

ABSTRACT

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Directed By: Assistant Professor Miriam Phillips, School of
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Vaudevival: Old is the new New was an evening-length concert performed October 20th & 21st, 2011 at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center in partial fulfillment of the M.F.A. degree in Dance from the University of Maryland's School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. *Vaudevival* was a "trad" dance theater project that challenged concepts of aesthetic hierarchies in popular culture. The show ricocheted through twentieth-century vernacular dance to create a vibrant statement about the cyclical nature of art and society, with live music and multi-media projections. This paper is a written account of theoretical and practical problems of identity politics and appropriation that unfolded during the choreographic process. Envisioning a creative utopia free of exploitative hierarchies – both on the stage and on the page, *Vaudevival* invokes the old to reinvent the new through the intertextuality of American dances, bringing scholarship to the theater, and bringing some theater to scholarship.

VAUDEVIVAL: Old is the new New

By

Emily Kate Oleson

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Advisory Committee:
Assistant Professor Miriam Phillips, Chair
Professor Ann Kilkelly
Instructor Alvin Mayes
Associate Professor Karen Bradley

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
<u>Problem Statement – or statement of problems</u>	1
Personal/Professional Problems.....	5
<u>Process and Methodology</u>	9
Methodology.....	15
<u>Theoretical Lens</u>	17
Chapter 2: The Performance.....	20
<u>Participants – Cast and Collaborators</u>	20
Choreographers and Collaborators.....	21
Musicians.....	23
<u>Pre-show</u>	24
Out-door.....	24
Indoor.....	25
<u>The Acts</u>	26
Act 1 – A Cheeky Clique of Charlestoning Chicks.....	26
Act 2 – The Un-silent Movie Quartet.....	27
Act 3 – Some Shim Sham Shenanigans.....	27
Act 4 – Verily, a Veracible Vestige of Vintage Vernacular.....	29
Act 5 – A Pensive Plea for Permission.....	30
Act 6 – A Myriad of Musings on Minstrelsy.....	31
Act 7 – Possum, the Amazing Jigging Yokel.....	32
Act 8 – The Next Big Thing.....	32
Act 8 ½ – Magic Trick.....	33
Act 9 – A Tantalizing Tale of Time-Traveling Treason.....	34
Entre-Acts.....	34
Chapter 3: Analysis.....	36
<u>Act 1 – A Cheeky Clique of Charlestoning Chicks</u>	36
Appropriation (where I least expect it).....	40
Mainstream Charleston.....	42
<u>Act 2 – The Un-silent Movie Quartet</u>	44
YouTube as Vaudeville.....	44
Traditional Repertoire.....	48
<u>Act 3 – Some Shim Sham Shenanigans</u>	49
Juggling Terms: <i>race</i> , <i>racial</i> and <i>racist</i>	50
<u>Act 4 – Verily, a Veracible Vestige of Vintage Vernacular</u>	55
<u>Act 5 – A Pensive Plea for Permission</u>	58
Signifying.....	59
<u>Act 6 – A Myriad of Musings on Minstrelsy</u>	69
<u>Act 7 – Possum, the Amazing Jigging Yokel</u>	72
<u>Act 8 – The Next Big Thing</u>	74

<u>Act 8 ½ – Magic Trick</u>	76
<u>Act 9 – A Tantalizing Tale of Time Traveling Treason</u>	78
<u>Entre-Acts</u>	79
Chapter 4: Conclusion.....	80
<u>The Astounding Conclusion</u>	80
Appendices.....	84
<u>Appendix A</u>	84
<u>Appendix B</u>	85
<u>Physics Demonstration/Magic Trick Act 8 ½</u>	85
Works Cited	86

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement – or statement of problems

In 2007, I was at a crossroads in my artistic and personal life. I had just started my family. I was not, as I had assumed I would be, happy to leave my artistic life behind me to “grow up and get a real job.” I determined to make a more focused and concerted effort to design a sustainable lifestyle including dance. I considered myself a “crossover artist.” I had some training in modern/postmodern dance;¹ I also had experience in “traditional,”² social and percussive forms. Which way should I go? Where was the work?

I often felt torn between the different dance communities in which I was involved, with their different economic infrastructures and aesthetic priorities.³ Some modern dancers I knew were dismissive of my other dance pursuits as being “just entertainment” or “low art.” Some friends in traditional dance and music communities saw modern dance as “weird,” irrelevant and elitist – not the kind of perception that builds audience. I was frustrated both by the lack of employment opportunities in dance overall, though I was lucky enough to get by, and by the lack of understanding and cooperation between my two worlds. My undergraduate department at James

¹ I often compare modern dance to modern visual art: both come out of the Modernist era in the early 20th century and prioritize “newness,” originality, and minimalism. Postmodernism is seen by some as a violent reaction to modernism, by others, a continuation of modernist principles (Brown 1998:209). Either way, the emphasis on original movement invention and unfamiliar choreographic structure characterized my experience with modern/postmodern dance.

² One example would be Irish step dance, which prioritizes the learning of certain choreography, continuity of styles, authenticity of the technique, and student’s relationship with the teacher.

³ These economic differences range from being hired by bands, to applying for grants. Aesthetic choices like staying in a relatively small space or facing the audience for an entire dance can be either an asset or a liability, depending on the form and the context.

Madison University had focused on modern/postmodern dance, and to a lesser extent ballet, and it was my understanding at the time that it was similar to most other college Dance departments in the country. I was confused by the prospect of short term financial success in the more “commercially successful” niche of traditional percussive dance versus a longer term security in entering dance in higher education, which it seemed would almost certainly dictate an increased modern dance focus.

In large part, the process of choreographing my thesis was an attempt to uncover my personal “dance home.” Were the categories of “modern dancer,” “traditional, folk or ethnic dancer,” or “social dancer” mutually exclusive – or even accurate?⁴ With more questions than answers, I entered graduate school hoping to understand better what kind of professional concentration I should choose, and whether it was in fact necessary to choose a narrower focus at all. Aside from my existential quandaries, I still needed to feed my family: what specialization or combination of fields would provide a “living wage?” Was there a time when there was more and better work?

Looking into the histories of tap and “traditional percussive”⁵ dances suggested there was. In the era of vaudeville from the 1890s to 1930s many dancers of various kinds had steady employment supported entirely by ticket sales to

⁴ For a discussion of categorization of dance into “the West and the rest,” see the following: the appropriateness of particular labels like “ethnic” see Kealiinohomoku (1969) or “folk,” (Kealiinohomoku 1972); the power structures involved in hierarchies of these forms, see Hammergren (2009), Foster’s *Worlding Dance – An Introduction and Choreographies and Choreographers* (2009).

⁵ This term was introduced to me (and may have been coined) by Eileen Carson-Schatz of the Fiddle Puppets and Footworks Percussive Dance Ensemble (Carson-Schatz, personal correspondence Jan 2012). An alumnus of Carson-Schatz’ company, my husband Matthew Olwell was teaching me steps that included tap, French Canadian waltz clog, step dance from Prince Edward Island, and Appalachian clogging/flatfooting. My own previous interest in Irish step dancing also fell under that grouping.

performances.⁶ The vaudeville audience saw many kinds of dance live on a regular basis (Bowie 1984). Vaudeville provided an infrastructure for dancers to tour the country, allowing dancers to play to many different audiences throughout their career, instead of saving touring for only the highest echelon of performers, meaning an important part of dancers' development would have been refining their material in front of many different live audiences. The artistic dialogue between audience and dancer that must have been going on at this time was fascinating to me.

In researching and choreographing around the idea of vaudeville I encountered a complex web of history, culture, and race that was often difficult to untangle. However, some themes and questions kept rising to the top of my consciousness. How do we proceed with traditions that have complex and multi-layered racial and social "baggage?" Following my instinct that the only responsible answer to that question is very, very carefully, I tentatively explored several avenues. I felt that I must, as an educator and an artist, examine the implications and cultural significance of the work I was making and the study in which I engaged.

I wished to work towards a better understanding of how the modern dance community and other traditional dance communities might inform one another. Could these forms coexist, not just in my own life and body, but actively help and learn from one another outside myself in the field? Part of this process seemed to be dismantling cultural ideas about what constitutes "art" and "choreography," and

⁶ Unlike today's companies that make an average of 34% of income from performances (Dance USA 2011 Web), vaudevillians could further their craft through trial and error in front of audiences across the country, instead of worrying about pleasing granting organizations. While both scenarios seem like the artist is catering to someone else instead of following their own artistic vision, in my own brief career I have found a clear connection with an audience to feel sacred and spiritually fulfilling, not cheap or like "selling out." The aesthetic and economic hierarchies surrounding commercialism is an area for future study, but I have heard dance work dismissed for being "commercial," not "serious."

possibly beginning to question the nature of exclusionary categories in the field of dance. The sustainability I sought also seemed to involve reexamining ideas about the desirability of making work that connects genuinely and intimately with our audiences, if opportunities are to increase and professional dancers are to thrive and grow.

How does vaudeville address the problem?

What I immediately appreciated about vaudeville was that thousands of artists were employed. Not only were there a variety of performance idioms on the program of a vaudeville show, the talent ranged from local skilled amateurs to international celebrities. This seemed to me to be a very effective training ground for artists. Live performance with an audience has a different energy than rehearsal alone or in a small group; not only were performers honing their material, but also their performance style. A dancer in vaudeville got to rehearse their material to the point of mastery through performing it many times a week over the course of many years. This level of facility is simply not attainable for artists who perform a work only twice, regardless of how many times it is rehearsed. A performer's connection with the audience was paramount in vaudeville, and material was frequently tested in several ways in front of a crowd. How successfully an artist was communicating could only be determined in front of an audience.

How does this paper address these problems?

This paper addresses my choreographic research in putting together the production of my thesis concert *Vaudevival: Old is the new New*, and will include research conducted to inform and contextualize choreography and performance. For the rest of Chapter One, I introduce the problems driving my various investigations, including sections on process, methodology, and research design. Chapter Two is a brief description of the thesis concert, including program information. Chapter Three will be an analysis of each act and some of the issues that arose in the process of making the dances and writing the text. Chapter Four is a conclusion about where to go next.

Personal/Professional Problems

I started dancing in 1995, late in my teenage years. I began studying Irish step dance through a series of strange coincidences unfolding around a production of the musical *Brigadoon* by my high school's drama club. I had never even heard of Irish step dance when I ended up in my first class. I was unaware that *Riverdance*, the 1995 Irish step dance phenomenon, was about to hit the scene. By 1996, my secret new hobby was a hot trend I could "barter" for other dance knowledge; having just had the revelation that I liked dancing better than doing anything else, I speedily put these chips in play. What I did not realize at the time was that far from just exchanging intellectual property with my teachers and students, I was entering a "traditional"⁷ community that saw music and dance as part of a lifestyle, not primarily as

⁷ There are nuances and implications in the term "traditional" that are outside the scope of this paper, but here I am using it as a self-identifying label. It's "traditional" if the practitioners sees it as such.

commodities. While my project is not about community per se, it is concerned with matters surrounding tradition and authenticity, how we view them and how we use them. I am also interested in how we set up certain ideas like “art” and “entertainment” in opposition and the politics of who gets credit and who gets paid.

The economic enquiry that steered me towards vaudeville began after I graduated from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA with a B.A. in dance and started living my life as a “dance professional,” teaching, performing, and self-producing on a small local scale. In college I had received serious and focused training in ballet and modern dance. Meanwhile, I had expanded my repertoire of traditional Irish dance movement through a self-directed and self-selected series of camps, festivals, master classes, rehearsals, much of it social and communal. My friends in this community valued “tradition,” seemingly for its own sake, unlike anyone I had talked to at the university – in fact my professors set up a hierarchy in which the more unexpected and original the movement the better – not a space to foster codified movement traditions.

I found when I got out of school however, that I was making my living as an Irish step dancer, not a modern dancer; and the longer I stayed in the traditional Irish dance scene, the more I was introduced to other traditional forms of dance I may never have pursued: Cape Breton step dance, Appalachian flatfooting, French Canadian waltz clog, Prince Edward Island step dance, hambone, and tap, all percussive, all excitingly musical and enchantingly historical.

In 2005, Matthew Olwell, Meg Madden and I co-founded Good Foot Dance Company to learn and perform these “traditional percussive dances.” We held a concert that included tap, step dance from Prince Edward Island, French Canadian

Waltz clog, Irish step dance, and Appalachian clogging. After building the material for our self-produced concert, we had dances that bands could hire us to do, and with only three of us we could often make decent money. There was enough localized demand that we could work on a small scale in concerts and festivals. Nothing like this materialized for me or my friends concerning modern dance, and the rift between the two halves of my dance life seemed to widen. I enjoyed doing modern dance, and I believed (and still believe) it was a serious and important art form, but perhaps more accessible, certainly more lucrative, and definitely no less artistic, were the “traditional” dances I was doing.

The problem of the term “traditional”

Traditional can evoke an entire lifestyle and aesthetic when used, for example in the context of the phrase “traditional Cape Breton step dancing.” It implies that information, in the form of repertoire, steps and musical phrases, has been intentionally preserved throughout generations, and possibly across geographical communities, through diasporic movement and emigration. The continuity of material and technique is of great value. Practitioners know that there is a community of other practitioners who very likely share some repertoire, and will probably have an opinion about the authenticity of your work, either in the execution of traditional repertoire, or the choreographic parameters of original work. All these connotations saturate the term “traditional” when applied by a Cape Breton step dancer.

In a practical sense, this means dancers are quite concerned with who might have created a step and where it is learned. They probably know where the author

was from if they know their name. They might know what other students the master artist has had and possibly who their teacher was. Dancers who do these traditional forms are keenly aware of what kind of music needs to accompany the step – in actuality, the dance is often seen as more of an accompaniment to the music instead of the other way around. While they might bend or break these rules to be innovative, dancers take musicality very seriously because the dancing is percussive (making audible sound on the floor). Not infrequently dancers also play musical instruments themselves. These “traditional percussive dance” cultures thrive at music-driven events, such as world music or folk music festivals (though “traditional” is a term preferred by some at this point, as exemplified by a recent slogan, “Trad is rad,” used by The Mammals, a group of young rock/traditional Appalachian instrumentalists).

Trad + vaudeville = Trad Dance Theater, a historical-fictionalized aesthetic

When I learned that traditional dances like Irish jigs and hornpipes, English Lancashire clog, and French Canadian waltz clog had had a strong presence in vaudeville and English music hall, and that they were inextricably related to dances I was studying like Appalachian clogging and tap, the seed was planted for a special affinity with this esoteric theatrical genre. Shortly thereafter, my group Good Foot Dance Company, did some French Canadian waltz clog in a show that evoked early 20th century circus. There was a harmony in placing these steps with a historical pedigree in a nest of historical-fictionalized visual design – WITHOUT going into the territory of historical re-enactment. Our company’s performance took on a feel of “magical realism,” like a dream or painting, due to this playful environment.

This was an exciting departure from other alternatives I'd seen to presenting traditional dances: one being the casual delivery of the material in a "neutral" theatrical setting, another the unassuming and informal context of a party or jam, and yet another "living history" approach one might find in a museum about life in early 20th century America. Ironically, we had always performed these dances that we thought of as "old" in our pedestrian clothes, trying to make the dance forms more relatable to contemporary audiences. Suddenly, the historical value of the dances, however it was imagined, became the currency for the audience. I wondered how juxtaposing the contemporary with the "old" would frame or complement our traditional dances. My desire to do "Trad Dance Theater" was born. I was suddenly very interested in the idea that there were once professional touring circuits that allowed dancers who could do a range of things, including conveniently short percussive dances, to have steady employment.

Process and Methodology

Originally *Vaudevival: Old is the new New* grew out of a desire to tap into an audience investment and engagement in live performance that characterized early entertainment in the United States, especially the widely accessible form of vaudeville. I wanted to conduct research to generate material from which I could write text and dances alike; I wanted to design scenarios that allowed for the re-ordering and re-organization of histories and hierarchies. I made a structure and frame for the show that was loosely grouped around nine episodic acts, an average number

for vaudeville shows, so that I could experiment within some parameters with various boundaries and categories.

Rather than reenact a vaudeville show, I wanted to evoke design elements and revisit themes from that era, using them as a palate from which to create a statement about culture as seen through American vernacular dance.⁸ I tried to design an environment with enough historical references to support traditional dance forms like tap and buck dance, which actually would have existed on the vaudeville stage (Bowie 1984; Stein 1984); I could also juxtapose contemporary forms against this historical frame to highlight similarities and differences between then and now.

As I researched dance forms including early vernacular jazz, tap, flatfooting, and contemporary urban dance, certain themes began to surface, including troubled and troubling stories of race, identity, and community in America's history. The following investigative questions were foremost in my mind as I began the choreographic process; others revealed themselves as the work unfolded:

- How could I make dance that was accessible to a wider audience while still staying true to both vintage and postmodern aesthetics?
- How could I take dance forms with a historical pedigree and place them into a historical-fictionalized visual design without going into the territory of historical re-enactment?
- How could I work within dance forms that had a highly charged racial and cultural history without perpetuating minstrelsy?

I was very fortunate to incorporate many kinds of collaboration into my research and show. Musicians, dancers, choreographers, directors, poets and historians from many communities helped me gradually refine ideas through discussion and experimentation. The blog I compiled (www.vaudevival.com)

⁸ "Vernacular" dances are often social and improvised to some degree by many, and as Marshall Stearns defines them "*vernacular* in the sense of native and homegrown" (Stearns 1968: xvi).

contains specific historical material, choreographic and musical attribution, and some information as to the way each piece was built. My process included reading and watching video footage, and extensive journaling for over a year leading up to the concert, which is more detailed in the blog (see Appendix A). I also played with improvised choreographic research in the studio alone and with others, and took weekly technique classes in support of the material in my thesis.

Research Design

One compositional technique that I wished to incorporate from the beginning of reconceiving a vaudeville-inspired show was a collaging of sources. This seemed to go well with the underlying current of variety. My choice was reflected in the overall content of the show, within specific movement phrases, and in the mixing of media, live and recorded. I was encouraged to play and experiment largely because of an idea called “culture jamming” which informs many YouTube mash-ups and remixes. One YouTube video defines culture jamming as “capturing the corporately-controlled subjects of the one-way media barrage, reorganizing them to be a comment upon themselves, and spinning them back into the barrage for cultural consideration” (rc4rdo 2008 Web).

Eduardo Navas defines “remix theory” as an inherently postmodern deconstructionist technique underlying many software and aesthetic productions (Navas 2010 Web). Remixing, born out of the sampling that Jamaican Dub and hip-hop artists were developing in the 1970s, encompasses everything from using a copy/cut and paste process in Microsoft Word to making a celebrity mash-up

YouTube video for fun. “Remix is a type of binder, a cultural glue—a virus—that informs and supports contemporary culture” (Navas 2010 Web). I felt the consistent use of sampling and remixing were the adhesive holding the potential unwieldy collage of my research together, especially in its unlikely samplings.

One such “unlikely” comparison was noticing a relationship between hip-hop and Appalachian old-time culture. By focusing on glimpses of similarity in these two dance forms, I began my research by pursuing concrete evidence for my hunch. I saw dance genres as separate and discrete, including tap and other vaudeville-related percussive dance I was interested in. Early in my MFA program, I compared two seemingly disparate American dance forms in an interesting academic exercise. Little did I know that this inquiry into old-time and hip-hop would completely reframe my concept of the relationships between many American dance forms.

I started with some assumptions about the similarities between old-time and hip-hop. For example, one similarity I noticed early on was that artistic and cultural nuances seem to be flattened by images created by the mainstream commercial music industry. Country music and R&B each owe much to the traditions of old-time and hip-hop respectively, the latter of which frequently generates negative press with charges of violence, hyper-sexuality, and drug abuse. This musical content turns out to be another similarity, however; Appalachian ballads, far from the wholesome “downhome” stereotype created about old-time culture in the 1920s,⁹ frequently feature murder, binge drinking, premarital sex, or some combination thereof. Hip-hop and old-time are both pretty much just as “sex, drugs, and rock and roll” as

⁹ Henry Ford and other social conservatives in the 1920s endorsed “old-time” dances such as square dances or “Real Folk Dancing” from the Victorian era as politically and socially beneficial, and tried to lure young Americans away from the “degenerate” and “immoral” forms of jazz and ballroom dance more popular in urban Dance Halls (Giordano 2008:86).

Shakespeare, waltz, hot jazz, commercial hip-hop, and every other pop culture form that has scandalized someone's grandparents.

Both cultures represent historically, socially and economically marginalized populations. Both had been dismissed as “low art.” Both had been absent from my academic dance study heretofore. I already knew from my studies of other “trad” subcultures like Irish music and dance, that they both probably had complexities that weren't immediately obvious to outsiders. I sought credible sources¹⁰ of information in new mentors and tried to reconnect with old ones as well. The primarily oral transmission of both cultures made it necessary to balance print research with information from current practitioners in both fields. These commonalities fueled my interest, as they illuminated parallel areas that could potentially benefit from more research.

While I was investigating connections primarily in my research, the differences between old-time and hip-hop set up many parameters for my thesis project as a whole. The major contrasts that were immediately obvious to me were racial, geographical, and generational affinities. My stereotype of old-time culture was aging, white and rural; I thought of hip-hop as a form belonging to urban African Americans, primarily youth. Moving between these seemingly polarized communities looking for middle ground, race politics manifested in every new area of research, from tap to Charleston to Lindy Hop to postmodern dance. Hence, race

¹⁰ Issues of “authenticity” came up almost immediately in my initial readings (Hancock 2004; Thomas 2001; Huntington 2007). This wasn't a totally unfamiliar conversation in terms of looking at historical precedent for specific aesthetic choices in traditional forms, but the idea of cultural or “racial authenticity” was unexplored territory for me. Reading work by authors who were questioning my motivations as a white dancer was a departure from my experiences studying with mentors in person, complicating formal research even as it was beginning. I began to interrogate my self and my assumptions about dance, from categorizations to motivations. Continuing to unpack ideas of authenticity will be an area for future research for me, and further discussion within this paper.

became an underlying theme of my entire project, which, at the beginning, could have easily privileged gender, class, age, or geography instead. As I researched various American dance forms, spiraling through vernacular jazz, early tap influences like buck dance and flatfooting, and back to contemporary urban dance, certain trends began to surface, including artists being exploited and “invisibilized” (Gottschild 2000) in America’s history.

Themes of elitism and socioeconomic and artistic hierarchies emerged as my reading, viewing and dancing research led me into a wide variety of unanticipated areas. The vastness of American social and vernacular dances impressed upon me that I could not do a truly thorough examination of my original comparative study in the scope of an M.F.A. thesis. Therefore, old-time and hip-hop dance came to represent the boundary forms on an American dance history continuum – a timeline that bridged the gap between the two.¹¹ Tap, Lindy Hop, Charleston, urban and postmodern dance dominated the majority of the program, sporadically bounding through chronology at uneven intervals. This breadth of vocabulary meant learning or refining some techniques outside of my movement proficiencies. The honest, sometimes awkward, but *sincere*¹² attempt at mastering an unfamiliar activity or uncomfortable situation became a personal narrative underlying many acts.

¹¹ Susan Eike Spalding mentions that some community members in Southwest Virginia actually refer to vernacular “jazz” dances like Charleston and Black Bottom as “old-time dances” (Spalding 1993:123). Mike Seeger has documented mountain styles of “flatfooting,” “buck dance,” “clogging,” and tap (Seeger 2007), which are still practiced today as “old-time dance.” Katrina Hazzard-Donald in turn traces the history of hip-hop dance to tap and vernacular jazz forms, and earlier forms of rural percussive dance “marked by flatfootedness” (Hazzard-Donald 1996:121).

¹² For a discussion of “racial sincerity” see John L. Jackson (2005).

Methodology

“Make it new!” – battle cry of Modernist poet Ezra Pound, as he looked to Chinese classical poetry for inspiration (Academy of American Poets, 2012 Web)

Implied in the title *Vaudevival: Old is the new New* is the belief that to present something fresh, we actually have to stop chasing after newness and acknowledge what already exists. The theme and driving motivation of early 20th century Modernism in all arts and sciences was the desire to reinvent and see the world in a NEW way. In the early 20th century, a major period of focus for my research, the individual who found authenticity within him/herself held more artistic collateral than the tradition-bearer trying to preserve or recreate. The ideas of tradition and innovation suddenly morphed into de facto categories,¹³ creating the impression that dance forms espoused either one or the other, but not both, erasing the understanding of intertextuality as foundational to artworks. Antithetical to my experience of any traditional or modern dance community, I set out to examine and trouble this bifurcation of oldness and newness.

One vital contribution that modern/postmodern choreographic processes directly made to this project was the direct and open questioning of terms and choices by viewers and participants. University of Maryland College Park has, or had at the time of this writing at least, a dance program primarily focused on modern/postmodern dance, and the cultural practices therein both supported and challenged me in various ways. The open forum embraced by this community allowed me to dialogue, revise, and collaborate freely with artists of diverse

¹³ This attitude is one I encountered in explanations of distinctions made by professors and peers as to what was “high art” or “low art” throughout my time in James Madison University and the University of Maryland College Park. The innovation/tradition dichotomy is also debated within dance communities regarding “authenticity,” “fusion,” or “experimental” sub-genres.

perspectives, and to turn research questions inwards to see if the consequences of this deconstructive approach matched the intentions of the inquiries. It also allowed me to collage and juxtapose unexpected elements to make new statements with existing content.

That content was largely comprised of pieces of, or entire dances that were choreographed by significant figures in their respective genres or communities. For example, I staged Leonard Reed and Willie Bryant's Shim Sham Shimmy three different ways in a scene that including other events and elements. I invited guest choreographers into my process. I collaborated with my cast to create exponentially more reactions to my historical and sociological research, triangulating the relationships of the work through a sea of seemingly disparate fields. Including these many voices became an important part of my methodology and product. I struggled to weigh and weave narratives and counter-narratives into a textured coherence, without flattening issues into one-dimensional predictability.

I found myself frequently learning movement outside my expertise, a somewhat vulnerable position. I tried to bring as much sincerity and transparency as possible to my study, in a way that did not dismiss authenticity or disrespect any dance form. I included dialogues to contextualize information that I felt might be lost due to lack of proficiency. I will discuss these methods in more detail in Chapter Three.

Theoretical Lens

The idea of intertextuality adequately describes one of the most important theories justifying my multi-faceted research design. Naomi M. Jackson defines intertextuality as “the quality of literary texts to quote or allude to another literary text, thereby setting up a relationship between the two works” (Jackson 2000:220). I could easily extrapolate this for dance and think of many social situations in which I felt like dancers were dialoguing with their movement, or “riffing off each other.” I had seen this in b-boy battles and flatfooting jams; as I read more about American percussive dance history and hip hop aesthetics, I came to appreciate that this was not only happening, but was a central, intentional, and often highly strategic element of these cultures, in terms of dancers relating both to each other and to the music. Looking at many texts allowed me to see relationships beyond the surface meaning (“he’s tap dancing because he feels happy”) and gave me ideas for experimenting with context, such as playing with the performance of gender and race.

The dance forms themselves could also be seen as meta-texts alluding to one another, for example b-boying/b-girling’s top rock unintentionally referencing Charleston, which in turn might have been in dialogue with Appalachian flatfoot or buck dance styles. Instead of feeling that I had to prove causality or a clear lineage between forms through time, I could release the need for one definitive link between forms. Embracing an idea of indeterminacy, the realization that all can’t be known, let me explore many more interactions among the influencing material, such as looking at historical records AND contemporary versions of forms with varying histories.

Jackson's assertion that "no text is an untouched, unified whole, but the result of many 'grafts' of other texts" (Jackson 2000:220) has really remarkable implications for my understanding of what is modern/postmodern "choreography." While perhaps a fundamental idea in postmodern theory, I had not encountered this idea applied to Dance Studies in my formal education. Choreography and composition courses in the universities I have attended have prioritized, at times insisted upon, original movement invention for course work.¹⁴ Jackson argues that many postmodern choreographers use a collaging process, perhaps not in exactly the same way that urban DJs use samples, but not entirely divorced from the theory of remix aesthetics posited by Navas. If the postmodernism is in the process, I could use "found" movement to collage my work together, the way many sculptors use recycled materials, and not unlike the way some choreographers ask dancers to create their own phrases and then the choreographer arranges them. The notion of intertextuality definitely appealed to me as a way to present original ideas and choreography without all the emphasis being on novel movement invention.¹⁵ This became the backbone of my choreographic technique for the piece, so that I could present historical repertoire as part of my research.

The theory of intertextuality also surfaced in my study of traditional and contemporary vernacular forms. Adam Mansbach, writing about hip-hop aesthetics

¹⁴ According to one University of Maryland College Park student, "if it had a name, you weren't allowed to use it" in one professor's composition class. This rule effectively eliminates all codified dance forms, such as ballet, tap, Lindy Hop, jazz, Irish step dance, etc. from the coursework.

¹⁵ I enjoy "inventing new movement" – but how can I know it is new? Just because I am not consciously imitating someone else doesn't mean I've "invented" anything new as far as someone else may be concerned. I am sometimes perturbed by the conflation of "new" and "new to me." I think "invention" is an important aspect of choreography, but I don't feel it is an inalienable element of choreography. This attitude is partly what makes me feel affinity towards postmodernism.

explains the technique of sampling from remix theory, which is built on the phenomenon:

Self-awareness – the oft-lamented paralyzing postmodern condition of knowing that one is producing art, knowing that it’s all been said and done before, fearing that in forging ahead you risk redundancy, irrelevance, pretension – has not produced paralysis in hip-hoppers. Perhaps our immunity from this generational malaise stems from hip-hop’s love of collaging, sampling, dislocating, and reconfiguring: the more that’s been said and done already, the more we have to play with. Where others see defeat, we find liberation, empowerment (Mansbach 2006:100).

Histories of tap dance make similar mention: “It was through this three-hundred-year musical and social exchange, with its steady pattern of imitation, assimilation, and the transformation of such percussive step dances as the jig, gioube, buck-and-wing, and Juba, that tap dance evolved in America” (Hill 2010:2). The repeated dialogue of dance material, in which participants specifically refer to one another’s movements, and then improve upon them or top them with something else, implies a pride in and a desire to preserve continuity in the dance form. Far from trying to make work that is entirely unlike anything the audience has ever seen, dancers use the steps to perpetuate an on-going discourse in their community and society at large, inserting an original thought within a recognizable framework or lexicon.

Vaudeville as a theatrical structure is a collage, a remix of different kinds of performance. The production side of my thesis revealed a crucial intertextuality between sections of my show, particularly in the racially sensitive statements that I did not want to stifle. Researching history, using postmodern deconstructionist approaches and a remix aesthetic were not only very useful to me as research and choreographic tools, but are I believe potent tools for social change. I will discuss these specific issues more in my analysis in Chapter Three.

Chapter 2: The Performance

In this chapter I will describe each act of the theatrical production *Vaudevival: Old is the new New*; program information is also included. The average vaudeville show had nine acts, so I named nine acts in my thesis concert, even though I could have counted more or less. Part of the joke was trying to conform, and being actually unable, to the conventions of vaudeville. I will analyze and discuss many of my choreographic choices and their social and historical context in Chapter Three.

Participants – Cast and Collaborators

I was blessed with a cast of undergraduate dancers recruited in the Dance program at the University of Maryland, College Park that displayed a remarkable range of races and ethnicities. The diversity in the cast allowed us to delve into identity politics with a truly multicultural conversation. These cast members were my most dedicated collaborators, giving me their honest feedback and thoughtful reflection. In rehearsal they helped me test improvisation games I made up to generate movement, did short writing tasks, and conducted their own guided and independent historical research.

Greg C. Adams, a graduate student in the ethnomusicology program who I met thanks to Miriam Phillips, has now been a steady collaborator of mine since 2010. For the thesis concert, I set a loosely structured improvised solo on myself based on a set of banjo tunes, which we arranged together, and which was a jumping off point for an entire scene. Greg was also instrumental in helping me with my academic research as a mentor, as was my thesis committee chair Miriam Phillips. I

consider both of them collaborators on this paper. Also at UMD, I recruited an excellent slam poet, engineering student Abisola Kusimo, whom I met at an open showing in the Dance Theatre hosted by Patrik Widrig. Both Abisola and Greg not only rehearsed with me and brought their own strengths, they also helped me clarify and refine what the work was saying in my own mind.

One other rich area of collaboration was in the production with my stunningly calm costume designer, Rebecca DeLapp, who was more reliable, accommodating and delightful than I can describe. She magically always had time to help me, go shopping, or find a last minute touch. She is going to be a huge asset to the field of Dance. I also count Erin Glasspatrick, Production Coordinator in charge of the dance graduate thesis concerts, as a collaborating strategist and ally.

Choreographers and Collaborators

As I had come into the graduate program hoping to have a concentration in performance instead of choreography, I soon viewed my thesis concert as an opportunity to ask other people to set choreography on me and concentrate on my technique and performance. I asked Gesel Mason, whose teaching and sense of social critique I loved, to set a modern/postmodern solo on me; and I asked Aysha Upchurch, the first deeply knowledgeable hip-hop dance teacher I had ever had to set a solo on me as well. I also decided to reach out for more training in areas that had previously been more peripheral to my dancing, such as urban dance and tap dance, which I have loved for a long time, but which had never been my primary concentration. As coaches I had guest artists Brandon Barnette, an accomplished urban dancer, and Leslie Felbain, a professor with whom I studied Alexander

technique, meet with me individually and come into rehearsal to work with my cast. I took other technique class with teachers who challenged my parameters about dance and concretized a lot of my dance theory, most notably at Urban Artistry, a Bethesda, Maryland based urban dance group with whom I studied b-boy/b-girl (breakdance), popping, and house dances.

I learned a vernacular jazz dance choreographed by Brenda Bufalino, co-founder of the American Tap Dance Foundation and one of the most recognized living tap dancers in the country, via Ann Kilkelly, award-winning tap historian and professor. I restaged this piece in three different ways, but it was an honor to have access to such credible source material. I also learned from vintage film clips, from Marilyn Miller and Joe E. Brown to Al Minns and Leon James, and while none of them know me (and probably wouldn't even if they were still alive), my concert and my conclusions all would have been vastly different without them. I rehearsed tap choreography with Matthew Olwell and took master classes with Bessie-award winning Baakari Wilder, in addition to attending the local DC Tap Fest for the past three years. Allison Robbins, who I met in Charlottesville while she was getting her Master's in Music also contributed historical and choreographic knowledge to my project. Andy Kontola and Gaye Santelmann also coached us in some Lindy Hop movement to throw into our arrangement of the Shim Sham in Act 3, generously bartering for the lesson and giving us advice on where to find good social dances.

Musicians

The band that I assembled for *Vaudevival: Old is the new New*, whom I dubbed The New Band, was comprised of members of bands I'd been listening to for many years, or people with whom I was personally acquainted. Playing Upright Bass, band leader, Joseph "Jobass" DeJarnette, of Sonic New York, runs Truthface Recordings/Studio 808A in Floyd, VA, and recorded the band in rehearsal and helped engineer sound at the performance. Formerly of The Wiyos, a band that was highly influential in my interest in vaudeville and toured with Bob Dylan and Willie Nelson, Jobass also plays and teaches old-time bass. On fiddle and vocals, Sarah Alden of Luminescent Orchestrïi and many other projects, resides in Brooklyn, NY, and added a perfect musical sensibility that could span old-time, swing, jazz, and hip-hop arrangements. Lydia Martin of Fredrick, MD, defies banjo stereotypes I held as a young person of banjo players as old, white males who had no ear for any kind of music but twangy Bluegrass – in fact a major goal of the show is demystifying this stereotype which I now reject utterly. Lydia was helpful not only in her funky ragtime banjo grooves but her willingness to sing, play percussion, guitar, and offer encouragement, suggestions and ideas. Jabari Exum of Hueman Prophets, a hip-hop theater project, and Farafina Kan, a West African dance and music company, is a native of Washington, DC and contributed percussion on the djembe and human beat box, as well as other vocals. I met Jabari because he accompanies West African dance classes at University of Maryland, and although he was unfamiliar with old-time music prior to the project, he immediately felt like part of that trad community, contributing perfectly complementary beats to whatever we selected. Greg C. Adams brought his exceptional skill and passion for the banjo, which was a constant

inspiration, as was his repertoire of funky nineteenth century tunes. Aimee Curl and Danny Knicely of Furnace Mountain and other projects, joined us on vocals, and are two of the most beautiful singers I can think of, and master instrumentalists in their own right. I was humbled that so many virtuosic artists would basically donate their time to my project at a fraction of what would be fair artist fees for them.

Pre-show

Out-door

There were two pre-show acts before the concert proper started. One was outdoors on the patio of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. Accompanied by live solo banjo, three men spun fire poi, balls of kevlar attached to short chains that are spun in circular pathways away from and around the body. The other pre-show was in the Gildenhorn Recital Hall, and consisted of the band playing live arrangements of songs from various genres while film footage that had been particularly formative in my research played silently behind them. The purpose of the pre-shows was to transport the audience to an openness for another time and space through the unexpected and magical presence of fire before they even entered the slick, contemporary interior of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.

Fire is both simple, elegant, elemental, and circus-y – even potentially cheesy. I like this ambiguity. It referenced both the unassuming ancient roots of communal spectacle, which must have been lit by fire of some kind; and the kind of performance

risk that is usually reserved for very high budget productions like Cirque du Soleil. Adrian Galvin, who has been studying poi¹⁶ technique for several years, choreographed the fire dance with input, guidance and editing from myself.

Indoor

Meanwhile, in the Gildenhorn Recital Hall, full clips of banjo orchestras, Al Minns and Leon James, Whitey's Lindy Hoppers, and a Black Bottom dance tutorial from 1928 played with no sound. The New Band arranged a score to accompany these research images, and to calibrate the audience's ears to the sounds they'd be hearing for the rest of the show. Since most instruments were acoustic in the space, the overall sound was rather quieter than I was used to, so sitting in the audience for a few minutes just listening was meant to prevent the low volume from being distracting once the dance began. I think this worked to some extent, but I still felt the music was regrettably quiet overall; something I will handle differently in the show's next incarnation.

¹⁶ Poi are Maori in origin according to the website where we bought our fire spinning gear (www.homeofpoi.com). I first encountered them in a carnival-themed show in Charlottesville, VA along with other flaming objects like fans, hoops, staffs and whips. Like other "fire toys" they have been widely incorporated into street and festival performance in the United States. Poi in particular may be a case of the same kind of cultural appropriation that made me squeamish in other parts of my concert.

The Acts

Act 1 – A Cheeky Clique of Charlestoneing Chicks

If everybody Charlestoneed off a bridge would you do it too?

Choreography by: Early 20th century jazz dancers at various clubs including the Savoy, as demonstrated by Al Minns and Leon James

Arranged by: Emily Oleson

Performed by: Emily Oleson, Catherine Marafino, Raha Behnam, Michele Chia, Chelsea Freeman, Ashley Haymaker, Connor Voss
Music performed by: Sarah Alden, Aimee Curl, Morgan Morrison, Lydia Martin, Joseph “Joebass” DeJarnette

Music composition: “That’s Old Time” by Dwayne Brooke, Aimee Curl, Morgan Morrison

In Act 1, we explored Charleston dance variations and related popular vernacular dances from the early 20th century. I developed this choreography almost entirely by looking at vintage dance clips on YouTube. The music, “That’s Old Time” by The Woodshedders, was a recently composed song that was about contemporary old-time culture, specifically the dances and tunes played by a community that embraces ideals of rural pre-mass media America.¹⁷ This song provided fit accompaniment for a contemporary treatment of what would be, according to some, an “old-time” dance.¹⁸ My partner Catherine Marafino and I edited the choreography as we developed the initial duet, and University of Maryland students formed a backup chorus of Charleston dancers.

¹⁷ For a concise, interesting working definition of old-time music see www.oldtimemusic.com, which talks about the label as a marketing tool from 1923, the same year the Charleston would have appeared on Broadway in *Runnin’ Wild* (Stearns 1968:111; Giordano 2008:82).

¹⁸ In most of my experience “old-time dance” means square dancing, and flatfooting, also called clogging, buck dance, hoedown, jigging, or just “dancing” (Seeger 2007) however, Susan Eike Spalding’s dissertation *Aesthetic Standards in Old Time Dancing in Southwest Virginia: African-American and European-American Threads* quotes some members of rural communities in Southwestern Virginia referring to “old-time dances” as Charleston, Black Bottom and Big Apple (Spalding 1993:123), elements of all of which are in my choreography for this piece.

Act 2 – The Un-silent Movie Quartet

Are they really together?

Original Choreography by: Marilyn Miller and Joe E. Brown (?)

Choreography adapted by: Allison Robbins

Performed by: Emily Oleson & Matthew Olwell

Video Projection: *Sally* (1929)

Music performed by: Vitaphone Orchestra, Leo F. Forbstein, conductor

Music composition: “Look for the Silver Lining” by Jerome Kern & Buddy DeSylva

For Act 2, Matthew Olwell and I performed in front of the projected film footage of Marilyn Miller and Joe E. Brown dancing in the 1929 film *Sally*. In a short piece done to an instrumental arrangement of “Look for the Silver Lining,” Brown and Miller perform what I would classify as “eccentric dancing” – dancing that is designed to be arrestingly odd and/or slightly comedic, like abstracted slapstick. Allison Robbins, who received her Master’s degree in Music from University of Virginia, helped me learn the choreography in this piece, which we postulated was made by the dancers, and also helped me block it to coincide with, or complement, the action in the film.

Act 3 – Some Shim Sham Shenanigans

Is this really appropriate in their age?

Choreography by: Leonard Reed & Willie Bryant

Performed by: Emily Oleson, Matthew Olwell, Chelsea Freeman, Raha Behnam,

Ashley Haymaker, David Yates, Connor Voss

Music performed by: The New Band

Music composition: “When I Get Low I Get High” by Ella Fitzgerald

The Shim Sham Shimmy is widely known in both the Lindy Hop and tap dance communities, even sometimes referred to as the “tap anthem.” While Leonard

Reed and Willie Bryant choreographed it in 1927, over the years countless different performers have danced it and Reed and others have created several variations. Matthew Olwell and I sequenced three of these variations and included a Lindy Hop-inspired partner dance break¹⁹ in between the first and second time through the Shim Sham. On the second time through the dance, two tap dancers on small dance boards²⁰ were slid gradually onto stage pushed by other cast members, their tap sounds audible even from off stage while Matthew and I were still as we “froze the breaks.”²¹ The dancers on the boards were the only ones wearing tap shoes, and both were African American. This casting choice was a reference to African American dancers frequently overdubbing the sounds of white dancers in early film tap sequences (White 2001:2), for which they received no screen credit – a fact that was mentioned in a dialogue immediately following this dance. Everyone else doing the Shim Sham wore sneakers, creating a contrast in the audibility of the dancers on the small boards versus on the floor. The cast members who had been pushing the dance boards joined in on the third Shim Sham variation, suddenly doubling the number of performers in unison. We formed a semi-circle like a section of a tap jam session circle, a tribute to the solidarity and global spread of the tap community.

¹⁹ “Break” can have many different meanings in dance and music; sometimes it means solo, or variation, change in position or instrumentation, or a particular kind of one of the above. It would be far too complicated to get into all of the nuances of the term here. “Three and a break” is a common compositional form in both tap and jazz, which means a repetition of three sequences, and then a variation, which is how it is used in the Shim Sham choreography generally, and in Act 3: we throw in a variation or “break.”

²⁰ Tap dancers often carry small squares of dance floor, about 3’x3’ because often tap dancing is prohibited on dance floors and stages, and this was the case in CSPAC’s Gildenhorn Recital Hall.

²¹ In freezing the break in the Shim Sham, one makes no audible noise.

Act 4 – Verily, a Veracible²² Vestige of Vintage
Vernacular

An Audacious Attempt at Authenticity?

Choreography by: Brenda Bufalino

Arrangement and Adaptation by: Emily Oleson and performers

Performance by: Raha Behnam, Michele Chia, Adrian Galvin, Marianne Goris,
Chelsea Freeman, Ashley Haymaker, Shanna Lim, Amy Scheer, Connor Voss, David
Yates

Music Performance by: Count Basie

Music composition: “Lester Leaps In” by Lester Young

Ann Kilkelly initially taught me this vernacular jazz dance choreographed by Brenda Bufalino as a warm-up before we worked on some tap material in one of our early meetings in November of 2010, but I liked it so much I wanted to include the piece in three different treatments. Count Basie’s band(s) had/have several versions of the song “Lester Leaps In,” which Bufalino choreographed this dance to, and we selected a slower version than the one to which Kilkelly remembers performing. Jabari Exum added a go-go beatbox line over the recorded track the third time through the form. The undergraduate cast at the University of Maryland performed this dance with me, the first time through as if we were at a party doing jazz socially, the second time as a moving somatic frame for video “citations”²³ containing vintage jazz dance, and the third time with the hard edges of “Street Jazz” or “Thrash Jazz.”²⁴

²² In the playful vaudeville tradition, I made this word up, “verbing” the word “veracity” meaning truth – “veracible” describes something than *can be made to be* truthful.

²³ I assembled some clips that were available on YouTube of “authentic” or “vernacular” jazz dancers, and, as closely as possible, edited together footage of them doing the same movements in Bufalino’s choreography, in the same order it appears in her dance. I included their names, in order to “cite” the dancers performing their social dance repertoire, instead of the legal owner of the archive footage.

²⁴ Junious “House” Brickhouse of Urban Artistry explained to me the difference between “authentic” hip-hop dances, which were social party dance, a fascinating parallel to vernacular jazz dance, and what is commonly taught as “hip-hop dance” in studios, which he describes as “thrash jazz done to R&B music.”

Act 5 - A Pensive Plea for Permission

Investigating “practice”

Choreography by: Aysha Upchurch

Performance by: Emily Oleson and Abisola Kusimo

Text by: Aysha Upchurch, Abisola Kusimo, Emily Oleson

Music performance: The New Band

Music composition: “Far South Reel” from Converse’s Analytical Banjo Method (1886.)

Aysha Upchurch choreographed and helped me conceptualize a piece in which I tried to “practice” phrases from several urban dance forms, usually popularly grouped as “hip-hop” dance. We ended up including a basic hip-hop bounce only, and then branched out to b-girl toprock and the West Coast funk style popping, two styles that are commonly, though erroneously, called hip-hop dance. I repeatedly stopped and started my movements, switching gears to show varying degrees of success and frustration. Greg Adams contributed “Far South Reel” from Converse’s Analytical Banjo Method (1886), over which we added a bass line, beat box, and a clave beat played on a cast iron skillet. In the middle of the section, Abisola Kusimo, a young African American woman from the audience interrupted the band with a challenge to me about trying to do hip-hop dance as a white woman. We had an improvisational dialogue about my motivations to learn more about the form, and Kusimo gave a poem about the cultural biases faced by black women. The piece ended with my admission that I was afraid that retreating from learning black art forms might widen racial rifts, but that I was also afraid of doing harm by performing minstrelsy.

Act 6 – A Myriad of Musings on Minstrelsy

Who is impersonating whom here?

Choreography by: Emily Oleson, Greg C. Adams and performers
Performance by: Raha Behnam, Michelle Chia, Marianne Goris, Shanna Lim,
Emily Oleson, Matthew Olwell, Amy Scheer, Connor Voss, David Yates
Music performance: Greg C. Adams

Act 6 opened with a projected photo and text montage with quotes about the popular nineteenth century entertainment form of minstrel shows, in which white performers in black face make up and wigs distorted African American features and customs in (then) comedic (today unspeakably offensive) impressions of black culture on plantations. Greg Adams accompanied these images on his reproduction 1850s banjo with a slow version of Yankee Doodle, then for the rest of the piece launched into a medley of solo banjo tunes from the 1850s to 1890s. The undergraduate cast embarked on a deconstructionist exploration of imitation, censorship, and appropriation. Highly abstracted movement phrases featured repetitions of themes with different degrees of accuracy or exaggeration, ending with spoken comments of a racist nature that the cast flung at each other. For example, one white dancer questions why an African American dancer doesn't have more "soul" and he sarcastically suggests she not even try to dance and just go pick up a banjo. Matthew Olwell and I provided a wide moving frame for these explorations, clogging and Irish step dancing on the very edges of the stage, intimating that these forms are not free of the stigma of the minstrel era.

Act 7 – Possum, the Amazing Jigging Yokel

Choreography by: Emily Oleson
Performance by: Amy Scheer and special guests
Music performance: The New Band and special guests
Music composition: “Glory in the Meeting House” traditional, “Angeline the Baker”
traditional, “Billie Jean” by Michael Jackson

Immediately following the piece examining minstrelsy, this piece started off with a creepy-sounding fiddle tune played in E minor by Sarah Alden; other members of the band gradually join her on two banjos and an upright bass. Undergraduate dance major Amy Scheer, the banjo clown, in an attempt to join the band pulled several banjos (and then a short series of accordions) out from off stage, all of which were taken from her by band or audience members.²⁵ She then switched to dance, kicking off a duet with David Yates, making references to clogging and modern dance. When the band began their string band cover of Michael Jackson’s Billie Jean, the cast encouraged the audience to join in an enormous dance party on the stage, taking the tone of the show from creepy and uncomfortable to familiar and fun, and showing another side of the banjo.

Act 8 – The Next Big Thing

Choreography by: Gesel Mason
Performance by: Emily Oleson
Music performance: The New Band
Music composition: “Blue Monk” by Thelonious Monk

²⁵ Originally I wanted this piece to be a “banjo ambush” – I invited all of the banjo players I could get to in the Washington D.C., Maryland, Virginia area and offered them free admission to bring their instruments and surround the audience with banjos playing Billie Jean. Each night we only ended up with three to four guest musicians, however, so late in the game I had to develop another plan that had an air of spontaneity.

Choreographed by Gesel Mason, this solo piece started as a conversation about different styles and techniques populating the same body. The research questions were about how the influences of tap, jazz, modern, urban dance, Irish dance, and other forms come out in improvisation. Filming long sessions of improvisation, Mason assembled clips into structure that followed a journey from percussive to internal to expansive. Signs instructing the audience in actions like “Applause,” “Cheer,” “Giggle,” or “Boo” created an interaction and acted as a reference to vaudeville and television. Half way through the piece the band launched into a cover of Thelonious Monk’s “Blue Monk.” The banjo solos in this arrangement in particular lent a ragtime feel to the piece, tying the contemporary choreography to the early 20th century content of other parts in the show.

Act 8 ½ – Magic Trick

I thought this physics experiment (see Appendix B) about the perception of brightness and contrast on an old-fashioned overhead projector would go over better as a kitschy “magic trick” – it was already a compelling optical illusion, but would be too dry without some humor. To add some extra irony, Catherine Marafino, my dance partner from the Charleston, was the magician. I asked David Yates to be the “lovely assistant,” because he was a fire protection-engineering master’s student used to scientific technical jargon, and hence he had the job of explaining the scientific side of the illusion. To make sure the magician reference was complete, Marianne Goris, a visual art and dance double major, fabricated a giant top hat, and my three year old daughter Lydia jumped out of it dressed as a white rabbit.

Act 9 - A Tantalizing Tale of Time-Traveling Treason

Where did they come from, where are they going?

Choreography by: Emily Oleson, solos by performers
Performance by: Raha Behnam, Michele Chia, Chelsea Freeman, Adrian Galvin,
Marianne Goris, Ashley Haymaker, Shanna Lim, James Maisu, Catherine
Marafino, Emily Oleson, Matthew Olwell, Amy Scheer, Connor Voss, David Yates
Music performance: Common featuring Jill Scott and The New Band
Music composition: "I am Music" by Ahmir Thompson, Dawn Thompson,
James Poyser, Lonnie Lynn, J. Yancey, Pino Palladino, Jeff Lee Johnson, Jill Scott

I choreographed this group piece as a conversation between many different social dance forms, including clogging/flatfooting, Lindy Hop, hip-hop, popping, vernacular jazz and Charleston. In the course of our rehearsals this became a partner dance performed in a circle, including some floor work; it could be done with any number of couples. Though there was a lift in the dance, there was no decided leader or follower and the gender of lifters/liftees was mixed. I also filmed the formation from above and projected the aerial footage behind the dancers; since the stage was raised, this allowed the audience to see the patterns the dance made on the floor. Music was Common's "I Am Music," a hip-hop track with a swing feel. The dancing concluded with solos and duets choreographed by the dancers, and the band decumulated until just the drum was playing and I was doing a simple body percussion pattern with the audience. The drum dropped out, and we deconstructed the body percussion pattern to just a heartbeat to close the show.

Entre-Acts

I only exited the stage entirely twice in the concert, but in between each act in the concert, I changed costume, mostly necessitated by a shoe change, because I was switching dance styles. This was often within audience sightlines in an upstage

corner. Not wanting these changes to get into the realm of Burlesque²⁶ (although being comfortable with that as an oblique reference), I wanted other action to be continuing on stage. To fill this time, I originally wanted to create very vaudevillian sketches involving extremely fast verbal banter and slapstick comedy. Not only was this outside my own realm of expertise to perform, I found I could neither convincingly write nor direct this kind of dialogue. This could be yet another avenue for future study.

Instead of transitions that were virtuosic vaudeville-style performance, I used the entre-acts to explicitly contextualize the dances and my own inner turmoil studying racism and appropriation. While it was not artfully written, I took a lot of the dialogue from actual conversations I had had with friends, mentors and collaborators, such as “Why would anyone want to revive vaudeville?” – a question our percussionist Jabari asked me on the way to our first rehearsal which became the first spoken line in the show. The fact that the lines were real events in my life gave them a place in my story. I have received consistent feedback that they were the “weakest link” in the show, and I can see that this is true. I am happy, nonetheless, in the fact that they did transmit a significant amount of information and theory, albeit didactically. It is impossible to know how audience reaction would have been without the dialogues. Would the dances have read as clearly with less context? For some, it may have been more powerful, but returning again to the idea of accessibility, I made a conscious choice to try to reach a broader audience.

²⁶ Burlesque, distinct from vaudeville, was variety entertainment that featured women stripping (Trav S. D. 2005: 105).

Chapter 3: Analysis

Act 1 – A Cheeky Clique of Charlestoneing Chicks

In 2006 I wanted to come up with some jazzy slapstick that just felt good to do to the neo-Swing music of my new favorite bands like The Woodshedders and The Wiyos. I originally thought of Charleston as just a fun recreational dance that I could riff on without falling into the Ruth St. Denis legacy of modern dancers.²⁷ I consider this legacy the practice of selecting “Other” dance forms for inspiration from afar without careful study, to either portrait or caricature for his or her own demographic who don’t know anything about the original²⁸ – but I soon realized that this was not going to be the case. I was just as bewitched by the Charleston as St. Denis must have been by the cigarette poster of Isis (flombar1 2007 Web), and like her, I couldn’t help myself but to start messing around with someone else’s tradition.

After a couple of months of playing shamelessly with Charleston ideas, I came to realize that members of the Lindy Hop community are probably considered the guardians of the Charleston and other social and vernacular dances born or popularized at the Savoy ballroom in the 1920s, ‘30s and ‘40s. Certainly many Lindy Hoppers consider this part of their mission, such as the Harlem Hot Shots who are, according to their website, “a group of professional Swedish dancers whose specialty is entertainment authentic to the Swing Era.” Their teachers studied with original

²⁷ For a further discussion of Ruth St. Denis and issues of cultural imperialism see Desmond 2001:256-270. Ruth St. Denis contributed so significantly to the field of dance, I in no way wish to diminish her accomplishments or importance. Comments like “India came to me,” however, can be difficult to interpret today, making her a subject of some controversy (Frosch 1999:252).

²⁸ Recent University of Maryland Dance M.F.A. graduate Daniel Phoenix Singh notes some mechanics of this practice in his thesis (Singh 2004:34).

Savoy dancers like Al Minns, much like my new friend Jeff Booth at the Jam Cellar in D.C., who studied with Frankie Manning and Norma Miller, among others.

My clearest intimation of the proprietary feeling Lindy Hoppers might have for Charleston came after my concert as I attended a weekly dance at the Jam Cellar. An instructor named Bobby White, who I was chatting with about dance history asked if I had “my Charleston yet?” It was quite striking; he didn’t mean *my* Charleston in the sense that I would have developed my own style or variation through a long period of experimenting with the dance in a social setting, the way the original authors of the dance would have done. He meant did I have the Charleston they teach in his community at his event for the purpose of partner dancing. I collected further evidence for my theory: several Lindy Hop companies, at least four but probably dozens, perform choreographed solo Charleston dances not unlike my choreography for Act 1, the solo Charleston competitions at events like the International Lindy Hop Showdown have been getting bigger over the last three years, and the apparent “web absence” (opposite of web presence) of a Charleston or vernacular jazz community apart from Lindy Hoppers.

Even though I didn’t have several years to make a respectful and systematic study of the Lindy Hop and Charleston, I tried to find the most credible, as well as the most artistically stimulating source material to reference. Perhaps that makes it worse. On the other hand, maybe no one else cares – but I care. Part of the whole purpose of my thesis project was a respectful treatment of tradition. Right off the bat my convictions were tested; I don’t know whether my choreography represents success or failure. It probably depends on whom you ask. I feel uneasily happy with it. I tried to make my dance about the ’20s, instead of ’20s-inspired postmodern

dance – this would be like Ruth St. Denis today getting on YouTube and watching a bunch of Bharatanatyam dance to make *Nautch Dance*, instead of just going with her guts and an evocative costume. I don't know if that's better, but at least it's different. In spite of what I consider noble intentions towards self-identified “traditional” communities, I am a postmodernist, so I can't get completely away from that.

To learn Charleston steps and variations I turned almost entirely to YouTube, with the important exception of my friend Josephine Stewart, a great dancer who taught me (and/with/through my friend Meg) my first formal Charleston step.²⁹ Her studies in Swing and Lindy Hop far exceed my own by many years. By the end of my search I was only watching Al Minns and Leon James videos for movement vocabulary, which I've arranged like I would arrange a dance that's comprised of traditional Irish step dance steps, many of which people treat as public domain. This kind of choreography raises really interesting questions for me about plagiarism and tradition. After a certain point, words become a language, and people who all speak the same language aren't copying each other just because they aren't inventing brand new original words for every situation. After that point, movement coalesces into a “form” and people who work within that form repeat movement motifs indefinitely without charges of redundancy or plagiarism from their own.

I'm thinking here of ballet's *pas de bourre* as an example – who invented it? It is no longer considered necessary to cite that person each time you use it. Even if it would be nice to cite the original *pas de bourre-er*, that's just not going to happen. There's no point in getting all riled up about it, or staying away from it just because someone who happened to do three consecutive weight shifts named them a particular

²⁹ Her step still exists in the piece, when Catherine and I do a front to back Charleston.

thing. Those weight shifts existed long before the French language would be my guess. However, Charleston is a little different, it's just hard to say how different; it's not as old or ubiquitous as the *pas de bourre* (the latter having been incorporated as a term into many other dance styles) and it has a history³⁰ in which the original practitioners were African American. The Charleston was picked up, altered, and marketed by white dancers, and if the original dancers had wanted to copyright it they wouldn't have been legally allowed to.³¹

If I have been appropriating Charleston from the Lindy Hop community, which is not certain in my mind, watching contemporary practitioners of the form, who are almost all white, delayed the realization that Charleston was a site of racial resistance in the 1920s, and not a light-hearted departure from the depressing history of tap dance I was reading about in books like *Black Dance in the United States from 1690 to 1970* (Emery 1972). It was in fact, the same history. I would love to keep finding out more and more about the roots of the Charleston and some of its earliest practitioners, but I am just scratching the surface. Here is what I do know:

Charleston was first seen on Broadway in the 1923 African American musical *Runnin' Wild* (Stearns 1968:145), whereupon it became a national craze. After that point, professional dance teachers, or masters, encouraged practitioners to do a more sedate and upright "correct" version of the dance, instead of the grounded and angular "clumsy" way to do it (Martin 2010; Haylor and Millar 1926). Charleston became a dance performed solo in competition, in partners in the Dance Hall, by choruses on stage and by mixtures thereof. It remained a highly accessible form practiced by both

³⁰ Marshall Stearns in *Jazz Dance* suggests that the Charleston is similar to the "King Sailor" and "Obolo" dances (Stearns 1968:12).

³¹ Anthea Kraut mentions that simple repetitive steps in social dances can't be copyrighted under current law in *Race-ing Copyright* (2009).

black and white dancers, though most of the venues to dance the Charleston would have been racially segregated, except for the Savoy ballroom in Harlem.

I want to briefly address the term “Black Dance” – when Jawole Willa Jo Zollar discusses racism in the field of dance (Zollar 1995: 129), she asks us not to talk about “Black dance” unless we are also going to refer to “White dance,” which makes perfect sense to me. The only complication is doing my research in books like the one mentioned above, with titles like *Black Dance in the United States: 1690 to the 1970s*. As argued in the 1990s debate between playwright August Wilson and theater critic Robert Brustein (Brustein and Wilson 1996), the idea of a dedicated space for “racially-affined” art is very controversial. The fear is that if art forms are “segregated,” even in name, it reifies racial categories, subtly reinforces mainstream domination of minorities, and could eventually lead to a regression of society becoming legally segregated again; on the other hand, history teaches us how much can be lost without dedicated study and support of some of these forms.

Appropriation (where I least expect it)

When I learned that Charleston also had originally been a “black dance” appropriated by white flappers, a fact I had not suspected until I began a focused examination, it felt like it was a trend that needed to be examined throughout the show. I had already come across this theme of “de-Africanization” in tap history, hip-hop scholarship, and old-time dance and banjo music. As E. Patrick Johnson points out in *Appropriating Blackness*: “History demonstrates that cultural usurpation has been a common practice of white Americans and their relation to art forms not their own. In many instances, whites exoticize and/or fetishize blackness, what bell

hooks calls ‘eating the other.’” (Johnson 2003:4).³² As my research and choreographic process unfolded, I wondered if maybe “Black Dance in the United States,” including flatfooting, jazz, swing and hip-hop, were none of my business?

And yet, when I thought about it on a personal level my perspective changed. There may have been times when I have felt the urge to try the exotic, but something in me has always censored that impulse. I hated the idea of being a dance tourist. I could look at dance with a “utilitarian” aesthetic only after I’d studied long enough to understand how movement shaped my body. For example, when I was a child, ballet equaled “girly.” That meant I did not want anything to do with it. Later, once I actually started dancing and taking class, ballet equaled “a useful conditioning of external rotator muscles” (even though pink tutus still were not my favorite costume choice). After years of steeping my body in the extremely narrow verticality of Irish step dance, I could look at West African dance and see potential grounding, widening and release of upper body tension. I felt comfortable in my reason to study it, not because it was “exotic” or a “fetish” – though it was different – but because it was *complementary* to what I already knew. It was Other in the sense that I didn’t know anything about the surrounding culture – but I already had some idea of the humanity of it through analyzing the way that it shaped the human body. I could then move past inhibitions about the appropriateness of my attempting West African dance, even being aware a long precedent of white exploitation of black bodies. My inhibitions about other dance forms, such as tap, Lindy Hop and hip-hop, were not so easy to move past.

³² I always feel a sense of relief when I see this sentiment in print. So often in the dance world it feels like the elephant in the room, especially in social dances like Lindy Hop, or urban dances like hip-hop.

In the meantime, I would not call myself an “authentic” Charleston dancer. The ethics of remix aesthetics, cultural appropriation, a sense of ownership over my own American history, and the sheer fun and joy of doing these steps are all still at conflict within me, but clearly not stopping me. In my losing battle, the fact that Charleston and Lindy Hop were so thoroughly appropriated by white mainstream culture makes it feel silly for me to abstain from practicing them at this point in history. There are also other people who are clearly inspired by the YouTube Charleston “archive,” like popular dancer Forsythe (takesomecrime 2010 Web). Should we be doing this? I don’t know. I am just recognizing the tip of the iceberg, and figuring out some of the politics and implications.

Mainstream Charleston

I wanted to trace my movements further back than the most obvious media sources, and I feel like my research into this form is only just beginning in earnest. I also do not want to overlook mainstream manifestations of the Charleston in popular culture. For Act 1, each dancer chose a “Flapper Mentor:” an historical figure who actually danced in the 1920s, to inspire our performance in various ways. We were not playing these characters, but rather pretending that these artists might have acted as big sisters, coaches, mentors, if we were rising film or vaudeville performers. Mine was Louise Brooks.

When I think about Louise Brooks, I appreciate her unapologetic sexuality, to which I can relate. The way Brooks used her eyes in movies like *Pandora’s Box* (1929) is bewitching. Her face was so dynamic and that made her incredibly multi-dimensional even when she was put into a “vamp” role where she was basically a

home-wrecker and a cautionary tale. The free and fun-loving, but not ignorant and arbitrary, mindset of flappers was also described by Stephen Sharot (2010), who argued that while flappers were sexually liberated to some extent, they still often wanted to be perceived as moral, “nice” and “marriageable,” and did not become apathetic or careless about courtship and family life.

Another thread that led me into my work on this piece was reading *Satan in the Dance Hall* by Ralph G. Giordano. Flappers were major trailblazers in the sexual revolution, following closely in time after Suffragettes. I appreciated this proximity especially while I was at the American Woman exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute in New York City (MET 2010). The more revealing clothing flappers wore obliterated the possibility of pretending that the female body didn't exist, and hence the pretense that it was something about which to be deeply ashamed. This directly subverted the idea that women who wear revealing clothing are responsible for the actions of the men who see them, even if those actions are violent or criminal, not to mention just stupid or inappropriate. I watched a compilation of movie scenes that were censored in the 1920s (CineGraphic 2009 Web) illuminating the kind of conditions under which flappers were rebelling. There is a “shocking” scene of many women's feet with shoes and stockings on under a table.³³ As Giordano explains, “At a time when American society was barely getting used to seeing an exposed female ankle, the exposed legs and arms was tantamount to complete nudity” (Giordano 2008:114). I had always subconsciously associated “Flappers” with silliness, and in fact the older generation's dismissal of flapper values (Giordano) was a big part of their original struggle. It was probably partly the source

³³ In this montage there is also a slightly more revealing forerunner of Marilyn Monroe's famous runaway skirt (CineGraphic 2009 Web).

for this impression of mine. I now look at flappers as revolutionaries for important the strides they made in the face of conservative opposition which probably affect me to this day.

Act 2 – The Un-silent Movie Quartet

In Act 2 Matthew Olwell and I dance in front of projected footage of Marilyn Miller and Joe E. Brown in a short comedic duet they perform in the film *Sally* (1929), turning their duet into a quartet. This scene was meant to convey the crossing over of performing artists from live theater to film work, the beginning of interesting interactions between live and virtual performance that still concern me as a professional dancer today. Does film and digital media replace or enhance the live dancer? Possibly both? We contextualized the juxtaposition between live and film performance in short (if less-than-artfully-didactic) dialogues after this piece that compared vaudeville to movies both favorably and unfavorably.

YouTube as Vaudeville

One possible reincarnation of vaudeville, proving that the demand for that style of entertainment is not dead, is YouTube. Sitting down for a few minutes (to several hours) and self-selecting short acts from a variety of performers is like a choose-your-own-adventure vaudeville show. You can watch episodes in any order, you can find amateurs and professionals alike, and if you don't like one thing, something else is coming up. The only thing that is missing from YouTube is the

immediacy of live performance. What is important about live performance? It connects people in time and space in ways that a website cannot.

Vaudeville as Seen by its Contemporaries (Stein 1984) as well as several other books, cite the rise of cinema as part of the reason for the decline of vaudeville, and I wanted to establish this idea early in the show. We would be immediately destroying any expectation of a vaudeville reenactment by figuratively killing vaudeville before the second act. This would free me up to reference vaudeville a little more obliquely when I wanted to, and to allow the audience to conflate my statements about vaudeville with today's entertainment outlets. Another appealing element of *Sally* was that it was a film from 1929, a truly vintage element I could include from the vaudeville era, even though I was setting it up in contrast to vaudeville.

My friend Allison Robbins, sent me a link to this scene, saying that it reminded her of me – which was extremely flattering. The duet is what I would consider “eccentric dance” according to the way I understand genre distinctions in 1929. There are some tap steps, but a lot of goofiness in between. I got the idea for dancing with the projection also from Robbins, who was doing this kind of work with early tap dance film in her studies. I asked her if she would “consult” with me, and she did an amazing job notating the choreography and helping us learn it. We brainstormed about timing and blocking as well.

Interestingly, there is no choreographer credit that we can find for this dance, done to the song “Look for the Silver Lining” which became one of the better-known songs from the movie and Broadway show. The film lists choreographers for “stage ensembles” and “ballet” numbers specifically, which would imply that those choreographers did not handle the tap numbers or the other duets and solos. Allison

postulates that Miller and Brown probably made up the choreography themselves, and from the way that they look at each other and have such loose unison in the scene, I feel this is a good guess. Miller was a seasoned Broadway star at this point and Brown had been a child star in Vaudeville, they certainly could have thrown something together for themselves. The movie was based on a Broadway show of the same name starring Miller, which in turn had been based on an unproduced musical by P.G. Wodehouse,³⁴ who contributed some of the lyrics to *Sally* (Sally Web). With so much information available about the creative process of this production, the lack of choreographer credit for the scene I wanted to use raised questions about what kind of dance was intellectually important in 1929 and today.

In her 2009 essay *Race-ing Choreographic Copyright*, Anthea Kraut describes how our very ideas of creative authorship in the West might have been and possibly might still be underlying the kind of hierarchy that might privilege “ballet choreographers” in film credits over tap or eccentric dance choreographers. She explains that some “traditional” or “World dance” forms are too old and collectively constituted to attribute to a single inventor or originator.

As conventionally conceived, these dance traditions are created and maintained by communities of anonymous producers. In contrast, this line of thinking goes, Western traditions like ballet and modern dance are made up of discrete works with individual, identifiable authors, whose innovations propel their art forms forward (Kraut 2009:77).

Even though Miller and Brown, Olwell and I are all white, these distinctions often fell (and possibly still fall) along lines of historical injustice created by racial discrimination and stereotyping as Kraut effectively proves. Even terminology reflects the confusing traces of appropriation in the time period I was studying. In the

³⁴ Well-known for his Jeeves and Wooster stories, in my opinion, Wodehouse is one of the funniest comedic writers of all time.

early 20th century, when most people heard the term “Modern dances,” they thought of one of the new ballroom dances picked up in urban dance halls from African American dancers; a trend which dance masters alternately tried to suppress or to contain by forcing Europeanized aesthetics onto the new dances (Martin 2010:128). Delineations are still complicated once “modern dance” was more associated with established Euro-American choreographers like George Balanchine,³⁵ Hanya Holm,³⁶ Agnes de Mille³⁷ and Doris Humphrey.³⁸ When they worked for the lucrative commercial Broadway stage, which they all did, their work often received great critical acclaim for “raising the bar of excellence” in that commercial venue. Sometimes these chief choreographers included material developed by African American choreographers who did not always receive credit, equitable financial compensation, or a part of the critical acknowledgement for their artistry. Kraut attributes the overlooking of African American artistic contributions as part of a trend

³⁵ (Goux 2010) George Balanchine hired Katherine Dunham’s entire dance company for the Broadway production of *Cabin in the Sky*. Dunham, who had trained the dancers, received no credit.

³⁶ (Kraut 2009) Hanya Holm, German expressionist choreographer, incorporated two jazz numbers into her Broadway production of *Kiss Me, Kate* that were, according to Kraut, “show-stoppers” (89) though dance critic John Martin described them as “forgettable.” These dances probably would have been choreographed by the dancers themselves, given Holm’s typical choreographic process of arranging dancer improvisation or dancer-generated material, her lack of training in jazz or tap dance, and the lack of choreographic notation for these two numbers in the *Kiss Me, Kate* Labanotation score which Holm submitted to the U.S. copyright office in 1952, the first dance to obtain copyright in the U.S.

³⁷ (Kraut 2009) Famous tap duo Honi Coles and Cholly Atkins worked under choreographer Agnes de Mille in a Broadway production of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Kraut cites an anecdote from Marshall and Jean Sterns’ *Jazz Dance* describing that, “‘During rehearsals Agnes de Mille didn’t know what to do with us,’ says Coles, ‘so finally Julie Styne, who hired us, took us aside and said, ‘Look, why don’t you fellows work up something, and I’ll get her to look at it.’” . . . The Coles-Atkins Payne routine was a hit, but Agnes de Mille was listed as the only choreographer in the program. ‘Later on we had to get her permission to use our routine . . .’”(89).

³⁸ (Kraut 2005) Doris Humphrey was credited with “arranging” dancers in the Broadway production of *Run, Little Chillun!*, who were comprised of dancers whom Zora Neale Hurston had previously trained to perform Bahamian Fire Dance choreography in her show *The Great Day*. Hurston received no credit for any kind of contribution to *Run, Little Chillun!*. Kraut lists other oversights of Hurston in the dance history record.

of “invisibilization” outlined by Brenda Dixon Gottschild in her work on Swing era race politics *Waltzing in the Dark*:

Both tap dance – with its cool energy, indirect approach to the audience, and attention to the task with the artist as skilled technician – and the Lindy – with its radical partnering and acrobatic moves – offered subliminal prototypes for European American “modern” dance as well as for postmodern dance and contact improvisation (Gotschild 2000:251).

The social dance forms above were surely somewhat impactful on early modern choreographers, even if they disliked them, but in a way that is easy to bypass.

Traditional Repertoire

Underlying, perpetuating or interweaving with any broad social hierarchies at play in copyright and attribution are our very understandings of the nature of choreographic work. One interesting distinction put forth by performance theorist Diana Taylor manifests in the ideas of the “the repertoire” and “the archive.” Taylor explains,

The rift, I submit, does not lie between the written and spoken word, but between the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual) (Taylor 2003:19).

Interestingly, she applies all of dance into an “ephemeral” repertoire, whereas in Anthea Kraut’s work a fixed archive of dance is essential in obtaining copyright, suggesting that maybe the separation into these categories is not so clear-cut. I do think it might be useful to take this idea one step further and apply it to the kinds of dances (tap, social dances etc.) that historically did not qualify for copyright protection. Clarifying and honoring the repertoire of vernacular choreography, while

it may pose irreconcilable challenges to our current copyright law, operates to increase the overall cultural knowledge available to scholars and laymen alike. If certain copyrighted dances could pass into the territory of archive via video or notated documentation, social vernacular dances are still situated squarely in the repertoire, even, or especially now through dissemination on YouTube, a digital archive.

What about this dance to “Look for the Silver Lining” from *Sally*? No choreographer even claimed the movement sequence in screen credit, let alone copyrighted it, yet the movie is still copyright protected archive. I think the movement itself is part of the repertoire that according to Taylor “. . . both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning . . .” and “. . . allows scholars to trace traditions and influences. Many kinds of performances have traveled throughout the Americas, leaving their mark as they move” (Taylor 2003:20).

Act 3 – Some Shim Sham Shenanigans

In Act 3, *Some Shim Sham Shenanigans*, I arranged Leonard Reed and Willie Bryant’s the Shim Sham Shimmy, our national “tap anthem,” choreographed in 1927. The following sensational story about Leonard Reed winning a Charleston contest in the early 1920s is in *Jazz Dance*:

The Orpheum Theater in Kansas City staged a Charleston contest – strictly for whites – while he was still in high school, and Reed, passing as ‘pure’ white, entered and won it. ‘On closing night, the manager approached me with the prize money in a box and an evil glint in his eye,’ says Reed. ‘Two of the colored usherettes had given away my secret. I grabbed the box and ran out into the crowd with the manger yelling ‘Catch that n----!’ close behind me. So I yelled ‘Catch that n----!’ too, and made my getaway while everybody was trying to help me find the thief’ (Stearns 1968:71).

In studying tap dance history in general (Stearns 1968; Emery 1972; Knowles 2002; Hill 2010), I was depressed and discouraged by stories like the one above and the ones about Harold Nicholas of the Nicholas Brothers getting arrested for sitting in the lobby of the hotel in which they were guests (Goldstein 1992), Miles Davis being assaulted by police in front of the club where he was headlining (Early 2001:89), and other African American artists being ignored, harassed, coerced, abused or worse (Rose 1996; Miller & Jensen 1996; Gottschild 2000; Frank 2005; Kraut 2005, 2008, 2010). I know too, that many people don't want to dwell on these unpleasant historical facts – I didn't even want to dwell on them, but I found them moving and impactful and I needed some way to process them. This was delicate however, because I am not African American, and there is a sense that maybe these stories aren't "yours to tell" as a white person – that it's not appropriate to bring it up. This awkwardness made me feel I needed to understand the whole subject of race on another level.

Juggling Terms: *race*, *racial* and *racist*

The question of whether or not we should be discussing "Black dance" and "White dance" goes right to the heart of what race is. Michael Omi and Howard Winant lay out a clear, yet complex, definition of race as a "*concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies*" (Omi, Winant 1994:55). Though concepts are abstract, this one has had a very real effect on life in the United States. They set up their definition in subtle opposition to other definitions of race, such as the biological model, which assumes race is a product of measurable genetic difference, and the ethnographic model, which

doesn't take into account the imbalances in the political power structures at work in American history. They distinguish between "racial" and "racist" in so far as the latter must always involve an imbalance of power. Describing racial characteristics is not racist, according to Omi and Winant, but assigning causality to people's actions or making predictions based on their race is racist.

In Act 3, there was a casting issue that I was very nervous about. I had read an account of Cholly Atkins mentioning that black tap dancers sometimes overdubbed tap sounds for white chorus dancers in movie musicals (White 2001:2). Wanting to make a statement about African American tap dancers being invisibilized yet amplified in films, I wanted to have some kind of moment where tap dancing could be heard from off stage but not seen. I wanted two African American members of my cast (who wanted to be in the Shim Sham anyway) to be tap dancing on dance boards off stage, but I was afraid to make choreographic choices based solely on race – wasn't that racist?

The fact that we could not tap on the floor of the theater, a silencing of tap dancers and their legacy, actually provided me with an interesting avenue for making a "moving statement" on those moving pictures. Placing furniture sliders on the bottom of dance boards, we could gradually push the dancers from out of sight off stage, to the center of the stage over the course of an entire time through the Shim Sham choreography. Matthew and I, who had started the piece in sneakers the way it would be done in a Lindy Hop setting,³⁹ chose moments of stillness during their journey to emphasize the fact that there was sound coming from someone else whom the audience could not see. In this way both Matthew and I, and Chelsea Freeman

³⁹ We added some Lindy Hop-inspired partner dance, but neither Matthew nor I are trained Lindy Hoppers.

and David Yates, chose a moment to “perform our race” above (but not apart from) performing ourselves.

Choosing this very explicit racial statement gave me a whole new set of challenges for resolving the section. Instead of “re-enacting” a “white role” of getting credit for someone else’s work, which I might have done by ignoring David and Chelsea once they were on stage, or by remaining downstage of them, we chose rather to welcome them on and keep going. Could we enact a retro-narrative of social change? As other cast members came on stage we formed a big semi-circle around David and Chelsea and began to dance in unison, which was a powerful moment that brought cheers from the audience. I don’t know what the audience thought it meant, but to me this moment symbolized various tap revivals or “the tap renaissance.” At these times, African American tap masters were recognized by a diverse global community, which was celebratory and moved the field forward. At the end of the piece, no one bowed, to leave some ambiguity about the boards and their meaning for attribution, and to convey ambivalence: we celebrate tap history, but not all the events that took place in the past.

One common pitfall I encounter, both in myself and in others when I approach racial politics surrounding tap and Lindy Hop specifically, is a bifurcated thinking on the history of the forms. The stereotypes are usually similar to the following: either you are black and naturally look good doing it, or you are white and can probably never live up to the original superstars of the form.⁴⁰ This thinking paints the issue entirely in, well, black and white. On one side is the idea that these are “Black dance” forms, and white people shouldn’t study them because “haven’t they already

⁴⁰ One white friend who is extremely proficient at Lindy Hop bemoaned “probably never being able to do it justice.”

stolen and profited enough off this material?” On the other side is the idea that the forms aren’t really “Black dance,” either because “race doesn’t matter or exist,” or because “human movement transcends all of that,” besides “look at all the great white tappers and swing dancers that have existed in the intervening period” and “it’s too late now, so what the hell, go for it.”

My mentor and award winning tap historian Dr. Ann Kilkelly explains that these American forms arose in a particular place and time, on particular bodies, and often those bodies were African American bodies. This is a subtle but important shift in the paradigm. While the shorthand term “Black Dance” is understandable and may be useful in some racial projects, can dances have a race? It is the practitioners who are raced by society. Whether or not you believe race exists, in the early 20th century the government and many citizens were taking pretty specific actions based on the idea that some Americans were black, and the ramifications of that idea shaped the experience and culture of the dances’ authors (Omi & Winant 1994:54). The racialized environment was a significant part of the cultural production in terms of relevant context I should study. Unfortunately, this admission of racial relevance often seems to be read as an invitation to perpetuate cultural separatism.⁴¹

Norma Miller was a featured dancer in Whitey’s Lindy Hoppers, an all-black swing dance ensemble from the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem (Miller and Jensen 1996).

In her autobiography she notes feeling competitive and resentful towards white Lindy

⁴¹ At the *Dance Across Borders* conference in February 2012 at NYU, several other grad students conveyed relief at seeing research from within the field of dance studies into the implications of white dancers studying what can be considered “black dance.” Some white students confessed that they had been interested in similar material (vernacular jazz, tap, hip-hop, or others) but had been intimidated by the intensity of the race politics into choosing different concentrations. For more on “white folks” freaking out about “black dance” see Gottschild’s *Stripping the Emperor* (2001:332), Dyer’s *White* (1997:6), and Campbell’s *‘Go White Girl!’: Hip Hop Booty Dance and the White Female Body* (2004). For a response see Zollar (1995). For a famous debate on cultural separatism see Brustein & Wilson (1996).

Hoppers in the first Harvest Moon Ball Competition, because it was hard to watch them “butcher our dance” (Miller and Jensen 1996:81). My interpretation of this is not that she objects to the dancers because they are white, but because they were not skilled enough to represent the form that she held dear. Miller mentions elsewhere that there were white dancers at the Savoy who were quite good but happened not to pursue Lindy Hop as a career, possibly because of the social stigma associated with jazz dances at that time (Giordano 2003:105).

Implied in her statement is how high the artistic stakes were for Whitey’s Lindy Hoppers. They came from the racially integrated Savoy Ballroom, but the group faced enormous discrimination in their travels throughout the country, not just social and economic, but aesthetic. They would have seen trends within the previous decades that taught that the “correct” way to perform a dance like the Charleston was an extremely sedate way (Haylor and Millar 1926 Web). Whitey’s Lindy Hoppers and the other authors who originally incorporated Charleston into the Lindy Hop, were known for their energy and amplitude. Labeling the original Charleston style “clumsy” and teaching a “proper” version, dance leaders actually marketed an incorrect approximation that could be described as bleaching or diluting the dance. Was this the “butchering” Miller was referring to and was it intentional? It sounds to me like Miller would have hated for social privilege, instead of skill and mastery of the technique, to take the contest that was supposed to represent their beloved art form.

As I have noted, fears of white dancers appropriating the form without capturing the essence were not unfounded in the case of the Lindy Hop and the jazz dances that went along with it, and the misunderstandings that ensued were large in

scale. Al Minns, another member of Whitey's Lindy Hoppers, mentions America "stamping out" jazz dance for 25 years, ignoring original jazz entirely until the Swing revival began in the 1980s (Minns, interview, Web). In fact, the term "jazz dance" had come to mean a theatrical dance form more associated with white choreographers' Broadway productions than the black dancers at the Savoy Ballroom. Meanwhile, "swing" came to mean Jitterbug, a name given by black jazz musicians to nervous and jittery-looking white dancers across the country. Scholars trying to correct these mistaken impressions, like Marshall Stearns and Mura Dehn, were mostly unknown until after the Civil Rights Movement, which is a statement about the racial climate of the first half of the 20th century. Pretending that race was irrelevant to these particular jazz dancers at that particular time disregards the extent of their accomplishments, which were revolutionary in our performing art forms; and yet, white dancers backing away altogether only leads to more invisibilization of dance greats like Miller and Minns. Yasmin Gunaratnum's *A 'Traacherous Bind,'* acknowledges the particular climate of studying the topic of race, and she explains, "The doubled research practice that I have begun to outline here is one that is feeling and thinking its way through hugely uncomfortable, contradictory and challenging concerns" (Gunaratnum 2003:49). Well, at least I was not alone in feeling awkward.

Act 4 – Verily, a Veracible Vestige of Vintage Vernacular

While "jazz" was not one of the areas of dance I had envisioned finding in the link between old-time and hip-hop that comprised my original research goals, I did come across a lot of footage during my first semester at University of Maryland that

looked promising. Much of it was useful to me in this scene. Most of it turned out to be “vernacular jazz,” which is not only a fun and obscure dance form (my favorite combination), but introduced me to some useful terminology. These dances are social and as Marshall Stearns defines them “*vernacular* in the sense of native and homegrown” (Stearns 1968: xvi). There are probably dozens if not hundreds of dances that fit this description but Stearns focuses on the dances that are performed to Jazz music specifically. He warns however,

“The phrase jazz dance has a special meaning for professionals who dance to jazz music (they use it to describe non-tap body movement); and other meaning for studios from coast to coast teaching ‘Modern Jazz Dance’ (a blend of Euro-American styles that owes little to jazz and less to jazz rhythms)” (Stearns 1968: xvi).

I think that vernacular jazz is in fact a vital part of the chain of social dance linking urban dance in some way to roots in rural old-time dance.

Our jazz dance was choreographed by Brenda Bufalino and taught to me by Ann Kilkelly, who gave me coaching and instruction on the vernacular jazz movement. The first time through the choreography I tried to stage it much like a social gathering. I had the dancers improvise with the jazz movements, something we did as a drill in rehearsal to encourage ease in the movement and full embodiment.

The second time through the dance I used footage of Al Minns and Leon James, Whitey’s Lindy Hoppers, Earl “Snakehips” Tucker, Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth, and some unidentified Cake Walkers in order to create immediate visual references, or “movement citations” of early jazz dancers who might be unknown to general audiences. This decision was juxtaposed against the conversation about copyright and attribution. Personally, I wanted the dancers to get the recognition. My cast created a tentative and rhythmic moving frame around the screen. The

direction I gave them was to try to explore a part of one of the jazz movements on a very small scale, starting with just a tiny initiation. Then the exploration built to three groups scattered around the stage, performing the timing of their accents in unison, very rhythmically.

When we first started working on the dance, I felt that the movement would lend itself easily to a “hip-hop” adaptation. I didn’t realize that “hip-hop dance” is usually a misnomer, unless one is discussing a particular body of social movements done at parties including the Running Man, the Cabbage Patch, the Snake, and others. The term is often used incorrectly to describe dances that are more accurately described as b-boying (more popularly known as breakdancing) which originated in the South Bronx, or West coast funk styles including popping, locking (separate styles), and boogaloo, and sometimes house dancing (Pabon 2006:23). This confusion is strikingly similar to that confusion in using the term “jazz;” it’s hard to know what someone means exactly.

The committed practitioners in the urban dance community who I met through my research were often stringent about terminology. I struggled to find an accurate way to describe my goals for the third section of Act 4, during which we repeat the jazz movement with harder edges and stops, among other variations that felt “urban” or “hip-hop” to the cast members, regardless of what that would mean to urban dance historians. I finally decided to embrace the mildly derogatory term my mentor Junious “House” Brickhouse at Urban Artistry used to describe most “hip-hop” dance programs in studio settings: Thrash Jazz. Thrash Jazz is forceful movement that’s trying to be hip-hop – wasn’t that what I was doing with the piece? I still think there

is a visible influence of urban aesthetics in this section, but it is not presented as if it were an authentic hip-hop dance.

Act 5 – A Pensive Plea for Permission

I came to University of Maryland already interested in urban dance forms, and wanting to learn more about them. I asked hip-hop dance teacher Aysha Upchurch to set a solo on me as a guest artist for my thesis concert, then set about the “socially responsible” course of studying up on my history and cultural context. When I first began reading about hip-hop dance and culture, I came across Carla Stalling Huntington’s *Hip Hop Dance: Meanings and Messages* (2007). Huntington brings a broad theoretical background to her work, and some of her arguments are dependent on concepts with which I was unfamiliar. It was difficult to sort out what was problematic for me and why until I had more theoretical background of my own.

Quotes and ideas from her book spun around my head, seemingly contradictory, throwing past experiences into question. Had I really been welcome at that class? Was I overstepping my cultural bounds? Huntington explains that hip-hop dance signifies complex and culturally specific meanings, which was clear enough at first. For the Cabbage Patch, for example, one of the “historical texts written by this dance is solidarity in or political support for African American community, a community that has been stolen and stolen from” (Huntington 2007:44). Reading this raised my hope that I could be dancing in solidarity *resisting* the kind of culturally imperialist and socially oppressive structures I was reading about in early 20th century dance history. On the other hand, she implies that the

meaning one is signifying is dependent on skin color, even shade of skin tone within the African American community – how could I be assured of what my dancing would mean to others?

Signifying

One of the most fascinating works I encountered in Professor Faedra Carpenter's Critical Race Theory in Performance class was Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s famous *The Signifying Monkey*. It introduces some fascinating ideas on vernacular language, which I think can be extrapolated to dance. It describes and applies the trope of "Signifyin'," described as repeating the work of another, but with a signaled difference (Gates 1988:46). While reading Gates directly helped clarify what I had read about hip-hop dance, it did not answer any of my personal questions.

The idea of intertextuality through referencing other cultural texts immediately intrigued me. I recognized some of my own favorite art contains some "inside joke," drawing viewers in and together. But could I Signify? And if so, what would I be signifying? Gates does specify that there are two kinds of signification: one can be "signifying" in the (white) European linguistic sense, or one can be "Signifyin(g)" in the African American sense of multiplying meaning. I hoped that I could rehearse resistive choreographies in solidarity from a place of sincerity without getting into problematic significations.

My fear was that for any choreography of resistance I performed, my skin might signal a different meaning to viewers (something over which I ultimately have no control) and "flip the script." If I also felt empowered by something that was considered empowering for black dancers, was I then politically and historically

situated to over-power? To dilute the form with my incompetence but get away with it thanks to white privilege, like what had happened to Charleston and Lindy Hop? Without being immobilized by this possibility, I wanted to be careful and aware of this risk. I definitely didn't (and still don't) want to convey "white supremacy" by doing dances that were originally about "Black Power," and other African American resistance to oppressive political and aesthetic preferences.

Huntington empowers the reader by saying, "Hip hop dance is not about getting away from sexism, racism, or class hierarchies. It is about acknowledging them and commenting on them, as well as documenting and historically solving them" (Huntington 2007:105). That was an important idea for me to hear, however she goes on to mention that, "Via consumption practices people can use their money to enjoy aspects of blackness like hip hop dance without incurring the social consequences of actually being black, while at the same time, increasing surplus and accumulation." What had blackface minstrelsy been, if not an attempt by a more privileged socio-economic class of white dancers, actors and musicians to benefit from aspects (even imaginary ones) of blackness for monetary gain? When the author stipulates, "It is precisely because of African American women's experiences that make the language and text of hip hop dance so important" (104), she is affirming that hip-hop is a racially affined art form whose importance lies in its specific cultural affiliations. In studying hip-hop, would I be engaging in a modern day form of minstrelsy? I had already come across parallels between hip-hop culture and minstrelsy in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000) and in the educational play *The Dance* (White & White 2009), but these had concerned the exaggerations of drug

culture and materialism in commercial portrayals of hip-hop culture, they didn't necessarily have to do with dance specifically.

Different aesthetic trends in American dance are often categorized as falling along racial lines, but I do not believe that they are inherently race-based, if one takes into account an accurate view of the terms. The communities that created many American vernacular forms were comprised of black individuals (Kilkelly 2010 personal communication). That fact does not necessarily make American vernacular dance the sole province of African Americans; such blanket statements lead us down a slippery slope of cultural separatism (Brustein & Wilson 1996) – however, we may need concerted strides to make dedicated attribution to artists who have been intentionally silenced for such a long time. This effort can include physically learning and practicing cultural texts like dance for increased mutual understanding and respect. Or, at times, it could theoretically mean backing off.

Backing off and not going for it got me in real trouble in the studio though. In a breakthrough rehearsal in which we finalized the overall concept of the dance, Aysha Upchurch asked me what was holding me back. I confessed to her my fears that I might somehow be causing harm to the community I was trying to study, that I had been alarmed by some material I had read. Aysha listened to me compassionately and respectfully, and then helped me move forward with a piece that felt authentic without being pretentious.

The idea of sincerity played a crucial role in the choreographic concept of my solo. I would *actually* practice on stage, trying my best, stopping when I got frustrated or messed up. Sometimes I would succeed, and sometimes I would fail. Different audience members would be able to detect various levels of this. Poet

Abisola Kusimo would interrupt me from the audience, and expose all of my racial concerns with a poem she had written previously about the feeling of being under attack as a black woman in mainstream society. Aysha emboldened me to go for the movement, by giving me this permission to practice and fail, to stop and to listen within the choreography.

The consensus among most artists I talked to in this process who were themselves dealing with challenging social topics like gender, post-colonialism, sexuality, and class was that “you just have to do the work,” and if you do it honestly and respectfully it is healing and people are more served by this than by your hiding from social problems. Admittedly, there are many complications to this idea, including appropriation, commoditization, sincerity, ethics, and authenticity, which it is not possible to fully explore within the confines of this project, but I do want to touch briefly on the last, quoting E. Patrick Johnson’s *Appropriating Blackness*:

The key here is to be cognizant of the arbitrariness of authenticity, the ways in which it carries with it the dangers of foreclosing the possibilities of cultural exchange and understanding. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. reminds us: ‘No human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn to inhabit another world’ (Johnson 2003:3).

The conclusion I came to as I worked with choreographer Aysha Upchurch and others was that I needed to take my cues from live interaction and movement theory over written theory.

I have encountered a variety of reactions in my various forays into Other dance worlds; for example, no one bats an eye at my flatfooting. I get only a few surprised comments from peers when they learn that African American dancers created the Lindy Hop, and I am sometimes warned that I “better know what I’m doing” if I’m going to attempt any contemporary urban dance forms. The

combination of these reactions illustrates to me that the basis of these “race” distinctions are not, in fact, inherently “racial,” or essentialist. They say more about cultural expectations and anxieties than about phenotypes, like skin color. Instead, these reactions to me, a white woman doing “black dances,” reference held feelings regarding racist events in our country’s history that need more collective processing and pro-active changes in our institutions. My practicing creates a stir that signifies that there is still work to be done.

Sincerity

In *Real Fictions: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*, John L. Jackson explores the idea of sincerity versus authenticity, as applied to racial performance. In popular culture, authenticity is the realness or truthfulness of something.⁴² “Authentic” has been a word I myself have applied to dance in several instances: to indicate a step or movement as historical (rather than a recent or original invention), to describe a stylistic choice in agreement with other artists (who have studied historical resources) and, somewhat ironically, also to connote originality, honesty, uniqueness, or spontaneity in improvisation or choreography. Already entering Critical Race Studies with a paradoxical usage of the term “authenticity,” a distinction between authenticity and sincerity was a welcome clarification of the elements that make performance seem “real” or not.

Jackson’s discussion of sincerity versus authenticity brings objectification and agency into play. The author invokes the PBS series *Antiques Roadshow* to make the point that Americans associate *authenticity* with antiques (Jackson 2005:14) – this is very much the sense in which I use authenticity when I would talk about Irish step

⁴² For more in depth discussion and history of terms see Jackson (2005:15).

dance. Is it old, and therefore, more legitimate in some way? Like looking for legal precedent I can usually find a qualified yes or no in answer, though these superficial answers may be belied by a deeper inquiry. The logical and aesthetic criteria of authenticity in “traditional” art forms is a topic outside the scope of this paper, but suffice it to say that I am aware that there is enormous complexity in the above seemingly-simple statement. I had been accustomed to looking at authenticity as an object to be verified.

The problematic objectification in an appraiser-object view of authenticity, though slippery with dance repertoire, is particularly insidious as it becomes pertinent to race. It can turn people into “racial objects” in each other’s minds. Before I began unpacking some issues of race and authenticity at the beginning of my thesis project, I vaguely sensed that there were unsavory aspects of “authenticity hierarchies” in dance, especially dance that was racially affined, like hip-hop dance. Some experiences indicated problems to me, but often sped by without my pinning down exactly what was wrong before my mind and body had to move on to other tasks. For example, I recently remembered that once I had been in a hip-hop dance class where one white student had told another white student that she “danced like a black girl” – this was clearly meant to be a compliment at the time, but I believe I was not the only one in the room who felt awkward in the brief silence immediately following. The comment reflected a popular line of thought expressed by both black and white dancers that hip-hop is “Black dance,” and that black hip-hop dancers (or Lindy Hoppers or authentic jazz dancers or tappers or modern dancers) look “the best.”

I was confused by a stereotype that seemed “positive” . . . but what was really at work inside the assumption “all black girls can dance?” Obviously, challenging

anyone's dance skill out of hand, especially a huge conceptualized group like "girls," "black people," or "black girls" was not an argument I wanted to get into. I wanted to deconstruct this idea as soon as I recognized it, but I was left unsure of how to reframe the issue.⁴³ So for a long time I stepped away from it. In this disinclination to devalue "complimentary" stereotypes, I encountered my own racial prejudices for the first time.

Growing up in a family who participated in peace and social justice activism, I had spent much of my life intentionally advocating anti-racist views in my small Southern rural community. I had always been aggressively on guard against negative ethnic and racial stereotypes – but not having gone into the nature of race in depth, I had never tried to weed out racial and ethnic stereotypes that seemed innocuous. These judgments, often conflated with legitimate aesthetic preferences, worked both ways: when they were presented as race-specific, I often felt excluded from movement and aesthetic possibilities.⁴⁴

I first noticed these prejudices while studying tap dance, Charleston, and hip-hop, dance forms in which many, if not most of the masters of the genre were African American.⁴⁵ I was insecure about my rhythmic timing, about the amount of tension in my body, about my physical frame and whether or not I had anything to say – or the *right* to say anything – and many of these concerns formed a conceptual constellation: White Girl Qualities. As my own insecurities about these forms surfaced I was faced

⁴³ I will look next at bel hooks, Tommy DeFrantz, and Paul Gilroy to further inform this argument.

⁴⁴ For a similar example about Blues musicians being accused of "trying to be black" see Walter Benn Michaels (1997). Michaels also calls the entire concept/project of race "a mistake," which I totally agree with, arguing that it's an inherently essentialist construction that "mistaken though it may be, has obviously had and no doubt continues to have significant consequences" (Michaels 1997:131).

⁴⁵ When I started studying some of these I didn't necessarily know that they would be categorized "Black dance" by some authors, such as Lindy Hop, jazz or tap, as I grew up watching white tap stars in movies.

with a powerful confrontation of my dance-related racial stereotypes, complicated by Cartesian thinking about different skill sets. Seemingly, what made someone else good at something made me ill suited to it and awkward, or feeling unworthy.⁴⁶ The expectations and stigmas of “white people dancing” (Chappelle 2004 Web) were not just in my imagination, my environment frequently reinforced them; the surprise was that I’d internalized them to such an extent. This revelation of race politics in my dance training gave a whole new depth and dimension to other concerns, including appropriation and cultural imperialism, becoming overly race-conscious, and later, minstrelsy.⁴⁷

The idea of *sincerity*,⁴⁸ as distinct from *authenticity*, was useful to me because it explained other options besides resigning myself to being an object of someone else’s racial dismissal who should probably just give up, or doing the same to others. I could focus my own agency in deciding *how* to study in spite of my self-doubts. I set out to try to find a socially responsible way to approach topics that were clearly sensitive to some (but about which oversensitivity might cause resentment in others). I could examine my *intentions*, an important element of Jackson’s sincerity, as a compass to navigate the extremely wide swath of action and discourse between “definitely right” (i.e. not being racist) and “definitely wrong” (i.e. ignoring other

⁴⁶ This “black and white thinking” has been an issue for me before I encountered it in critical race theory, even before I encountered it in dance. I seem to be pre-disposed to either/or thinking, which is the topic of one of the acts in the thesis entitled *Magic Trick*. I disclose personal insecurities here at the risk of engaging in “me-too-ism” as defined by Richard Dyer in *White* (1997:10).

⁴⁷ For my choreography on mechanics of minstrelsy such as imitation, exaggeration, and censorship, see Act 6 *A Myriad of Musings on Minstrelsy* or research blog at www.vaudevival.com.

⁴⁸ Jackson’s “sincerity” was closer to a usage of “authenticity” that I would have used to talk about movement that was honest, original, or spontaneous. I had used authenticity with this connotation to describe improvisation that defied any “dance form,” movement that had only come from inside the mover, so inventive there could be no pretense involved. There is a therapeutic technique I have done called “Authentic Movement” all about getting to that place. This is almost the opposite of what I would mean by authenticity in Irish dance.

people's feelings about race altogether). Part of my own "racial project" would be to trouble historical racial oversimplifications as they pertain to dance.

Sincerity lies in believing one's own story, and "performing" or communicating that belief or transparency effectively to others. Jackson reinforces the importance of convincing others of one's sincerity quoting Harvard theorist Lionel Trilling (Jackson 2005:14), who confirms that "realness" is also in the eye of the beholder. This idea is echoed in Melissa Campbell's *'Go White Girl!' Hip Hop Booty Dancing and the White Female Body* (2004). In *Go White Girl!* Campbell explains "white women use [booty dancing] to obtain pleasure without orienting their entire lives around a subcultural formation" (498). This argument is similar to Huntington's claims about trying to be "black for a day" without actually incurring the effects of permanent blackness I had encountered in reading about hip-hop dance. This "dance tourism" sounds callous and rude on the page, but it might oversimplify cross-cultural exchanges that are constantly happening in many if not almost all dance forms. For example, when I started studying Irish step dance (having virtually no Irish heritage personally), I had no idea of exploiting "Irishness." I just thought Irish step dance was "neat," as my elderly Irish teacher⁴⁹ described it. I must have convinced the rest of my class and my teacher (most of whom *were* of Irish extraction to some degree), because no one questioned my aesthetic preference as being insincere. I approached hip-hop dance with the same sincerity, just being attracted to the aesthetic qualities of the form, and no one has ever questioned my motivations to my face.

⁴⁹ My Irish step dance teacher was Carmel O'Rourke Tighe, A.D.C.R.G. of Charlottesville, VA.

In print, however, many statements read as quite grave. Some questions made me wonder if I was missing the big picture, like: “When a white girl shakes her booty, is she colonizing black female bodies with her own, ironically performing both race and gender, or negotiating new spaces for her own sexuality?” (Campbell 2004: 498). Campbell continues to question an important possibility for cross-racial performance: “Can corporeal orature convey irony?” (2004:505). I think yes, but only if the audience knows what they are looking at and looking for within a common performance or movement lexicon. Campbell talks about the *discursive community* “a complex configuration of shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and communicative strategies” (Campbell 2004:506). We may need more information on marginalized dance forms in higher education to have a real dialogue as a single community.

I long for Dance Studies in the United States to be able to look across genres with more ease⁵⁰ in a single discursive community that can read Lindy Hop AND modern, ballet AND urban dance. As Brenda Dixon Gottschild explains,

In the case of the Lindy and so-called modern dance, these labels serve the function of racism by separating the realms of endeavor that have traditionally been reserved for blacks – that is, vernacular or pop culture – from those that are the exclusive property of whites – namely, the world of ‘art’ (Gottschild 2000:215).

Ironically, the term “Modern dances” in the vaudeville era meant the new partner dances that were coming out to jazz music like Foxtrot and Charleston (Giordano 2008), proving how arbitrary some of our delineations can be. Cross-genre

⁵⁰ For more on hierarchies of power and aesthetics in dance see Ananya Chatterjea’s chapter in *Butting Out* entitled “The Body Mobile, Mobilized, Mobilizing . . . Or, Regarding Legacies.” It is a synthesis of many different theories and theorists including embodiment, performance and performativity, feminism, post-colonialism, anti-racism, post-structuralism, somatic studies, and others. She then applies these ideas to dance in terms of race, class, sex and other stereotypes (Chatterjea 2004:83).

understanding in dance studies will continue to be a project of mine, and to some extent perhaps a racial project.

I felt good about Act 5 because I was sincere and transparent in my own performance,⁵¹ and because the piece allowed for multiple voices and points of view. Aysha, Abisola, the audience and I all had perspectives that might differ, and yet we held the space and listened. This presence of narratives and counter-narratives went along with the idea of the show being comprised of intertextual elements in a constant dialogue. I didn't get every perspective in, and my urban dance technique wasn't perfect, but I worked with my limitations to make a statement that I think was respectful.

Act 6 – A Myriad of Musings on Minstrelsy

With Act 6 I wanted to explore just the mechanisms of what might create something as malignant as blackface minstrelsy in the most abstract and universal movement terms possible with the cast. What would happen if we imitated each other? If we exaggerated into impersonations, or silenced each other? I set up a frame of flatfooting, clogging and Irish step dance performed by Matthew Olwell and I throughout the piece on the periphery of the stage, to reference the subliminal associations these extra “white” forms have contrasted with minstrelsy.

The architects of vaudeville took great pains to avoid offending women and children with their shows' content. This consideration was not extended to ethnic and

⁵¹ I had also been working on a clear and transparent performance style with Professor Leslie Felbain through Alexander Technique and other coaching.

racial minorities. One cannot overstate the challenges artists of color had to face in the early 20th century due to racism. It was difficult to know how to proceed with a choreographic treatment of this topic that wouldn't feel shallow or disrespectful. It was a shameful chapter in theater history, and I wanted to present facts transparently, but not let my own emotion get in the way of telling stories that needed to be heard.

In studying the styles of humor present in vaudeville, one encounters difficulty in peeling back the many layers of time and place. Sometimes comedy is funny because it seems true. Sometimes it is funny because it is NOT true, it's just being sarcastic or snide. Both phenomena can be at work in racial and ethnic humor, for different people at different times. It is quite difficult to make generalizations about something as grotesque as minstrelsy in the face of such paradoxes, and it was outside the scope of my project to do an exhaustive literature review on the topic. The temptation is to dismiss it entirely, but several scholars and artists have revealed disturbing facets of minstrelsy that underlie the popular imagination and entertainment industry of today (Lott 1993, Nyong'o 2009, Lee 2000, Walker 1996). What was insidious about the system of minstrel performance in our country was that buffoon roles were the ONLY type of performance in which African Americans were encouraged to participate.

Aside from having a completely separate circuit of black vaudeville houses (the Theater Owners Booking Association [TOBA] was referred to by artists as "Tough on Black Asses"), black vaudeville performers on that circuit were paid a fraction of what they made on larger integrated circuits; but it was the only way to play to black audiences in the South (Slide 2006:99). Even in the North, audiences in the vaudeville era were usually segregated by seating, and black performers always

had to use rear entrances of theaters. Pay scales reflected a wild racial disparity, and conditions like accommodations and food were difficult on tours. African Americans were frequently denied service, even superstars like the great Bert Williams and Ethel Waters. Dehumanizing blackface minstrel material was prevalent. The ethnic humor which seemed so equally shared among immigrant groups in vaudeville masked the fact that different circumstances were at work when players clowned in their burnt cork masks than when they pulled out their drunken Irishman routine.

In addition, immigrant groups like the Germans or Irish who were eventually wrapped into a conception of white America never faced exactly the same immense institutionalized oppression as African Americans. Laws about property ownership and personhood inhibited the growth of black entrepreneurs' ventures. Even when the law was technically unbiased, law enforcement frequently failed to provide protection to African Americans.⁵² This was the era of Jim Crow laws, and "separate but equal" public facilities. Eugenics, a "science" concerned with intentionally manipulating the human gene pool to produce an "optimal" and "superior" population, was supported by some of the top minds in the United States and Europe including Linus Pauling, Winston Churchill, Margaret Sanger, Alexander Graham Bell, and Woodrow Wilson. This school of thought formally established a racial hierarchy with "scientific data" to support claims of white supremacy, which became a standard part of public elementary school education (Giordano 2008:105).

⁵² For example, between the years of 1882 and 1935, 200 anti-lynching bills were put before congress in an attempt to prosecute the perpetrators and accomplices of 3,446 lynchings of African Americans. Only three bills passed the House of Representatives and not a single one passed the Senate (Associated Press 2005 Web).

Knowing that there was a lot of ethnic humor in vaudeville and no one group was entirely spared, I wanted to explore the nature of impersonating someone, or the process of exaggerating an impression of someone to the point of gross distortion. Choreographically, we explored the themes of imitation, support, censorship, interruption and sabotage. I knew that if I got too literal with choreography about minstrelsy, it would have the potential to be misinterpreted because I am white. I did not want to fall into making a statement that Richard Dyer calls “me-too-ism” (Dyer 1997:10) wherein as soon as there is a complaint from an individual of color, a white person starts listing all the oppressions that white ethnic minorities have suffered over the years. While I have no desire to diminish anyone’s suffering, this would just be a nonsequitur in a conversation about blackface minstrelsy on stage.

The very definitions of “white” and “black” and the complexity of race throughout our country’s history make comparisons between ethnic and racial humor unfair at best. At worst, these comparisons deflect very real and legitimate concerns about the foundations of racism in our country and obfuscate sources of current inequalities in our political systems. While it is easy to be so intimidated by the immensity of these problems that one is practically immobilized, I theorize that personal dance study, when approached with sincerity and respect, can be a means of physically dismantling these political hierarchies.

Act 7 – Possum, the Amazing Jigging Yokel

Part of the purpose of this act was to incorporate many, many banjos, and to demystify common stereotypes about people who play the banjo. I had held these

stereotypes earlier in life. Growing up in an area where neighbors flew rebel flags, I was openly hostile towards the “rednecks” at school when they would make racial slurs about “Mexicans,” who were “taking all the jobs.” I didn’t want to have anything to do with their racist culture, into which I grouped food, fashion, music, dance, and tractors. When I met my (now) husband Matthew Olwell and some of his friends, I was introduced to the kinder, gentler, hipster type of old-time musician. These people were my age, dressed in vintage clothes, and loved the fiddle and banjo AND Mos Def and Common. I could finally dissociate the banjo from *Deliverance*.

I learned that the banjo is of African descent through a lecture given by ethnomusicologist Greg C. Adams at the University of Maryland, though I had been vaguely aware of it through listening to the music of James Leva and the Carolina Chocolate Drops.⁵³ I learned that Appalachian flatfooting and other percussive dances I was studying were an amalgam of West African, Northern European and American Indian influences from workshops with Eileen Carson-Schatz, writings by Susan Eike Spalding, and through my own study of some of the dance forms involved.

I wanted to bring the audience on a journey of feeling uncomfortable with banjo music like I used to, which was likely to be pretty easy immediately following the minstrel piece, and take them into a place of familiarity and fun, to create a space of intellectual possibility that things may not be what they seem. There are people who are devoted to the music without espousing the atrocities old-time music was sometimes employed to represent.

⁵³ Part of the “tradition” in traditional music is that bands like to tell you during a concert where they learned the tunes. These bands play African American mountain repertoire, and will sometimes mention history for instruments, but it’s usually brief since they’re in the middle of performing.

I believe that the real power and potential benefit of culture jamming with old-time music is in Jose Muñoz' idea of creating art as a utopia, "an insistence on something else, something better, something dawning" (Muñoz 2009:189). This idea is also picked up by Colin Quigley, an old-time fiddler and scholar discussing music and dance:

we find our way into enhanced understandings of the people who once made it [old-time] and those who now create within it. . . . The idiom has been a site of ideological distortion and utopian fantasy. At the moment it has opened a space of cultural imagination in which a new generation of musicians is inscribing the meanings they seek for our future (Quigley 2011, cited in Dance is Music Web).

The old-time dance to which he is referring is comprised of clogging, square dancing, and flatfooting or buck dancing. Quigley, the course director in the M.A. in Ethnomusicology at the University of Limerick, is writing about the fact that these forms have been associated with oppressive racist communities historically, but now a younger generation is creating new, in fact contradictory, values for the form. Jose Muñoz also writes about the idea of changing power structures from within, not by completely departing or outwardly defying. He suggests instead that one could "reformulate the performativity" (Muñoz 1999:x) by "disidentifying" with an ideology, remaining in the community and working for change, often in subtle ways.

Act 8 – The Next Big Thing

"Vernacular" is a word perhaps most often applied to spoken and written language. Henry Louis Gates Jr. developed a theory of an African American literary criticism, which depended heavily on the idea of intertextuality, the theory that all

texts are dependent upon and build on other texts. He pointed out that, “vernacular informs and becomes the foundation for formal black literature” (Gates 1988:xxii). The idea of intertextuality seemed to be inherent in the vernacular dance practices I was seeing, but also among the dance forms creating movement habits and patterns within my own body.

Within my physical research, the concept of intertextuality was most strikingly clear working with Gesel Mason on the postmodern solo she entitled “The Next Big Thing.” Mason was concerned with seeing how all of the different types of dance I was studying manifested in my body when I improvised; the themes that were visible in my movement patterns. Our choreographic research consisted of my improvising under parameters she gave me while she filmed, and then assembling clips of the footage into an order for a solo with a beginning, middle and end, in a new remix. I appreciated that Mason noticed how much my dancing was affected by the presence or absence of music. For the second half of the solo she included a Thelonious Monk song, which, given the predominance of jazz dance in the concert, felt entirely right. The first half was an experiment in phrasing my modern dance movement as percussive, syncopated, and audible. This was a technically stimulating challenge. Mason also added signs cueing the audience to participate in various reactions from laughing to cheering to booing,⁵⁴ another layer of text to poke through the various movement texts swirling around the choreography. Confirming my initial belief that some aspects of performance could only be discovered in front of a live audience, I felt I had only begun to scratch the surface of variations in my own

⁵⁴ These signs are not unlike the light-up signs that accompany television shows that are taped in front of live studio audiences. Here, Mason references television as the closest thing we have had to vaudeville for many years. She also playfully inverts my initial assumption that the audience is responding honestly and spontaneously in an “artistic dialogue;” they might just do what you say.

reaction to the audience's reaction by the second (and closing) night of the performances. I look forward to other opportunities to research this potential.

Act 8 ½ – Magic Trick

I wanted to make a point about indeterminacy, the idea that you can't ever really know everything, the idea that there might be limits to our understanding. I remembered a physics demonstration from an undergraduate class called "The Physical Nature of Light and Sound" in which my perception of the color of a projected square changed based on the brightness of the surrounding field. I thought this was kind of like the way the concept of race works in vernacular language – that, judging by our every day speech, it appears to be possible to be "whiter" or "blacker" than someone, as in the title of the play *Am I Black Enough Yet?*

The real magic of the act is this: I emailed Professor John Staib who had taught the above-mentioned physics course at James Madison University, and he had no memory of this well-known experiment in this particular design. Nor could I find it online in any of the several resources I found on the well-documented theory of simultaneous brightness contrast, a phenomenon of visual perception. Maybe I dreamed it.

For our dialogue we used the website of Dale Purves M.D.'s lab at the Center for Cognitive Neuroscience at Duke University (www.purveslab.net). This excerpt appeared in our production, spoken by David Yates, the "lovely assistant,"

The explanation of this remarkable effect found in many textbooks is predicated on lateral interactions among retinal ganglion cells or other lower order visual neurons, which demonstrably cause distorted rates of neuronal

firing at contrast boundaries, presumably to enhance the detection of edges. This interpretation implies that the relative intensities perceived in response to such stimuli are, in effect, 'readouts' of the relative firing rate of neurons at the input stages of the visual. On this basis, any target predominantly surrounded by an area of higher luminance should look darker than the same target predominantly surrounded by an area of lower luminance (Purves 2005 Web).

After these theoretical calisthenics, the Magician, Catherine Marafino, glibly sums up, “So, what we think we know . . . we may NOT know.” This has pretty much been my experience studying dance. Whenever I THINK I know something, it turns out that there is some way to deconstruct or redefine the entire paradigm upon which my “information” rests. “Tradition,” “authenticity,” “appropriation,” “innovation,” “modernism” are all terms that are fairly integral to my work as an artist. In my time at the University of Maryland I have encountered enough points of view to redefine each of these in several ways (which could be another thesis for another time). The interruption of certainty is something I kind of enjoy actually. I have even started to do this to myself – sometimes before I even finish a sentence I start thinking about all the reasons why the entire structure of my “topic” might not be sound. Intertextuality, as discussed in terms of remix aesthetics and various pieces in my concert, is a bit of a coping mechanism against this indeterminacy I think. It creates substance without having to be definitive. If I never come to rest on ONE point, maybe I can cast a web of relationality to keep me safe and moving forward. So, why not: at the end of the piece, the Magician pulls an over-sized rabbit (my four year old daughter in a white bunny suit), out of a giant top hat. Life goes on.

Act 9 – A Tantalizing Tale of Time-Traveling Treason

One powerful lesson from my nine months of rehearsing with my cast of undergraduate dance majors was the simultaneous interdependence of the community, and the importance of individual responsibility. I had terrible luck getting my entire cast to attend rehearsal at the same time – it almost felt like they were taking turns. At first, this was maddening and slowed us down significantly. But once I surrendered needing the whole cast there and altered the choreography accordingly, the suffering in this attendance crisis was alleviated. I proceeded to make formations and spatial decisions that required split second choices on the part of the dancers, much as a social situation would call for.

In the case of Act 9, we blocked off each other instead of the room, were prepared to switch partner or roles, and got used to practicing with different numbers of people. This forced us to look at each other more, and look at the surrounding walls less. I liked this change in focus. I told the cast “you are responsible for doing your own thing regardless of who else is, or is not there,” and it really did become less of an issue. What seemed at first like a weakening of community actually strengthened the community by helping individuals to take greater responsibility. I think this could be extrapolated to an attitude that could underlie a cross-cultural approach to dance. Not every form has to be represented at all times, not every form might fit neatly into the task at hand, but there could be a space and a heightened self-reflexivity on the part of the members who are at the table at any given time to strengthen the overall field.

Entre-Acts

I was trying to reach a “broad” audience in the sense that I wanted many people of different aesthetic sensibilities to understand the work through explicit context. I also decided to focus the style of the spoken dialogues very specifically toward a student community. For inspiration, I chose a combination of actors whom I thought might be familiar to the student body at large and the students in my cast specifically. These actors included members of the television improv comedy show “Whose Line Is It Anyway?” and bombastic comedian Jack Black. For Amy Scheer, Marianne Goris, and Raha Behnam, watching footage of them informed a style that was not going for subtlety. I hoped we could make the delivery over the top enough that we would be clearly “performing” our lines. This absence of sincerity was a stark juxtaposition to how I coached the dancing. I hoped that if the audience knew the speakers weren’t going for realism, they wouldn’t “worry” about them and their acting abilities. The crowd might not like my writing (though I got all the laughs I was going for), but I felt like this choice was more fair to the dancers, because it might give them some protection.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The Astounding Conclusion

The most surprising and wonderful thing about working on *Vaudevival: Old is the new New*, was that it was full of affirmation and excitement for me. The process, like the product, was full of variety, rich with little tidbits overlapping and poking out at weird angles – like a collage, my initial intention. I think I did achieve something vaudevillian, both for others at the show and for myself along the way: something entertaining, sometimes ungainly, but ultimately uplifting according to most feedback I received. I feel happy that I made a show that I would like to watch.

Paradoxically, I felt like the more I pleased myself with the piece, the more other people seemed pleased. This was echoed in my observation about the strength and flexibility of the individual strengthening the community. I encountered a staggering amount of cooperation in executing the production elements of the thesis concert, including some unexpected agreement from the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at suggestions like dancing with fire and inviting 50 banjo players to “ambush” the performance. I felt truly grateful to get so much “yes” from collaborators, cast and mentors. Moving forward, I am reconstructing *Vaudevival* at Dance Place in Washington D.C. and I have expanded my circle of collaborators in directions beyond my wildest dreams.

I chalk some of this success up to becoming a more empowered learner in my time at University of Maryland. Today, I am much better at figuring out what I

would like to do than when I arrived in 2009 to hear Professor Karen Bradley tell us, “I want you to change the world to suit you.” I think this sense of possibility in approaching the project allowed me to dream big, and use the improvisational approach of saying “yes, AND” to keep the momentum going.

It was with this “yes, and” strategy that all four of the graduate students in my class successfully applied together for a “Green Grant” from the University’s Office of Sustainability. We received \$1,500 in one of only nine awards granted on the entire campus. Our Green Grant stipulated that we use recycled set and costume elements. We also agreed to recycle whatever possible after the show, with the kind support and cooperation of the production shops at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. For my concert, the money covered the entire costume budget, and all of the costumes have been recycled or repurposed.

I also received a travel grant of \$300 from the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies to go to the Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center in New York City. There, I looked for materials on vaudeville that were not available in our library at University of Maryland. I watched other works by postmodern choreographers⁵⁵ on the topic of vaudeville, including Mitchell Rose and Anne Bogart, and interviews of vaudevillians on an ‘80s television show called “Eye on Dance.” I got to look at a collection of vaudeville theater stills, stationery and programs, which informed a design for my program (see Appendix A). Getting to immerse myself in vaudeville research at Lincoln Center informed many aesthetic

⁵⁵ I am aware of a recent trend in which many choreographers are using vaudeville for inspiration, and I had heard anecdotal accounts of several other pieces. I was hoping to see Paul Taylor’s work, Bill T. Jones’ work, and the Circe du Soleil show, but those were not there.

choices in the show, probably more than I realize. I solidified an impression of vaudeville that lent an overall tone to the remixing of the production.

I also found some evidence to support some of my initial theories about several aspects of dance. Lining rural percussive dances up next to early 20th century “authentic” jazz dances and late 20th century urban dances does create an interesting continuity. I think there are compelling arguments for seeing American vernacular dance as an arc or web that stretches from the oldest cross-cultural percussive dance amalgamation happening on U.S. soil (or possibly even in the Caribbean where there was a lot of West African/Irish intermixing), all the way to contemporary urban social dances. This through-line has potential for reconstituting a broader conception of American vernacular dance that encompasses old and new, urban and rural, black and white. Aside from breaking down the above problematic dichotomies, this new frame allows us to observe trends across a broader swath of dances, which combine and recombine constantly. Here we can find similarities where differences are usually emphasized. It remains to organize the evidence convincingly, but I think it is definitely worth investing more effort in unpacking these relationships.

In terms of finding my dance “home,” I have come full circle. My own resistance to predictability in my *use* of existing traditional material strengthens my position as a postmodernist even while my study in other areas can still create tension with postmodernist aesthetic priorities. Returning to the metaphors throughout this paper, webs, arcs and collages, perhaps it is the tension itself that holds me up as an artist. A web with no tension wouldn’t be very useful to a spider; a keystone wouldn’t stay in a non-weight-bearing doorway. A collage without contrast, remixing, or juxtaposition is no collage at all.

The positive reception of the show, which I can say was the most honest and vulnerable statement I could muster, gives me hope and encouragement about using art for positive social change, which is what I would really like to do from this point. I want to improve the lives of dancers, so that they can improve more people's lives with an increased awareness of the body and physical health.⁵⁶ I will try to do this through academic scholarship and research as well as through personal investment in organic self-sustaining dance communities.⁵⁷ I am also thinking about how to reconceptualize theory and practice in dance studies in higher education to allow for more kinds of dance artists to come to the table. With my own dance company and others, I want to practice my own version of educational outreach to share the stories in American vernacular dance, which are so rich with potential social reconciliation and respect. With that scholarly cooperation, I want to work towards a more supportive economic infrastructure for live performers, through arts education and increasing the accessibility of dance across historic social divides.

⁵⁶ Here I am reminded again of Ruth St. Denis, who stated, "the great mission of the dancer is to contribute to the betterment of mankind." Reacting to this quote from her younger self in an interview she chuckled and said sardonically, "I'm realizing what a nifty little project that is . . . I have plenty of nerve to even talk about it . . ." (flombar1 2007 Web) . . . I have my own nifty project I guess.

⁵⁷ I am thinking here of Urban Artistry who establishes an intentional balance of attending and supporting several *kinds* of dance events and outreach for their professional development. They teach, take class, perform, rehearse, train/practice, cypher (dance socially), battle, and judge competitions and collaborate with other artists. In their community outreach, they support the theatrical, social, and competitive aspects of the culture, reaching quite a large number of people.

Appendices

Appendix A

Research Blog @ <http://www.vaudevival.com> The blog is organized by Acts, in the following order:

Act 1

A Cheeky Clique of Charlestoning Chicks
If everybody Charlestoned off a bridge would you do it too?

Act 2

The Un-silent Movie Quartet
Are they really together?

Act 3

Some Shim Sham Shenanigans
Is this really appropriate in their age?

Act 4

Verily, a Veracible Vestige of Vintage Vernacular
An Audacious Attempt at Authenticity?

Act 5

A Pensive Plea for Permission
Requesting permission to practice.

Act 6

`Possum, the Amazing Jigging Yokel

Act 7

A Myriad of Musings on Minstrelsy
Who is impersonating whom here?

Act 8

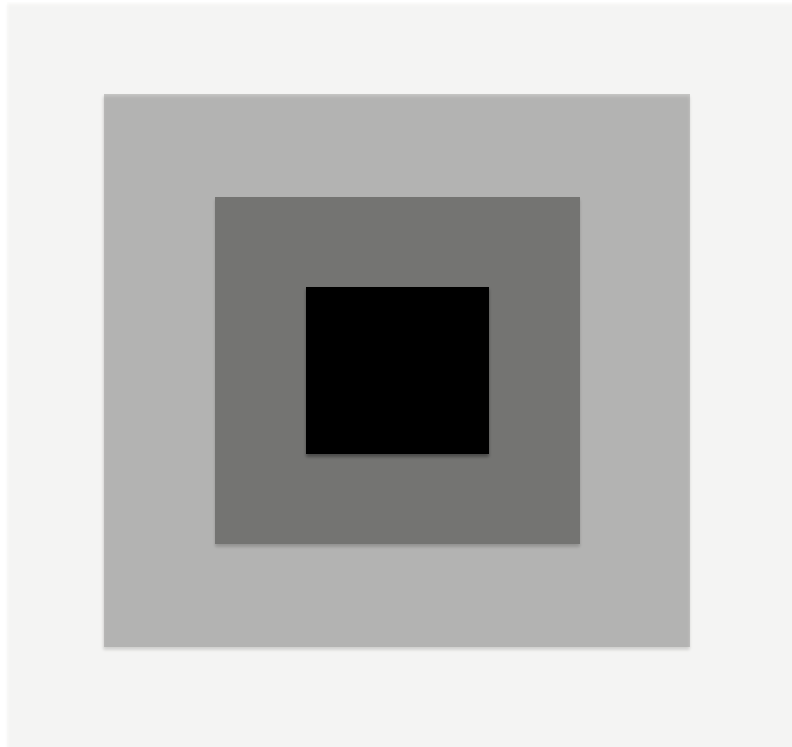
The Next Big Thing

Act 9

A Tantalizing tale of Time-Traveling Treason
Where did they come from, where are they going?

Appendix B

Physics Demonstration/Magic Trick Act 8 ½



The above transparency was placed on an overhead projector to demonstrate a phenomenon of brightness and contrast perception. When masking is placed around all but the center square, the projection of the center square appears white. As layers of masking are pulled back to reveal the lighter frames, the center square appears progressively darker. In the end, the inside square appears black while only the area outside of the transparency appears bright white.

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