012 New Waves! Dance and Performance Institute that commissioned *Moreechika* and for which Chatterjea provided instruction in contemporary Indian dance, held workshops and taught classes for artists in multiple forms, the great majority of which were rooted in histories of the African diaspora. I journeyed with ADT to Port-of-Spain as a researcher, performer, and participant in the Institute's diverse course load in dance and creative practices of communities of African descent. Through these different roles, I was able to witness firsthand the layers of ADT's preparation for the world premier, artistic dimensions of the Institute's curriculum, and the company's engagement with the Institute, as lead by Chatterjea's participation and leadership.

ADT held daily rehearsals, typically in the evenings for three hours at a time. During these sessions, artists' warm-up in the company's training system. These exercises include moving through phrases in three stances of classical Odissi dance known as *chauk*, *tribhangi*, and double *chauk*. The first position requires that artists open the legs one to two feet apart, bend the knees, keep the torso upright, lift the arms parallel to the floor, and then form a square with the arms by moving the elbows back in line with shoulders. In *tribhangi*, artists turn the feet out, move the right foot forward of the left about one foot apart and out to the right so that the right leg opens out diagonally forward. Dancers then bend the knees and extend the left hip out further to left. One rests on the left hip and the other at the center of the right thigh. The chest lifts up to the ceiling and over to the left. Further articulating multiple bodily curves, the chin shifts slightly to the right. Double *chauk* begins with the same upper body position as *chauk*, but with the feet twice as wide apart. Artists rehearse in ten different phrases in *chauk*, another ten in *tribhangi*,

and five different phrases in double chauk. For training in yoga, artists move through a set of postures in the movement sequences. These phrases include balance poses such as Dancer's Pose in which artists stand on one leg with the opposite limb behind, grabbing onto the inside of the foot; hip openers such as Half Pigeon in which dancers sit on the floor, lengthen the left leg behind them with the front of the leg facing the floor and open the right leg out in front of them so that the shin comes parallel to the body, and finally, they lengthen the torso straight up and then stretch it down to the floor; standing poses such as Warrior III in which dancers stand on the right leg, reach the left leg back so that it moves parallel to the floor, flex the toes and left hip down toward the earth, and extend both arms forward. For all of the exercises, dancers form different hand gestures or *mudras* such as *pataka* with fingers straight out and touching one another, *hamsasya* with the thumb and index fingers straight and apart, *mayura* with the thumb and third finger touching and remaining fingers straight up.

In addition to training, dancers also rehearse the choreography for *Moreechika*, breaking down each section to perfect the movements. The first part of the dance is titled "Almost Gone" and requires that the ensemble master precise limb extensions rooted in yoga technique as they each move within large cut-outs of black plastic. In the second piece "Vision," the duet between Chatterjea and Sherie Apungu builds an intimate relationship between them through integrating the strengthening plank postures of yoga and the grounded stance of Odissi's double chauk stance. "Chakra Vyuha" relies on intricate Odissi footwork to unify the ensemble in different geometrical patterns and formations. "Bird" features a solo of Chitra Vairavan moving in and out of yoga balancing postures whereas "Plastic Desire" necessitates that Orlando Hunter, Brittany Radke, and Renée Copeland be immersed in tribhangi exercises. "Progress-nightmare-progress" places layered hand gestures from Odissi and "Beauty" emphasizes the curvature provided by

tribhangi movements. “Game” intersects the hip openers of yoga with the spinal work in Odissi. While “Tremors of Spring” utilizes standing yoga postures to express a sense of preparing for resistance, “Anchuri! Get Out!” situates dancers in Chhau martial arts to embody readiness and militancy. “Blinding Storm” focuses on yoga movements and Odissi hand movements to connect with the ground and rise to and from the floor with extended limbs and spine. “Occupy” works with Odissi’s hand articulations and movement sequences that build a relationship to the earth. ADT’s participation in the Institute entails coursework throughout the day as well as dialogues with artists in roundtables facilitated by Chatterjea.

Thomas teaches the contemporary dance class through the lens of merging Trinidadian movement practices that place emphasis on isolating specific body parts such as accenting the hip and she explores ballet techniques that lift the body off the floor and extend the limbs outward. Chris Walker instructs the Caribbean dance course through his ideas about a Jamaican cultural aesthetic in which the body moves fluidly with an ability to lower the weight of the hips to the floor. Rennie Harris’s house dance focuses on intricate footwork and fluid movements of the torso. Diane Harvey-Salaam’s West African-based movement course is titled “Forces of Nature” and weaves together movements of head, arms, torso, lower body and hips. Ras Mikey C’s Ethio-Modern dance course fuses some detailed shoulder movements of Ethiopian dance technique with Euro-American modern dance. Queen GodIs’s spoken word poetry course is based on playwright Ntozake Shange’s “choreopoem” practice of connecting multiple stories of women of the African diaspora in improvisational theatre. Tony Hall’s Trinidadian folklore course is called the Jouvay Popular Theatre Process. It recalls the history of Emancipation in the Caribbean through stick fighting, vocal work, improvisation, and storytelling. Adding to the list of courses rooted in the histories of persons of African descent, Chatterjea teaches the

contemporary Indian dance course that experiments with the multiple Indian dance forms of ADT's aesthetic.

Through Institute roundtables, ADT participates in envisioning the radical possibilities of dance technique in the Caribbean. The first roundtable was held on July 21, 2012 and focused on exploring contemporary dance locally and globally while the second roundtable on July 28, 2012 discussed Caribbean dance in transnational terms. Chatterjea facilitated both roundtables and all Institute faculty and students were encouraged to attend these discussions. In the first roundtable, Thomas describes the Institute as a “radical act of building community” based on her interests in reimagining how the body and the world meet each other in dance and performance.³⁷⁹

Chatterjea substantiates these thoughts to define the Institute as a dream space where ideas become realized; however, she does not intend to simplify the conversation on the radical potential of the Institute's dance focus in Trinidad. While reflecting on progressive performance processes in the region with Thomas, Chatterjea also challenges the Institute's leaders and participants to examine how Western forms continue to be privileged in contemporary dance. Chatterjea poses the following questions during the first roundtable: Is ballet the base on which we understand our bodies? Is ballet the foundation always? What does “contemporary” imply when we use it? What does it mean, for instance, to practice Bharatanatyam dance with a pointed foot? Is the ballet line the definition of excellence? Chatterjea urges dance participants of the Institute to understand how the term “contemporary” has been “hijacked” to the point that dance forms within this category “must use the West in order to arrive at a contemporary place.” Thomas responds to Chatterjea's comments by discussing how the history of Euro-American dance forms bestows upon artists of color a certain level of access: “Modern dance does not

³⁷⁹ Makeda Thomas, (roundtable, New Waves! Dance and Performance Institute, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, July 21, 2012).

belong to Europe” but emerged from Native American and Africa-based styles. Thomas’s concern has been analyzed in Brenda Dixon-Gottschild’s discussion about how communities of color have influenced both modern and postmodern American dance practices. Dixon-Gottschild posits that no text has yet documented the Africanist and indigenous influences on modern dance.³⁸⁰ While both Thomas and Chatterjea seek for the Institute to create a radical practice of engaging with movement, Chatterjea maintains a specific objective to resist how ballet technique continues to be foundational to the movement practices of artists of color.

The first roundtable reveals how Thomas and Chatterjea approach the radical from different positions: the former through the position of Creole identity in Caribbean dance practice and the latter through envisioning a place for South Asian dance practice in the avant-garde. Thomas emerges out of a history of both emancipation and creolization or racial mixture between persons of African, European, and Asian descent. In her analysis of Caribbean history, Shona Jackson explains how Creole identity emerged following the need to replace laborers of African descent. On August 1, 1838 slaves were emancipated in Trinidad, followed by the arrival of indentured laborers such as Indian communities in 1845. “Emancipation in the English-speaking Caribbean in the nineteenth century saw the introduction of Indian, Chinese, and Portuguese indentured laborers, among others to work on the plantation that formerly enslaved blacks were leaving,” posits Jackson. She states that these groups gradually “came to form a culturally and racially mixed, or Creole, population and a complex social fabric.”³⁸¹ The moment of Emancipation not only begins a new era of cultural identity across racial difference but also

³⁸⁰ Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 47.

³⁸¹ Shona N. Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 6.

the celebratory practice of carnival to commemorate the landmark occasion of freedom.

According to Richard Schechner's analysis, Trinidad Carnival began as the celebrations of emancipated slaves embodying African practices and principles as well as European Catholic traditions of carnival that had been brought over to the Caribbean through Spanish and French slaveowners. Thomas brings forth her own concerns about the resonance of carnival in Caribbean dance spaces such as the Institute:

How do we present in the carnivalesque? *New Waves!* is not about bringing artists together around carnival. It's supposed to be about dance and about what site-specific means in a Caribbean space. When we're thinking about the Caribbean we go into a carnival space. It's a real effort to center it on dance. But this is perhaps a paradox of the Caribbean space.³⁸²

Thomas's hesitance to frame the Institute under the terms of carnival makes sense given the complexities associated with the history of its formation in the Caribbean. Her dilemma involves an attempt to comprehend the significance of this historical formation of carnival while ensuring the focus of the Institute remains fixed on dance movement.

On the other hand, Chatterjea struggles to place her choreographic work in a contemporary dance context as a result of prevailing dichotomies between the so-called "East" and "West" in the dance domain. Her concern extends conversations about colonial histories such as Edward Said's that critique how the West evolves continuously as the site of progress. "The West" operates as a space for rationality, development, humanity, superiority and "the Orient" functions as the site for aberrance, under-development, and inferiority.³⁸³ According to Said, "The Orient"—that is, Asia, parts of North Africa, and Islam—get positioned as Europe's cultural contestant, other, and great complimentary opposite to the West. Chatterjea places such

³⁸² Makeda Thomas, interview by author, November 3, 2012.

³⁸³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 300.

concerns within the context of dance in her book *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies through Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha* when she posits that the term “postmodernism” seems to be constantly linked to a radical ideology and practice, yet reserved for describing the cultural production in the white West. To transgress these constructed divisions between East and West, Chatterjea shows how the choreographies of women of color artists Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha redirect the course of the so-called “postmodern” from a focus on Euro-American aesthetics into creative works that place emphasis on cultural forms of communities of color. When Chatterjea’s enduring focus on the preference given to European-based forms exists in the Trinidadian context, she challenges artists participating in the Institute to comprehend how giving privilege to certain forms actually goes against a radical practice.

Chatterjea considers the possibilities of dance in the Institute to be a focus on the cutting-edge aesthetics of communities of color. The priority given to artistic forms of persons of African descent as well as Thomas’s attention to the historical contributions of black and native populations to the formation of modern dance demonstrates how Thomas also places emphasis on the creative expression of people of color. Thomas wants to include aesthetics known popularly as European forms in the works of artists of color and Chatterjea seeks for artists to be aware of whether the fusion between Euro-American and other forms lends superiority to the former. As Thomas and Chatterjea partner across their different cultural histories and approaches to dance, their solidarity exemplifies Chatterjea’s reflections on the Caribbean as a radical place for transformation that opens up space to build alliances between people of color.³⁸⁴ As different ideals about cultural representation meet in the Caribbean, it underscores Stuart Hall’s

³⁸⁴ Ananya Chatterjea, communication with author, July 23, 2012.

description of creolization as an area of cultural confrontation. According to Hall's approach, Caribbean identities can be expressed from the location of the repressed in seeking to highlight African customs that were historically silenced, from the position of exclusion in which Caribbean culture goes up against the dominant European presence as the "other," or through a diasporic presence of diversity, hybridity, and cultural differences. A Creole space in which different cultural identities intersect holds the space to incorporate Thomas and Chatterjea's alternative lenses.

Although different ideologies about radical Caribbean practice surface in the Institute, the folklore course carries the capacity to express Chatterjea's inclination toward movements that do not prioritize ballet lines. Instructor Tony Hall's class places emphasis on the practices of people of color during Emancipation in Trinidad while also allowing space for artists to re-envision this history through their own experiences. ADT artists Orlando Hunter, Renée Copeland, Chitra Vairavan, Ananya Chatterjea, and I attend Tony Hall's session that blends improvisation, theater, and self-narration in order for participants to make critical discoveries about the role of storytelling in daily life. Hall asks us to begin the session by marching in a tightly formed circle while holding long wooden sticks. At the sound of each other's collective growls, we stop suddenly on grounded feet to meet the eyes of the person across from our bodies and challenge them to a duel. Hall's Jouvay Popular Theatre Process allows us to connect with the movement histories of persons of African descent in the Caribbean. The term "jouvay" comes from the French word "j'ouvert," meaning "dawning of a new day." The Jouvay practice commemorates the official Emancipation Day celebration of August 1, 1839 in Trinidad, according to Earl Lovelace who uncovers the lack of effort to expand on the origins of carnival in the Emancipation-Jouvay tradition. Lovelace analyzes Jouvay as a creation of lower class Africans

who perform “freedom and the expression of the triumphing human spirit in a street theatre of song, dance, speech, sound, and movement.”³⁸⁵ As the “joyful rhythm of a people marching to selfhood” forms the crux of Lovelace’s ideas about Jouvay, his analysis provides further opportunity to discuss how Chatterjea’s interests in the movement practices of communities of color can define contemporary dance. Hall encourages us to remember the experiences of our own ancestors and requests that we gather in a circle so that we can articulate the role of archetypes in our everyday life. Hall’s Jouvay practice builds on Caribbean histories of Emancipation celebrations in ways that call on participants to be grounded in our own stories. Jouvay upholds the practices of persons of African descent, moves outside dominant hegemonic narratives that mark bodies of color as the opposite of European ones, and brings in the multiple memories of its diverse practitioners.

Chatterjea’s leadership in the Institute roundtables also produces conversation about how a radical Caribbean aesthetic can highlight indigenous people’s politics. She poses the following question in the second roundtable: what is indigenous to this land of limitless possibility where coalitions can be built? In response, Thomas discusses the challenge artists face in the Caribbean to resist the conventional narrative about indigenous people having been wiped out of the region. In an analysis of this very problem, Shona Jackson seeks to deepen awareness of how “the extent to which Creoles are able to imagine and institute themselves as natives both politically and culturally, rests upon the management of this radical difference through discursive repetition of native extinction.”³⁸⁶ Jackson calls attention to how Creoles in the Caribbean assert their distinct subjectivity in ways that rely on the vanishing of indigenous persons. Based on this underlying

³⁸⁵ Earl Lovelace, “Emancipation—Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pain” *TDR* (1988-), Trinidad and Tobago Carnival 42, no. 3 (1998): 54.

³⁸⁶ Shona N. Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*, 25.

presumption of Creole identity, the roundtable pushes artists to reconsider their politics of indigeneity in order to establish a radical dance practice that thinks outside a narrative about the total cultural and historical replacement of indigenous persons in the Caribbean. Chatterjea not only engages in developing queries about the role of native claims in a performance but also wrestles with these concerns in her own choreography. While the second roundtable encourages Institute participants to deepen their critical reflections with a consideration for native people's contemporary realities, the dance movement of *Moreechika* emphasizes indigenous people's resistance to multinational oil companies' strategies, actively reversing the notion of native people's extinction. *Moreechika* illuminates what David Shorter defines as a critical engagement with political struggles or acts that bridges relationships with the contemporary realities of indigenous people.³⁸⁷ Rather than bring contemporary Indian dance into a Caribbean context to further exacerbate the conventional narrative on indigenous people's vanishing, Chatterjea's partnership with Makeda Thomas leads to staging a dance production that develops solidarity with native politics.

Demonstrating the possibilities of radical dance practice in three sections of *Moreechika*, ADT's world premier in Port-of-Spain brings a layered investigation of native people's social movements into the Caribbean context. The sections of *Moreechika* titled "Game," "Tremors of Spring," and "Anchuri! Get Out!" explore the experience of pollution, mobilization, and resistance through the lens of present indigenous communities. These sections follow behind seven earlier pieces: after "Almost Gone" has provided a visual of bodies reemerging from death after a chemical spill, "Vision" has explored the recurring devastation in communities, "Chakra Vyuha" has positioned the ensemble in rigid, mechanistic movements to underscore the

³⁸⁷ David Shorter, "Indian," *Freq.uenci.es: A Collaborative Genealogy of Spirituality*, January 3, 2012, <http://freq.uenci.es/2012/01/03/indian/>.

constructed labor of capitalism, “Bird” has expressed the effects of oil pollution on wildlife, “Plastic Desire” has examined the role played by femininity in exacerbating corporate damage to communities, “Progress-nightmare-progress” has revealed the human impact of economic progress, and “Beauty” has articulated the accumulative, physical health risks of cosmetic products. According to the *Moreechika* brochure, the piece known as “Game” focuses on “contamination through unregulated practices of oil fracking” and is “inspired by the 18-year old Kichwa woman who is struggling with cancer in Ecuador.” “Game” expands on the analysis of how capitalist enterprise negatively impacts communities of color, by discussing how indigenous communities in Ecuador endured oil exploration, pollution, and health challenges. Second, “Tremors of Spring” examines how “Revolutions are sparked by the courage of a small group of people who inspire others to say ‘No!’” This section diverges from earlier pieces by taking an interest in shifting the course of those actions formulated by multinational corporations and prioritizing the sustainability of communities. “Tremors of Spring” turns mere observation into a desire to change the course of history through women’s actions whereas earlier sections such as “Vision” had focused on witnessing the daily devastation surrounding women of color. After “Tremors of Spring” builds energy toward solidarity with resistance movements that intend to overhaul the crisis of oil development faced by indigenous communities, the next section “Anchuri!” fully realizes this attentiveness to native people’s revolutionary practices through its focus on “women from the Kichwa community of Ecuador, who ran through forests for hours shouting ‘Anchuri! Get out!’ to protest against land encroachment by oil corporations.” These three sections of *Moreechika* offer to the Caribbean context, as established by Thomas’s Institute, a multidimensional inquiry into how contemporary indigenous communities resist corporate power.

As ADT delves into the experiences of people in Ecuador with pollution, health disparities, and environmental damage, the company builds a layered investigation around a complex history of oil exploration. The company's investigation of Kichwa communities derives from a larger case against ChevronTexaco. As part of his call for the oil company to compensate affected persons in Eastern Ecuador, Miguel Tinker Salas describes how public interest lawyers in 1993 advocated for native persons in the region by filing "a class action lawsuit against Texaco over millions of gallons of oil and toxic wastewater that released into groundwater and streams."³⁸⁸ In 2001, Texaco was acquired by Chevron who worked for almost ten years to ensure that the trial proceeding would occur in Ecuador, outlines Salas. ChevronTexaco was mistaken by any presumption that "it would be easier to influence the outcome in a developing country" because "after appeals, the company was found liable for \$9.5 billion in damages." Unfortunately, the plaintiffs had to then conduct the lawsuit in the U.S. as a result of a U.S.-Ecuador investment agreement in which Chevron argues that it can dismiss the initial judgment and assemble a group of lawyers with the authority to invalidate the Ecuadorean court's rule. Based on Salas's comments, an exploration of the ChevronTexaco case from the standpoint of indigenous resistance is integral as American politics aggravate indigenous people's capacity to gain appropriate redress. The depths of ADT's focus on the Kichwa can be further explained through Judith Kimerling's work that uses a legal studies analysis to examine how indigenous Amazonian peoples such as the Lower Napo Kichwa as well as the Huaorani were met with destruction upon the arrival of ChevronTexaco. "Their homelands were invaded and degraded by outsiders who, over time, dramatically transformed natural and social environments" and they "have borne the costs of oil development without sharing in its benefits and without participating

³⁸⁸ Miguel Tinker Salas, "Can Ecuador Bring Chevron to Justice?" *Aljazeera America*, April 24, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/4/can-ecuador-bring-chevron-to-justice.html>.

in decisionmaking that affects them,” Kimerling posits.³⁸⁹ The organization known as Amazon Watch launched a major public relations effort to support indigenous communities affected by ChevronTexaco in taking up the *Aguinda v. Texaco* case, but their support did not escape the pitfalls of controversy. Kimerling provides an account for how Amazon Watch’s original claim that five native groups and eighty different communities brought forth the lawsuit had falsely assumed that the case would continue to represent the 30,000 affected residents.³⁹⁰ Even with such challenging political and legal concerns, Kimerling demands, “there is a significant public interest and moral obligation in the United States to remedy injuries in other countries that result from the activities of U.S. corporations.” Kimerling’s analysis provides an understanding of the devastation faced by indigenous communities, the difficulties endured by American allies of the case, and the overall significance of U.S.-based support to the legal action against ChevronTexaco. Kimerling’s discussion offers essential context on the oil development crisis in Ecuador, because ADT artists were inspired by events told by *Crude*, a 2009 film that focuses on Amazon Watch’s campaign to support indigenous groups.

The film *Crude* concentrates on the effects of Amazon Watch’s advocacy, providing evidence of solidarity with native people’s resistance to multinational corporations. Indigenous groups directly affected by the petroleum pollution considered any damage to water to be a disturbance of the “life blood” of the community.³⁹¹ *Crude* begins with this metaphoric assertion to connect indigenous people’s ways of knowing to environmental sustainability and the

³⁸⁹ Judith Kimerling, “Transnational Operations, Bi-national Injustice: ChevronTexaco and Indigenous Huaorani and Kichwa in the Amazon Rainforest in Ecuador,” *American Indian Law Review* 31 no. 2 (2007): 503–4.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 483–5.

³⁹¹ *Crude: The Real Price of Oil*, directed by Joe Berlinger, 2009, DVD.

problems with resource exploitation. As David Delgado Shorter suggests, indigenous people “see their own agency in the emergence of new cultural forms as well as in the continuation of endemic logic.”³⁹² *Crude* makes viewers immediately aware of native people’s philosophy on resources, and from this standpoint, into the politics of indigenous resistance based on the events of the lawsuit against ChevronTexaco. *Crude*’s focus on redirecting the course of development away from destabilizing indigenous communities correlates with Chatterjea’s introductory comments on *Moreechika*. She provides critique of the “mirage of a desirable notion of ‘progress’ where we relentlessly consume material objects, not realizing that we are also exhausting our reserves of non-renewable vital resources” and her desire for “greater respect of the earth, its resources, and all life that inhabits it.” *Crude* reveals how indigenous peoples sought redress for the cases of cancer and skin conditions that surfaced in communities. The film follows the daily experiences of a young woman who has cancer and whose mother takes her to a medical facility for treatment. *Moreechika*’s “Game” specifically focuses on a dancer whose body suddenly falls ill and other dancers are stricken with horror and shock after observing the effects of her condition. ADT’s focus on Kichwa peoples build an alliance with indigenous land politics and emphasizes women’s experiences.

More broadly than the very specific inspirations for “Game,” concerns the company’s aims to establish solidarity with native people’s resistance against exploitation. *Crude* demonstrates how to support indigenous communities’ land rights as Euro-American allies provided litigator advocacy, thereby showing how nonnatives critically engage with native people’s struggles. As Salas indicates, “If poor, indigenous people could team up with environmental activist lawyers and win a legal judgment against a multinational corporation, the

³⁹² David Delgado Shorter, “Hunting for History in Potam Pueblo: A Yoeme (Yaqui) Indian Deer Dancing Epistemology,” *Folklore* 118, no. 3 (2007): 294.

balance of power between Big Oil and its normally powerless victims might change forever.”

ADT intends to work in coalition through an artistic practice that resists dominant narratives on the extinction of native people and utilizes choreography to build alliances with indigenous struggles. Here, ADT leverages its main product—that is, choreography—and its resources as an American entity toward supporting indigenous claims. *Moreechika* uses choreographic inquiry to hold the U.S. accountable for corporate failure to provide effective environmental and economic redress to indigenous groups. ADT provides a framework to look at how alliances with indigenous communities function in dance movement.

Moreechika begins to establish its support for the case against ChevronTexaco through Odissi and yoga that expresses racialized identities rather than a misguided aim to represent a supposedly authentic native struggle. Dancers Orlando Hunter and Rose Huey move their bodies into the shape of tribhangi pose by bending the knees, extending the hip outward, and opening the chest. In this pose, they tap the ball of the front foot to the floor. They then transition from these Odissi movements into playing double-dutch by quickly lifting the feet off the floor and bringing the knees up high. Artists expand on the imagery of playfulness by using their fingers to poke one another’s bodies and engaging in hand clap games. They touch their own palms together and then swiftly clap the insides of another’s palms. The games also include hopscotch as Lela Pierce jumps consecutively on one leg as if carefully controlling the place of her foot in a box drawn with chalk on concrete and then she ends the leaps in the yoga pose of Half Moon by balancing on one leg and bringing the other leg parallel to floor. She then moves her body seamlessly from yoga to Odissi by holding tribhangi pose and gazing at dancers Chitra Vairavan and Alexandra Eady as if daring them to accomplish a better movement sequence. Dancers are rooted in technique and in dynamics of play such as double-dutch that emerge from diasporic

communities of color such as young girls of African descent. Their dancing shows how bodies can be deeply embedded into a history of race and simultaneously deploy Indian dance forms to articulate the complexities of identity. This practice substantiates arguments in Native studies about the distinction between tribal nations and ethnic minorities. The circumstances of indigenous people in comparison to other racial groups in the U.S., according to David E. Wilkins, entails how tribal people are the original inhabitants, are nations of their own, and reside in lands that they have some government control over.³⁹³ As artists express different pedestrian gestures and movements such as hopscotch, running, poking, and jumping rope alongside yoga poses and Odissi stances, “Game” explores the playful environment of young people’s lives outside racial rigidity, through detailed technique, and in terms of indigenous politics.

Artists express their understanding of circumstances examined in *Crude* and their main focus on native land claims. Redirecting the energy away from play, Chatterjea stops in front of dancers with her feet wide apart in the double chauk position and then runs in the opposite direction of where she was facing, leading all other artists to chase after her. The pursuit ends when artists form a straight line across the front of the stage and interlock their bodies together. They bend down so that their spines are parallel to the floor and they reach their heads under the hips of the person in front of them. Brittany Radke has been standing behind all other dancers with her hand at the navel and Chatterjea comes to pick her up and roll her over the backs of dancers. Although their spines hold Radke’s weight, dancers continue to play as they focus on Renée Copeland crawling under the bellies of artists and playfully engaging with them as she moves to the front. Apungu’s body has been folded over at the rear of the line and she becomes

³⁹³ David E. Wilkins, “Indian People are Nations, Not Minorities,” in *American Indian Politics and the American Political System* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2002), 47.

the first artist to remove herself from the playful distraction and to notice that Radke has fallen immobile in Chatterjea's arms. She backs away from the sight of fatality with her hands in *alapadma*, shaking the fully stretched fingers and a cupped palm in front of her face. She pauses in tribhangi pose, circling her torso around in the three hundred and sixty degree, rounded shape of *angabhramari* or "body circle." Maintaining the tribhangi pose, she shifts her upper chest backward. Expanding on Apungu's awareness, Lela Pierce brings her hips low to the earth in the squatting yogic position of Garland pose as she observes Chatterjea roll Radke's body carefully on the ground. This moment reveals the growing attentiveness to conditions of illness with yoga poses deepening artists' focus on Radke's body and Odissi generating a sense of mourning and feelings of grief. ADT was inspired by *Crude*'s inquiry into the story of a mother who aids her teenage daughter in her struggle with cancer; yet, artists do not reenact events from *Crude*. Rather, they offer a response to their research on indigenous people's lives to emphasize the devastating effects of oil development projects. The company's aesthetic yoga and Odissi technique develops awareness about a global problem faced by indigenous communities rather than merely appropriating native people's cultural practices. As David Wilkins indicates, the cultural distinctions of indigenous persons contribute to cultural sovereignty and the commercialization of Indian culture only interferes with self-determination.³⁹⁴ ADT places emphasis on the drastic health changes in a young woman's daily life by showing how ADT artists themselves might be complicit with the conditions endured by indigenous persons globally.

From negligence and the loss of human life, artists build vitality around resistance and the need for awareness about the exploitation of vital resources. The next section "Tremors of

³⁹⁴ David E. Wilkins, "Indian People are Nations, Not Minorities," 59.

Spring” engages in a dialogue about how a few persons can inspire others to create change. Founding ADT artists Lela Pierce and Chitra Vairavan have danced with the company since 2004 and their duet in “Tremors of Spring” inspires revolutionary action. Differently than “Game,” the intersection of Odissi and yoga moves away from the grief and shock of awareness to a sense of refusal and collaboration. Vairavan runs from stage right to left, pausing in the yoga pose of Crescent Lounge with one leg bent forward and the other leg lengthened behind. On the other hand, Pierce works with Odissi as she walks on quickly and eventually pauses in the sitting and open knee position of double chauk and brings the left arm forward. Pierce walks back to stage right with the side of her body facing the audience and her feet parallel. She lifts and lowers the left and right foot consecutively, increasingly quickening the pace of these steps. Simultaneously, her elbows are lifted toward ears and her chest spirals forward and back from the ribcage. Pierce’s Odissi movements emphasize hips opening and grounding toward the earth, feet engaging rhythmically with the floor, and the torso circling. On the other side of stage, Vairavan focuses on yoga poses as she slowly lifts the left foot off the floor, balancing on the right leg with hands on the face and beginning to reach the left leg back to form Warrior III. Joining Vairavan in her practice, Pierce comes into a lounge. Side-by-side, they gaze out to stage left as if simultaneously becoming aware of the effects of oil exploration in communities. Vairavan repeats a phrase of lengthening her leg back and returning it forward while Pierce holds Warrior III, the pose formed previously by Vairavan. Creating a shift in energy, Vairavan rises with arms swinging forward and back as if the problems that she has witnessed suddenly fatigued her. She then shifts into a new emotional state of refusing to accept these conditions that she has observed by walking backward, shaking her head, and moving her hands in and out at the navel area. Even as they seem to shift out of yoga and Odissi movements so that they can dance

in unison, they continue their technical foundations. Pierce grabs Vairavan and breaks her fall when she walks over to her and drops down. As Pierce drags Vairavan's body, she sustains flexed feet, and when they both pull away from one another, their arms remained outstretched. After they each lift up from this holding position, Vairavan returns to balancing on leg and moving the other repeatedly forward and back. Pierce performs a similar phrase, albeit with her legs creating more of a circling motion. Movements may appear pedestrian-based but they continue to be technically-rooted. As they hold one another, Pierce bends her upper torso backward in the form of yoga's Camel Pose. Vairavan's running off stage is followed by Pierce leaning her torso down the standing legs in the shape of the yoga pose Forward Fold. Pierce and Vairavan connect with one another based on their shared recognition of how communities are being negatively impacted by the extraction of vital resources. In their duet, Odissi and yoga enact an exercise of awareness about current mobilizations against resource exploitation.

The following section "Anchuri! Get Out" continues the inquiry into Kichwa communities' resistance through transforming prior deployments of Odissi stances, emphasizing different yoga poses, and articulating movements in Chhau martial arts. From the very beginning of "Anchuri!," dancers move through Chhau movements such as *Sada Topka* in which artists balance on the left standing leg, bring the right knee forward and lift it up to the navel, reach the right foot slightly forward, and open the right knee further out to the side and away from the navel. The left foot then comes down to the floor so that the body forms the stance *Dharan*, a basic posture of Chhau. *Dharan* may appear similar to tribhangi because it also bends the body at multiple angles, forming a curved spine and extending the hip to the side; yet, the feet are much wider apart and the pose comes prior to walking steps such as *Sada Topka* rather than before the

kind of footwork that gets articulated in Odissi.³⁹⁵ “Anchuri!” places Chhau alongside yoga movements such as standing poses and arm balances that establish strength, readiness, and connection to the earth. In Warrior II Pose, dancers project a robust energy through the full extension of arms open to the side, lengthening the left leg behind the right and keeping the entire left foot flat on the floor, lowering the right leg parallel to the ground with a bent knee, and gazing out toward the front arm. Artists clap their hands and their arms rise up and fall immediately toward the floor so that they can use the grounding of their hands to lift legs up into a Handstand Pose. Yoga poses exude resilience in the firm extension of arms as well as preparedness in quick transitions between upright to upside down postures. Dancers craft unity with land through techniques such as the thigh bone and hips lowering to floor in Warrior II pose and the placement of the hands on the earth in Handstand pose.

Through Chhau and Odissi fusion, “Anchuri!” focuses on protest. Dancers bend one arm at the chest and circle the other arm out to the side. Meanwhile, they circle one leg on the floor, reflecting the limb movements of *Chunchodiya*, one of Chhau’s sequences in daily routine work.³⁹⁶ Artists reveal the possibilities of experimentation with Chhau movements when they do not roll the legs and arms out in a circle, open out to *Aadda Chali* with the front leg bent at ninety-degrees and the back leg extended behind. Rather than this previously described Chhau structure, dancers kick the right leg up and back and then lift the full body off the floor as they kick the legs out forward. For movements such as *Chhonchdia* that come from everyday forms of labor and get utilized in the militarism of Chhau, ADT places the martial art within the context of

³⁹⁵ “Mayurbhanj Chhau Dance Technique (Gurukul Chhau Dance Sangam) online,” published on February 4, 2014, Accessed January 23, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bR7DFcE4Qyk>.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

resistance to oil crises. Framing Odissi toward the same effort, dancers open the legs wide apart and bend the knees so that the hips reach down to the earth in double chauk. While holding this posture, the ensemble enacts its sense of rootedness to the earth based on contemporary Indian dance as they hop the feet off the floor five times consecutively. Dancers build on this athleticism with other Chhau aspects such as *Duba Challi* that brings the knee into the chest with the right arm overhead, the left arm forming a rectangular shape, and the elbow lifting in line with the chest. When artists' form a lounge, move the arms below the thighs, and lower the head, their dancing reflects the movement of *Uttahan*. Differently than practiced by the second of ADT's Chhau teachers, Rakesh Sai Babu, artists have shifted away from gazing up with the head and having the right hand up, left hand out at shoulder, and the left leg forward. When dancers incorporate tribhangi into the mix of Odissi and Chhau movements, they lift the elbows up toward the ears in a display of strength with the right leg forward and the hip of the left leg reaching out to the side. Artists come into the tribhangi stance after pausing all movement and then taking a firm gaze out at a fixed point. Tribhangi creates hip extensions and bodily curves with alignment of chin, chest, hip, and legs and feet, enabling artists to position femininity at the center of reverting the authority given to multinational corporations and challenging political disregard for native land claims. While the lifting of double chauk from the earth requires stamina and alignment of knees over ankles to leave and return to the floor safely, artists articulate Chhau's technique of groundedness through establishing a steady foundation in lounge poses. Chhau movements offer the ensemble a sense of readiness and training in militant forms. Through the ADT aesthetic of merging Chhau and Odissi, dancers' research on indigenous resistance gets transformed into training dancing bodies to highlight a radical politics. "Anchuri!" leverages Odissi poses against the multinational oil industry rather than simplistically

associating with deprivation and underdevelopment.³⁹⁷ Instead of touring in a Caribbean context to “institute themselves as natives both politically and culturally” or to construct “discursive repetition of native extinction,” the company articulates Odissi postures to highlight the radical moves of indigenous communities.³⁹⁸ By bringing *Moreechika* to Makeda Thomas’s Institute, ADT puts forth an inquiry into native resistance that challenges a dominant narrative about indigenous disappearance. ADT’s choreography executes Chhau, Odissi, and yoga movements based on their observation of the destructive practices of the oil industry and the Kichwa community’s work to resolve these tragedies.

African Diasporic Practice and Anti-Global Capitalist Movements

Ananya Dance Theatre (ADT) premiered *Moreechika: Season of Mirage* with director and artist Laurie Carlos in September 2012 in Minneapolis, MN. Carlos had served as the theatrical director of the dance, co-conceiving the work alongside choreographer Ananya Chatterjea. Broadly, *Moreechika: Season of Mirage (Moreechika)* is a dance that explores the human impact of the oil industry through the Indian dance forms rooted in ADT’s technique, namely, Odissi dance, yoga, and Chhau martial arts, as well as Carlos’s theatrical jazz aesthetic that places emphasis on improvisation. For the Minneapolis premier, Carlos provided vocal work for the sound composition, poetic narrative and improvisation for the live performance, and direction for the five transparent puppets known as “hungry ghosts” that were displayed on the back wall of theater. These puppets were created by designer Annie K. Sullivan based on her exploration of Tibetan and Chinese mythologies.

In the final two sections of *Moreechika*, Carlos demonstrates how an African diasporic practice in the theatrical jazz aesthetic moves the piece into an engagement with anti-global

³⁹⁷ Shona N. Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*, 4.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

capitalist social movements. The second to last section “Blinding Storm” poses the question “What is left to us/ when that which we knew/ as nurture/ as blessing/ turns against us/ raging a storm in our eyes?” Laurie Carlos’s voice speaks poetically in the music and she also moves theatrically onstage with dancers. Meanwhile, dancers carry forward the company’s contemporary Indian dance aesthetic of flowing through Odissi and yoga poses. Falling from the ceiling and onto the stage comes a constant flow of rice, creating a blizzard and stormy image for audiences because artists utilize Indian dance gestures and movements to drop to and from the floor and move the rice around their bodies. The final section “Occupy” calls on spectators to “[j]oin the space/ transform the dream-space/ into the arena of action/ working in small gestures/ that create epic hope.”³⁹⁹ Dancers continue to manipulate rice as Carlos enters the audience and starts to bring spectators to the stage. ADT layers its deployment of Indian dance forms with Carlos’s expression of a theatrical jazz aesthetic in vocal work, movement, puppetry, and narrative. The terms of diaspora in ADT consist of utilizing multiple Indian movement forms for the purposes of resisting globalization, and doing so in relationship to black cultural forms. This cross-cultural intersection leads to a conversation on global capitalism that emphasizes the role of black creative practice in broadly building critical, grassroots movements and specifically connecting performer to audience member in *Moreechika*. ADT moves World Dance into the realm of decolonizing alliances by forging intersections across African and Asian communities; although, the company focuses on indigenous politics.

The forging of different diasporas in ADT comes into focus as Laurie Carlos’s artistry signals a cosmic shift—that is, the falling of rice from above—through placing her theatrical work alongside dancers’ Odissi and yoga movements. In the section of *Moreechika* titled

³⁹⁹ Program for *Moreechika*, *Season of Mirage*, Minneapolis, MN: Southern Theater, 2012.

“Blinding Storm,” artists’ hips lower toward the floor and knees open in double chank. As dancers execute the double chank or the *mandala* pose that place the body with the feet wide apart, this posture offers one of two signs of the oncoming rice that will fall immediately from above. Calling upon the rice to drop through theatrical movement, Carlos’s body reflects the ensemble’s facing because she walks with her back to the audience. When she reaches her left arm to the floor and bends down, her actions create the second sign of the imminent, falling rice. From this point, two sets of actions proceed: the ensemble dances with the rice and Carlos prepares the audience to join artists onstage. At this juncture, dancers enact alternative variations on a movement sequence that consists of dropping to the earth, swirling the rice around their bodies, pouring the rice in front of their face, or shaking a fist full of rice and letting it fly out into space. Examining one of the dancers’ movements illuminates the technique specifics of this section. For instance, Chatterjea pivots on the right foot so that she can turn the body consecutively with her arms out wide and the head released back. Reflecting the form of the yoga pose known as Spinal Twist, Chatterjea falls to the earth with her back lying on the floor, knees into chest, and arms lengthened in a “T” shape. She rises swiftly off the floor with her body in the form of Chair Pose, the yoga stance that bends the thighs parallel to the floor, keeps the insides of legs touching, and lengthens an upright spine. Linking yoga with Odissi hand gestures, Chatterjea creates the fistful fingers of *mushthhi* by bringing all the digits of the right hand together. She releases the rice particles in front of her face and opens her mouth wide. With her knees touching the floor, she lifts the torso up and releases the head back. Her body produces the yoga shape of Camel pose as she throws rice directly at her navel. She then offers an early demonstration of the kinds of movements that spectators can exercise after they are invited by

Carlos onstage. While on her knees, Chatterjea places her hand in the rice and swirls her arm out to begin separating the rice and creating images.

As dancers move through rice, Carlos's voice and bodily actions are directed toward the audience as a way of preparing spectators to enter the performance space. Prior to re-entering into the audience, Carlos walks as she exclaims the words "dance your guns to silence." As she has expressed this same phrase at the start of *Moreechika*, this recurring action begins to serve multiple purposes. Since Carlos first walked through the audience, her poetry and vocal work have accompanied dancers' movements. Her words remind audiences of the complexities of indigenous communities' specific experience of global capitalism because of how her earlier poetry was based on Ken Saro Wira's leadership of Nigeria's Ogoni people against Shell Oil. Articulating the phrase amid the fallen rice provides spectators with a sense of foreshadowing on her own imminent return to the audience seating; although this time, she will not recite her monologue. Rather, she will request that viewers begin to cultivate their own story by rising from their seats and moving alongside artists.⁴⁰⁰ This practice contributes to Carlos's theatrical jazz process that has been discussed by Omi Osun Joni L. Jones as both textual and physical because of its nonlinear narrative and gestural vocabulary. As Jones gathers, "Carlos's verbal text encourages comprehension beyond what the words alone can bring."⁴⁰¹ In *Moreechika*, her words now call on audiences to join dancers in moving onstage and to participate in the theatrical jazz aesthetic in which they can connect aspects of their own lives to the dance's focus on conditions of systemic violence.

⁴⁰⁰ Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, *Theatrical Jazz: Performance, Àṣẹ, and the Power of the Present Moment* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015).

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

Carlos performs with great calculation by, first, connecting with the audience through gaze and movement in space, second, entering into the audience with intention, third, inviting a spectator to come with her onstage, fourth, showing the observer how to handle rice, and fifth, returning to the audience to bring more spectators to the performance space. While getting ready to go to spectators, Carlos gazes out toward the viewers. She then moves closer to audience seating by walking downstage so that she stands directly in front of spectators. She pauses there and looks at the visual of artists moving in the rice. She turns her head to spectators and away from them saying, “your anger and your joy.” She moves away from the audience by walking to the back wall. She stops momentarily and resets the placement of her costume over her shoulder. In a forthright manner, she then walks down the stage into audience, goes up the stairs, and pauses in front of a spectator. At this moment, the recorded sound composition presents Carlos’s voice saying, “Raw to the sky, to you. This is the long held note.” The spectator faced by Carlos rises out of the seat while holding Carlos’s hand and walks with her down the steps and onto the stage. Carlos bends her body down to grab some of the rice that has fallen on the ground. The spectator waits there with the front of their body turned away from the audience. Carlos puts rice into the spectator’s hands, momentarily holding her palm close to theirs. Carlos gazes at the spectator and they return the gaze back. While backing away, Carlos continues to look at the person until she turns away from them in order to return to the audience and collect another person.

Carlos’s attentiveness with the first spectator and her intentional movements prior to entering the audience have proven to be successful because an audience member begins to freely walk down the steps without Carlos having come directly to them. However, Carlos takes initiative to ensure this spectator understands the awareness required to handle rice. She grabs

hold of both their hands as well as the hand of the second audience member that she had initially come to invite onstage. As all of them walk down the stairs, a third audience member grabs holds of their hands. By now, three other audience members are walking down and Chatterjea immediately takes one of their hands. Both she and Carlos bend down to grab rice and place it into an audience member's hand. Carlos offers a convincing approach, although her invitations do not always lead to spectators joining artists onstage. When later entering the audience again to invite someone onstage, an audience member quietly hesitates to go on. Carlos begins to return to stage without that audience member she had just approached. Yet, the theatrical aesthetic had already done enough work to inspire those who were ready and willing, considering how another audience member passes Carlos on their way down to stage. Even as some audience members choose to remain in seats, spectators begin to freely enter stage and dancers greet them by taking their hand and lowering to the ground to grab rice for them.

Carlos further prepares to train audiences to be fully conscientious of their performative actions because she has been speaking words very quietly to audience members as she holds their hands. Eventually, she transitions into speaking louder into the microphone, allowing the following to be heard repeatedly: "someone is digging just to find this much rice." The call for critical actions on the part of spectators is also demonstrated in the recording of Carlos saying, "for us, for us, for you, for us, for us, for us, for us, for you, for you, for you." This phrase informs audiences of the need for careful handling of rice because all movements offer a contribution to the dance's commentary.

Through Carlos's ideas about jazz aesthetic, the puppets also expand on the process of audience members entering the stage. At the start of "Occupy" when Chatterjea moves from throwing rice at her navel to moving the rice on the floor with her arm, I clump the puppets

together on the projector so that their thin limbs, protruding stomachs and large heads are entangled and one puppet cannot be deciphered from another. According to the audience's perspective, the puppets are assembled at the right side of the screen. As I slowly separate one puppet from the group, spectators observe its dark figure move slowly from the left to the right side of stage. Spectators can witness all the other puppets remain still until that sole moving puppet exits the screen entirely. From thereon, each puppet has its individual walk across the screen: one puppet shifts forward simply through moving its limbs; another stretches its arm across the screen and paces its way off; and one figure overwhelms the screen with its belly as it moves its way down. The puppetry movements follow suggestions provided by Carlos during rehearsal sessions in which she urged me to "pile up puppets" at the start of "Occupy."⁴⁰² This recommendation added to my larger process of realizing her aim to create a relationship between these figures and the dancing. By putting the puppets in a confused mass and then carefully moving them across the screen one-by-one, the puppets connect with the audience members who enter stage to participate in improvising with rice. As much as the puppets reflect the potential for audience members to move from the space of spectatorship to crafting their individual stories, the movement of puppets completely off screen also points to a future without anguished spirits roaming with their unsatisfied craving. This vision emerges from my research on how hungry ghosts can reflect an urgency to be liberated from the suffering of cyclical existence, as dictated in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. After the last puppet moves across screen, I turn the projector off and I walk into the space where artists and audience members work with the rice. Activating this interest in shifting the continuity of daily life, I move to the center of stage and lower the figures down to lay them to rest in the rice. These actions also contribute to moving

⁴⁰² Laurie Carlos, Ananya Dance Theatre Rehearsal (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN, July 2, 2012).

away from delusion about the current state of capitalism into cognition about the conditions linked to consumption of vital resources. Moreover, the puppets become part of the larger work of alliances at two levels: Carlos's vision for hungry ghost puppets through the lens of experimentation in black cultural forms and my execution of Carlos's ideas through my research on the philosophy associated with puppets.

Although audience members and dancers move onstage together, improvisation heightens the practice of contemporary Indian dance. Audience members perform different movements on the floor such as placing the forearm on the ground and moving it in a rounded turn to separate rice and create circular images with it. Other audience members walk slowly, allowing rice to fall carefully through their fingertips. As spectators engage with the rice based on their training in jazz aesthetic, ADT artists sustain their technique by holding their bodies upright with the thumb and index fingers together in the hand gesture titled *hamsasya*. They oscillate the arms up and down by lifting one arm up to their face and lowering the other limb to navel. Simultaneously, they shift their bodies forward and back while keeping the feet firmly parallel. Bringing in a regular routine from rehearsal, ADT artist Hui Wilcox begins the salutation to teacher, audience, and earth that is *pranam* by bringing thumbs to shoulders, keeping elbows lifted and stretching arms out wide before lowering the hips down and bending the knees and lowering the hands to the ground. Artists Brittany Radke and Sarah Beck-Esmay finish up the end of *pranam* as they bring palms together and rise from the floor. To further signal the ending of the dance and support the return of audience members to their seats, Carlos takes the hand of two spectators and walks with them to the stairs. Theatrical jazz aesthetic and contemporary Indian dance are interwoven through instruction provided on how to move with rice, the conclusion of the piece, and the timing of audience members' movement off stage.

The rice connects the elements of *Moreechika*, according to dance critique; yet, some criticality associated with rice remains a gap in these reviews. Sheila Regan of *Twin Cities Daily Planet* was moved “when the whole company was dancing on stage, embodying the energy of the Occupy movement.”⁴⁰³ Finding the “torrent of rice shot down” to be “electrifying[,]” she says. “To me, I read this as the greedy corporations keeping the 99 percent down, but I could be wrong. Then, the dances began to transform the space, creating circles of rice with their hands on the floor, and inviting audience members to join in.” While Reagan focuses on the resonances of Occupy, other critiques examine how the dance built connections. *MN Artists* dance critic Lightsey Darst reflects on how the dance’s events had transpired without “others” or foreigners, because the rice reminds viewers that the dancing had not happened to a group of individuals in a far distant place to which she was broadly connected through larger economic forces.⁴⁰⁴ Rather, Darst considers the rice to be a compelling element because it offers “the evidence” of everything that has taken place in *Moreechika*. While ADT examines the unequal distribution of global resources through “Occupy,” Darst persuades audiences to visualize how *Moreechika* still manages to create tangible connections. Both Regan and Darst provide insight into how audiences build a close enough relationship to the production as a result of every distinct moment of the dance.

The *Moreechika* program describes “Occupy” as a piece inspired by activist and scholar “Angel [Y] Davis’s statement at the Occupy rally in Philadelphia: ‘the unity of the 99% must be a complex unity!’” The Occupy movement began on September 17, 2011 in New York when

⁴⁰³ Sheila Regan, “Ananya Dance Theatre’s ‘Moreechika: Season of Mirage’ is a call to #OccupyOil,” *Twin Cities Daily Planet*, September 12, 2012, <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/moreechika-season-mirage-ananya-dance-theatre-review/>.

⁴⁰⁴ Lightsey Darst, “There are No Strangers Here,” *MN Artists*, September 19, 2012, <http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=321504>.

“protestors set up camp for the night in Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan;” they claimed to represent the 99% of the U.S. population and to be in “opposition to the 1% elite.”⁴⁰⁵ According to American Studies scholar Eithne Quinn, the early days of the Occupy movement lost sight of how to broaden its analysis intersectionally across race and nation because most of its protestors were white and middle class or unemployed college graduates. Indigenous communities expressed objections to the use of the term “occupy” and groups led by people of color such as Occupy the Hood “challenge[d] the class reductionism” of some of the ideological basis of Occupy. “Occupy” invites audience members to leave their seats and join dancers onstage to reflect on how the events of *Moreechika* might connect with the Occupy social movement that aims to transform the increasing gap between the poor and wealthy and to change the course of global affairs in which an elite, one-percent owns the majority of the world’s resources. Extending the dance’s focus on organizing led by persons of color and indigenous communities, this section of the dance emphasizes Angela Y. Davis’s statement in order to bring attention to how groups get impacted differently by these economic terms. “It is a movement arrayed from the outset against the most affluent sectors of society – big banks and financial institutions, corporate executives,” says Davis, “whose pay is obscenely disproportionate to the earnings of the 99%.”⁴⁰⁶ As spectators get up one-by-one out of their seats, crowding the stage alongside dancers to participate in forming new constellations, patterns, and mythological figures out of the fallen rice, they respond to a call to overhaul disparities embedded in access to vital resources and help to envision a future that dismantles contemporary life from the ongoing failures of the

⁴⁰⁵ Eithne Quinn, “Occupy Wall Street, Racial Neoliberalism, and New York’s Hip-Hop Moguls,” *American Quarterly* 68 no. 1 (2016).

⁴⁰⁶ Angela Davis, “The 99%: A Community of Resistance,” *The Guardian*, November 15, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/nov/15/99-percent-community-resistance>.

past. Angela Davis posits, “There are major responsibilities attached to this decision to forge such an expansive community of resistance.” Carlos’s focused attention on spectator, and careful guidance on how to pick up rice and how to create with it, encourages audience members not to make careless gestures but rather to take the task of crafting a story with the fallen rice seriously.

By enabling spectators to weave their own experiences into the dance through theatrical jazz aesthetic, Carlos’s work places emphasis on black cultural forms. The creative expression of persons of African descent function, according to Paul Gilroy, as a multilayered context of “modernity,” a term that Gilroy defines as concerning the development of “civil society, the modern state, and industrial capitalism.” Gilroy argues that black political and artistic formations operate within and outside modernity because they offer a counter-discourse or critique to the conditions of modernity that emerged from experiences of racial slavery. Aesthetics of the African diaspora have been theorized by Gilroy as practices of “black Atlantic radicalism” that can accumulate and occasionally sharpen utopian visions.⁴⁰⁷ Through articulating black artistic practices based on their potential for resistance to capitalism, *Moreechika* formulates a contemporary dialogue on how multinational corporate grab for resources negatively impacts communities of color. As Carlos leads audience members to the stage, she brings forth the role of creative black expression in challenging modernity, defined here as a project of global capitalism that increasingly privileges the wealthy.

African diasporic practice also contributes to a social movement that connects native communities and persons of African descent because Carlos invites audiences into a vision for the Occupy movement as a space in solidarity with indigenous people’s struggles. As Carlos enters the audience and brings persons to the stage, spectators enter a space of challenging the

⁴⁰⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 47.

violence undergirding modernity. Just prior to “Occupy,” Carlos’s voice in the musical composition cries out a desire for rice and her body moves about the stage while dancers move under the terms of ADT’s contemporary Indian dance. In this earlier section of *Moreechika*, the ensemble dances through choreography that intersects Chhau martial arts, yoga, and Odissi for the purposes of highlighting native people’s resistance to oil disasters, such as that which has been endured by the Kichwa community of Ecuador based on their case against ChevronTexaco. When Carlos starts to prepare audiences to take action, her artistic work connects the historical resistances of black bodies to the contemporary struggles of native people. Historicizing these kinds of larger colonial conditions that connect black bodies and native communities, Patrick Wolfe defines “the eastern Cherokee’s catastrophic ‘Trail of Tears,’” as “one of many comparable 1830s removals whereby Indians from the South East were displaced west of the Mississippi to make way for the development of the slave-plantation economy in the Deep South.”⁴⁰⁸ Based on Wolfe’s analysis, native land dispossession and enslavement of black persons cannot be separated in the context of modernity. Carlos brings spectators into a definition of Occupy that has been crafted as a result of black bodies moving in solidarity with native struggles. Audience members contribute to a “dream-space” that has already been deeply transformed by the resistance of indigenous people’s struggles, meaning that spectators enter a space designed to be in solidarity with native communities rather than to continue a colonizing project that displaces native communities from land.

As much as this dance production enacts solidarity with indigenous struggles, its use of both movement and rice as theatrical prop positions the dance in Indian social contexts. In *Moreechika*, spectators can observe images can be associated with the situation of systemic

⁴⁰⁸ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8: no. 1 (2006): 391.

violence in Adivasi indigenous communities in India in order to comprehend what is at the heart of multinational corporation grab for resources—that is, the subject of neoliberal capitalism. *Moreechika* exposes audiences to images of starvation through “Occupy” as dancers throw rice at their bellies and watch it fall in front of their eyes with their mouths wide open. These visuals can be linked to Indian social contexts through Arundhati Roy’s discussion of how food grain absorption has decreased to lower standards than during the Bengali Famine, yet democracies’ disregard for media that focuses on starvation deaths leads malnutrition to be the preferred model.⁴⁰⁹ Adivasi communities become a major subject of inquiry in Arundhati Roy’s *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire* because she discusses how police have mainly targeted Adivasis who peacefully protest and are killed for protecting forestland.⁴¹⁰ All of these previous areas analyzed in terms of indigenous political struggles and black creative practice become part of a larger effort enacted through contemporary Indian dance to challenge global capitalist dynamics that destabilize the course of sustainability of communities of color and produce gross human rights violations. Through intersections across Afro-Asian diasporic practices, ADT develops an inquiry into how vital resources get mass-produced for profit accumulation of multinational corporations rather than for human wellbeing.

⁴⁰⁹ Arundhati Roy, *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004), 102.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

Conclusion

I have traced the makings of cross-cultural dance works in REALITY and Ananya Dance Theatre by examining how artistic forms of both the African and Asian diaspora become intersected in choreographies. In future analyses, I seek to further discuss how artistic works by choreographers Ananya Chatterjea and David Roussève demonstrate how practices of diaspora function as experimentation. Diaspora will be, first, broadly defined as communities living outside boundaries of racial, ethnic, and national origin as a result of histories of involuntary or voluntary migration from a country outlined by specific geographic, cultural, and national territory. Experimentation will be defined as an enduring engagement in dance forms and traditions for the purposes of crafting stories about challenges faced by communities of African and Asian descent. Through a focus on how diasporas continuously experiment with past and current realities, my research will trace artistic influences across African and Asian communities in the case studies of dance companies, showing how diasporic practice has the potential to interrelate different cultural forms. I will analyze intersections across dance forms in African American modern dance and theater, West African-based movement, Indian classical and contemporary dance, and Indonesian contemporary dance.

I will begin by exploring how these artists cultivate two different configurations of diaspora: for Chatterjea and the Ananya Dance Theatre company, I will discuss South Asian diaspora through ideas about classicism and for Roussève and the REALITY dance company, I will explore African diaspora and concepts of creolization. My focus on Chatterjea's radical dance practice will lead me to expand an exploration of South Asian histories into a discussion of the experiences of multiple diasporas in the Americas. First, to contextualize Chatterjea's articulation of these different forms, I will use Alessandra Lopez y Royo's analysis of post-classicism because she distinguishes between a contemporary Indian dance form that stages work

outside of standard repertoire and choreographies that deconstruct the idea of the classical and focus on present challenges.⁴¹¹ Y Royo examines how contemporary Indian dance choreographers deploy their investigations of movement and their own understandings of Hindu texts to interrogate socially and politically conservative ideologies, to place emphasis on women's experiences, and to deal with dynamics such as caste. My research will reference y Royo's concept of the post-classical to discuss how Chatterjea unsettles certain norms associated with classical Indian dance performance. My analysis will begin to go beyond the national boundary of the U.S. and into a larger discussion of what constitutes South Asian diaspora and dance in the Americas through my investigation of Chatterjea's creative partnerships with artists of African descent in Trinidad and Tobago. As a result, I might refer to Janet O'Shea's analysis of the classical as an ongoing process of change that holds the capacity to assess contemporary issues.⁴¹²

Moreover, I hope to describe Roussève's technique as contemporary African American dance based on his experimentation with Euro-American modern dance, contact improvisation, jazz dance, and Hip-Hop performance. I speculate that his work calls for focus on Brenda Dixon-Gottschild's description of how postmodern African American choreographers recreate, deconstruct, and maintain Euro-American popular culture while also preserving their own styles on the concert dance stage.⁴¹³ Nonlinearity, emphasis on flow and process, and other

⁴¹¹ Alessandra Lopez Y Royo, "Classicism, Post-classicism and Ranjabati Sircar's Work: Re-Defining the Terms of Indian Contemporary Dance Discourses," *South Asia Research* 23, no. 2 (2003): 162.

⁴¹² Janet O'Shea, *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007).

⁴¹³ Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 57.

fundamental features of the postmodern are inherited by both African Americans and European Americans, argues Dixon-Gottschild whose analysis prioritizes a discussion of creolization to show how Africanisms are deeply embedded into all elements of American existence.

Roussève's dance-making functions as creolization by weaving cultural information and patterns that resist linearity, emphasize the intertextual, and as I will suggest, intersect multiple dance forms and sociocultural experiences of both African and Asian diasporas.

My focus on choreographies linked to histories of communities of African and Asian descent will contribute to theories and practices of Afro-Asian politics. As W. E. B. Du Bois once said in *The Souls of Black Folk*, the problem of the twentieth century must be understood in terms of the relationship between blacks and other groups, not only in the U.S., but also Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.⁴¹⁴ Historian Nico Slate has analyzed the work of Du Bois to coin the term “colored cosmopolitanism” for the purposes of discussing the “commonalities of struggle between ‘colored’ peoples fighting for their rights throughout the world.”⁴¹⁵ Du Bois looks at how creative practices of communities of African descent such as religion play a role in uncovering an inner world of blacks that leads to a double existence in terms of reflection, tasks, principles, language, and social class. My research incorporates this framework to focus on how dance exists at a dual intersection of race, culture, and ethnicity based on how choreographers experiment with cultural forms of communities of African and Asian descent. Other scholars such as Vijay Prashad have engaged in Afro-Asian connections to discuss the term “polycultural” as encouraging “the inherent complexities of cultures, but that also stakes its claim to political and delimited claims rather than the pretense of universal, and nonembodied

⁴¹⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 10.

⁴¹⁵ Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 66.

values.”⁴¹⁶ Prashad examines how political ideologies such as multiculturalism reduce “different ways of life to superficial tokens that they can harness as style” and I concentrate on choreographies that move against the grain of normative multicultural politics through long-term creative processes with artists of African and Asian descent. In dance, the book *Butting Out* by Ananya Chatterjea outlines the works of artists of Asian and African descent by discussing how South Asian and African American choreographies both develop radical postmodern aesthetics in their focus on stories of women and people of color.⁴¹⁷ Taking on this comparative analysis, my research will examine how African and Asian diasporic practices get utilized in different racial and cultural contexts of the dance domain as well as how queer of color choreographers also construct progressive representations of femininity. I focus on how transnational dance works unveil the types of connections that can be formulated across culture.

I will include an analysis of diaspora as the decolonizing potential to be rooted in specific cultural forms and to build alliances with aesthetics of different histories of dispersion across the globe. My focus on the cross-cultural practices of the dance companies David Roussève/REALITY and Ananya Chatterjea/Ananya Dance Theatre resituate the diasporic studies of Brent Hayes Edwards in dance studies. Theorizing the term “diaspora” according to crossroads of international difference, Edwards focuses on the polemics surfacing in global circulations of Harlem Renaissance literature in order to shift the course of historical analyses of

⁴¹⁶ Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 40.

⁴¹⁷ Ananya Chatterjea, *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies Through Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha* (Middletown: Wesleyan, 2004).

the African diaspora toward resisting universal constructions of race.⁴¹⁸ My analysis will examine choreographic works from the 1980s to 2014 among artists of African and Asian descent to suggest that diasporic entanglements can cross over racial boundaries. My concept of diaspora will also expand Paul Gilroy's work that defines black culture based on the "black Atlantic" that resists reductions to race.⁴¹⁹ My research will expand on the artistic process of black Atlantic by not only disrupting rigid racial ideologies but also intersecting cultural forms of the African diaspora with practices of the Asian diaspora. Additionally, while Gilroy pays close attention to musical practices in communities of African descent, I will concentrate on dance and the stories of queer and women of color that get articulated through these practices because of how this research might bring specific attention to how bodies reshape understandings of social categories as always existing at the intersection of multiple racial subjectivities. These studies might also revise Gilroy's analyses to suggest that diaspora gets constructed through gender and sexual practices, because I will examine how choreographies examine queer of color life. In this way, my studies will support the analyses of Vijay Agnew and Michelle Wright. Agnew's discussion of women's subjectivity leads her to examine how women cross borders and boundaries in order to create and recreate their homes and form bonds with "those they had previously thought of as strangers in order to form new communities."⁴²⁰ Wright recognizes Paul Gilroy's deployment of the term "counterdiscourse" for the purposes of examining how ideas about identity in the West are in dialogue with African diasporic lives. She diverges from such

⁴¹⁸ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁴¹⁹ Paul Gilroy, "'Jewels Brought from Bondage': Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity," in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

⁴²⁰ Vijay Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, Identity: A Search for Home* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 19.

analyses by arguing that “blackness” as a theoretical issue must not be restricted to a specific standard of nation, language, or culture and cannot be enacted outside of gender and sexuality.⁴²¹

This research will contribute to studies of black feminism, queer performance, and African diaspora because of how my analyses of choreography highlight the creative practices of communities of African descent and focus on gender and sexuality. According to Patricia Hill Collins, black women’s lived experience can be the basis of knowledge through a three-pronged approach to black feminist thought: collective knowledge of black women, scholarly knowledge created by African American women intellectuals, and the social circumstances forming both ways of thinking.⁴²² Collins posits that the importance of black feminist epistemology concerns ways that oppressed persons develop knowledge to advocate for empowerment and activism. My research on how non-black women investigate lives of women of African descent contributes to Patricia Hill Collins’s call for interpreting black women’s experiences through scholarly production as well as alternative sources such as artists and activists employed outside academia and in community.⁴²³ For instance, when I analyze the use of the classical Indian dance form Bharatanatyam in REALITY’s 2009 dance *Saudade*, I examine this choreography in relationship to the overall narrative that speaks about black women’s survival from slavery and rape. According to critical gender and race theorist bell hooks, black women scholars must concretely engage and implement a feminist praxis otherwise they will reinforce sexist norms; nevertheless, black women prioritize social change when fully committed to a radical and critical

⁴²¹ Michelle M. Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4–5.

⁴²² Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 269.

⁴²³ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 16.

consciousness.⁴²⁴ I intend to extend bell hooks's work to illuminate how to challenge politics of sexual subordination through focusing on creative works by queer of color and non-African descended women of color. For instance, in my assessment of Chatterjea's 2012 dance *Moreechika: Season of Mirage*, I focus on the application of Indian practices alongside a theatrical jazz aesthetic that highlights black women's stories of sexual violence.

As dances by REALITY and Ananya Dance Theatre experiment in cultural forms of African and Asian diasporas to connect issues of gender-based violence to sexuality, queer of color critique will offer an important analytical framework. While *Saudade* delves into black women's memories of sexual assault, it also highlights gay black men's near death experiences and intimacy through the lens of HIV/AIDS subjectivity. While *Moreechika* establishes a theatrical jazz framework centered on narratives of sexual violence, it also emphasizes gay black men's stories of negotiating between politics of masculinity and femininity. Here, I extend David Gere's work on the increased potential for coalition when gay men identify with women as oppressed classes.⁴²⁵ This interrelation across gender and sexuality in their creative works also lead me to prioritize an inquiry into the terms of queer of color critique, as coined by Roderick Ferguson. He defines the term broadly as both resistance and alignment with the ideologies sanctioned by state and capitalist politics.⁴²⁶ Ferguson's emphasis on positioning queer black experiences within the context of capitalism will support my analysis of dance, as the larger framework of *Saudade* examines state failures to provide essential aid to black communities in

⁴²⁴ bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End, 1989), 181.

⁴²⁵ David Gere, "29 Effeminate Gestures: Choreographer Joe Goode and the Heroism of Effeminacy," in *Dancing Desire: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press).

⁴²⁶ Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

socioeconomic crisis and *Moreechika* broadly explores the human impact of the global petroleum industry. “By engaging as a site of contradictions that compels racial formations that are eccentric to gender and sexual normativity,” says Ferguson, “I have also attempted to revise the presumption that capital is the site of gender and sexual uniformity.” Such a framework will be vital to my theorizing of choreography where I will discuss how Ananya Dance Theatre creates four dance productions for their Quartet Against Systemic Violence to look at capital through the lens of state-sanctioned and gender-based violence. The company reveals how “normative boundaries of race, gender, class, and sexuality” get thrown into confusion, to use Ferguson’s terms, when prioritizing the dancing of a gay black man in expressing how feminine bodies become complicit with the underlying conflicts of globalization.

My studies will focus on challenging settler colonial dynamics. I will emphasize the enduring radical politics of choreographers to respond to Patrick Wolfe’s posit that liquidation functions as a perpetual element in U.S. society.⁴²⁷ This priority given to settler colonial studies will expand on my investigation of queer of color critique based on a shared engagement with capitalism, as Wolfe defines the logic of elimination in terms of the network of various groups that focus on acquiring land to liquidate native groups. I will position choreographic works in settler colonial theories by extending Wolfe’s suggestion about how native and black persons have been historically targeted through blood quantum policies and “one drop rule” doctrine. I will analyze how African American narratives resist ideologies of elimination and non-African and non-native descended persons do so through alliances with native and black communities.

I will also seek to expand my research methodology. My approach to autoethnography will contribute to feminist and performance-based ethnography. Feminist ethnography has long

⁴²⁷ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (2006).

offered an approach to anthropological study that focuses on the underlying problems of seeking a merely objective or unbiased analysis and I seek for my inquiries into choreographies of South Asian and African diasporas to extend such interventions. Lila Abu-Lughod's investigation of feminism and ethnography unveils the complex position of the woman of color researcher so that she can assess the conflicts associated with producing an unbiased account of a culture or community of people. Rather than seeking to be removed from persons of study, Abu-Lughod suggests that researchers claim their connections with community through constructing "ethnographies of the particular" in which the writing resists generalizing behavior and more specifically examines how individual actions affect everyday lives and conveys the inscription of historical processes on individual bodies.⁴²⁸ Autoethnography will lead me to understand how stories of the historically disenfranchised get reconfigured in multiple dance works, as Roussève held recorded interviews with his grandmother about laboring in the American South and reshaped their conversations to make several dances and as the dialogues between artists and environmental leaders in communities of color and Ananya Dance Theatre in 2006 led to the creation of several choreographies. As a result, autoethnography will enhance my focus on the intersection between Ananya Dance Theatre's choreographic series that reveals the human impact of environmental racism in specific communities of color and REALITY's Creole Series that juxtaposes the systemic violence that has taken place on cotton plantations with gay black men's loss. For film analysis, I will explore the relationship between dance and film in Roussève's work by analyzing film content with an emphasis on form through concepts of black filmmaking and American independent film. I will discuss how choreography gets reconfigured as a result of editing and camera techniques becoming a major focal point of filmmaking process.

⁴²⁸ Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1991), 148–50.

This concentration on revealing dynamics from field research through the position of researcher is also rooted in studies of performance and culture. Taking a critical and self-evaluative position as an ethnographer, D. Soyini Madison assesses the intricate detail of her research through actively creating performance. According to Madison, the ethnographer deals with data that reveals certain contradictions, requiring theatrical staging so that different understandings may come forth. Based on her theory of “acts of activism,” Madison suggests that individuals participating in art-making expand their ability to engage others, increase awareness about their own political lives, and transform private and public spaces in their communities.⁴²⁹ Madison’s analysis will help to illustrate how relating my own performance work to artists such as Chatterjea and Roussève offers a deeper inquiry into the political dynamics of their choreographic works. I will ground my research in the linkages across Afro-Asian choreographies because of my theoretical aims to associate women of color and queer of color processes of making decisions about the movement of bodies in postmodern dance in ways that place emphasis on feminism and queer of color analysis. I hope to utilize autoethnography as a methodological interest that affirms my own connections to the individuals of research study. My interdisciplinary intentions to intersect theories of gender and sexuality, diaspora, and dance will aim to expand previous dance scholarship that critiques the terms of the postmodern.

⁴²⁹ D. Soyini Madison, *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance* (New York: Cambridge, 2010), 216.

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