MOVING BODIES, SHIFTING CONTEXTS: Linking Performer, Audience, and Behavior through Dance Performances

by

Nikolas Charles Ferguson Owens
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willingness and openness to share your ideas and try on new ones really helped me to expand my breadth

of understanding dance in a holistic sense. This is the greatest gift I could have ever received.

   Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to Lindsay Kosasa. You have been the one

individual who has been with me and who has watched me grow through each and every one of my

choreographic works at Wesleyan. Your choreographic eye, methodical and oozing movement intermittent

with quick and precise accentuations, and your bubbly personality will be remembered as the hallmarks

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as a dancer, choreographer, and overall artist. Thank you for being such an amazing collaborator, fellow

dance major, and most importantly, a truly dear friend.

Where does human truth lie? On the surface, in the behavior men

show every day, or in the depths, behind social masks?

-Richard Schechner

INTRODUCTION

"A performance is always about at least two things: the performer's body and the story. The performance stimulates the audience to react in their bodies to what's happening to the performer… The performer says to the audience: 'Watch my insides being removed, watch as I spill my guts in front of you, to you, for you; watch how I am healed.' In watching, the audience participates in a cycle of conflict, agony, death, dismemberment, and repair… During each performance the performer tries to find for himself— and undergo in front of the audience—the process of birthing, growing, opening up, spilling out, dying, and rebirthing. This is the life-rhythm mystery of theater, 'live theater.' This is the kernel where art, medicine, and religion intersect."
(Schechner, *Environmental Theater* 172-173)

Investigating performance and audience relations is key to not only the performance arts, but also simply in viewing everyday life. If one is looking at the relationship between orator and listener during a lecture, between professor and student during a debate over an issue discussed in class, between one friend telling a story and his/her group of surrounding friends listening and interpreting said story, or even nonverbal forms of communication (dancing at a club, playing in a symphony orchestra); all of these interactions are looking at different facets of performance. To refer back to Schechner's quote "During each performance the performer tries to find for himself— and undergo in front of the audience—the process of birthing, growing, opening up, spilling out, dying and rebirthing. This is the life-rhythm mystery of theater, 'live theater,'" (Schechner, *Environmental Theater* 173). By performing, the artist opens a door for the audience to observe his process, his way of arriving at the performance, his way of portraying the performance, and his way of concluding the performance (Schechner, *Environmental Theater* 172). All of which the observers watch, take in, and reflect upon. Performance is a way in which a dialogue (nonverbal or verbal) exists and is interchanged between a subject(s) and each individual audience member; from this

relationship stems a codependent as well as group constructed meaning. This resultant

meaning, in turn, helps in constructing a specific reality or many realities. And these

realities, existing within the parametrical context that the meaning of the dialogue

dictates, are then utilized as rules, guidelines, suggestions, and ideas that we can choose

to act on or not.

For every person, group of people, society, or culture, these realities are viewed

and interpreted in very unique and personal manners. Each individual involved in

observing these realities says something different about it or they came about their

conclusion via a different route than another individual. It is for this reason and for the

purposes of this thesis that I deem it necessary to include my own reflections of

constructed realities that I've been involved in from the past, to give you an introduction

into how and from where my thesis topic originates.

I've always possessed a strong sensitivity to the relationship I hold with the

people around me. In particular, I have found myself to be extremely cognizant of how I

act with different groups of people in different contextual situations. For instance, with

some friends, I find myself to be extremely energetic and high spirited. This stems from

an innate affinity to being looked at. Comparatively, when I'm working at my job as a

women's competitive gymnastics team coach back at home in Los Angeles, California, I

perceive myself to be mature, respectable, and a good leader. This self-conception is

confirmed by reactions of the parents of the girls that I teach. They have always been

surprised when I tell them my age—especially when I was a teenager. They usually

believed me to be at least 25 years old.[1] Furthermore, while at home with my family

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[1] This means that it is not only my perception that is creating this reality, but also the perceptions and meanings that the parents are affiliating with the work that I do and my conduct while doing it that is **(Cont. on next pg.)**

during vacations, I am much more quiet and soft spoken. But when I do speak it's with an air of dry humor. I found this particular role through a perception of previously established house dynamics.

More appropriate to this thesis however, is when I'm performing onstage and I find myself in various situations. Sometimes, I am conversing with and challenging my own internal notions of what performance is. To me it means that I am authentically portraying my internal ideas by using my physical body and movement as a medium of expression. At the same time, I am ensuring that my demonstrations of meaning are authentic enough to cause the audience to create a tangible connection with and memorization of the messages my dance movements are supposed to convey. At other times, I use the audience's physical manifestations derived from viewing my performance (the ones that I as a performer, and an observer watching the reaction of the audience, can visibly see) as impetus for my either reflecting or challenging what I think they are thinking.   If I can't see the audience then I will undergo the same process, but with viewing my fellow dancers/performers onstage with me. I find this to be a particularly important aspect of how I view performance and audience involvement. It will influence how I compile research for this thesis because I will try and relate to the material that I uncover on the level of performativity and audience perception with my above stated experience as an audience member and a performer.

But regardless of the situation or context I'm involved with, I constantly analyze my role in the performance; focusing on whomever I am creating a relationship with at

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constructing the same reality. It is probably because of the fact that I don't want to lose my job that I act in an overly mature manner. But regardless it is still something that I am extremely cognizant of. Furthermore, I'm constantly reminding myself that the conduct, with which I associate this job, is a **(Cont. on next pg.)**

the time. Additionally, a lot of my performative mores and mannerisms have arisen

because of other 'performance-like situation' that I have witnessed and from which I

have interpreted meaning. For example, when in the work place as a coach, I know that

I have to act and present myself with a certain level of maturity because that is how my

coaches were able to help me develop and grow when I did gymnastics as a child.

These and other experiences have triggered a deep interest in the relationship

between social context[2] and behavior. This quintessential relationship is incredibly

important because behavior can be considered to be analogous to the actions that we

perform as individuals and as a community in a context, and I think that it is incredibly

important to try and understand the essence of its genesis in societies. This way we have

a chance at understanding why we have made the decisions we have made—either as an

individual or a society—and how to make future decisions that will benefit us as a whole.

This relationship between social context and behavior is incredibly vast and can

be investigated in so many different ways, but for my thesis I've chosen to focus on this

relationship in one particular context: dance performance. From my studies that I've

conducted into the relationship between social context and behavior over the last school

year (both scholarly and self-reflective), I've noticed the following phenomenon: that a

dance performance existing in a specific context can play a role in reflecting the

behaviors of that context to an audience. So at this point I would like to put forth

another question: "How does a performer respond to their audience during a

performance?" Now before I undergo the explanation to this question, I would like to

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prescribed conduct necessary for when I'm explaining and demonstrating the fundamentals (as well
as some of the specific techniques) involved in performing gymnastics.
[2] **In this thesis, when I talk about social context, I am referring explicitly to the community audience
within that context; not to other aspects of that context.**

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explain why I believe dance performance to be a relevant route of investigation. Through studying many different kinds of dance performances we are able to investigate the relationship between audience, performer, and behavior. And I consider this approach to be a relevant one because of the many different kinds of investigative interplay that can occur between performer and audience in each one of these types of dance performances. Therefore I believe that it is within these different types of interplay between performer and audience that the answers to my question above can be found. And through these answers we can promote a deeper understanding of the range and potency of the discourses between audience and performer, and therefore between behavior and social context.

Now for me, dance is incredibly important due to its ability to relate an idea, a history, a desire, or any other abstract notion to the physical form conveyed through movement of the human body. Dance is a communication medium that can express as vibrantly and emotively as film, art, and music everything we do, everything we think of, and everything we create. Therefore the body itself is one possible window/medium through which we generate an experience that incorporates these values, notions, and mores, and it is through dance performance that these values take shape and cause discourse amongst a community. I think that following this evolution is essential in trying to uncover, on an accurate level, how behavior and social context interrelate; helping us to understand why we are the way we are.

Now, there are a number of ways to answer the question: "How does a performer respond to their audience during a performance?" So as a means of providing one possible answer to this question, I want to re-visit my recently mentioned notion of informing upon an audience the mores and values that are put forth in a dance

performance. In the particular dance performance contexts that I have reviewed (to be explained in greater detail later in this introduction) pedagogy through dance performance has presented itself in different ways; playing different parts in establishing, perpetuating, and proliferating important cultural values and mores that maintain the integrity of a society. Now this pedagogical framework exists in two parts:

1.) The performers are the ones who display a specific reality in the dance performance for a specific audience to observe and interpret.

2.) The audience(s) or viewer(s) watching these dance performers gather information about the purpose of the performance by noticing and interpreting whatever is essential to it.

Therefore the relationship between the performer and the audience is where the idea behind portraying behavior exists. Certain behaviors in societies or communities are dictated by performers and observed by audiences through this pedagogical framework in a dance performance. So it is my hope that by using this pedagogical paradigm, we will gain a better understanding of the relationship between behavior and social contexts.

When looking at performer/audience dynamics, the relationship between the two has the potential to be manipulated by the dancer/performer, the audience, or a variant combination of the two, all of which rely upon the context in which the performance is given. These relationships and contexts also dictate routes of information that are expressed via physical and movement-based expressions. Therefore, to uncover what goes on in this relationship, I have decided to look at several

case-studies of different dance styles and backgrounds[3]. In all of the contexts, the relationships between audience and performer evoke and invoke the notion of behavior as being observed, learned, and adapted through dance performances that exist within specific contexts.

I will begin this investigative process in Chapter 1 which will be split into three different sections. The first section will look at Yoruba dance from southwest Nigeria and Santería from Cuba. In particular, I will explore their practice of ritual dance performance as perpetuating a traditional and pedagogical framework in between performer and audience that is paramount in these cultures sustaining their socio-cultural ties as well as their mores. One of the strongest ways of perpetuating tradition and ways of life for these two cultures is through ritual dance performance, particularly deity dances that specifically honor their polytheistic religions. Among both traditions (both Yoruba and Santería) the God Sàngó or Changó [4] is a very powerful deity whom both groups revere.

Omofolabo Soyinka Ajayi is an accomplished professor of Literary & Performing Arts of African & African Diaspora Women as well as Dance & Choreography at the University of Kansas, she is a native speaker of the Yoruba language, and she has taught courses on African dance and performance styles. In her essay *In Contest: The Dynamics of African Religious Cultures*, Ajayi states that "[d]ance is both a sign and a vehicle of communication. It is able to express an action, an idea and, it is at the same time the action and the idea it expresses" (Ajayi, *In Contest: The Dynamics of African Religious Cultures*

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[3] These four contexts that I will describe are in no way a universal formula for which to understand the relationship between social context and behavior. Rather they are four of an infinite number of windows to look through so as to gain a better understanding of the relational phenomena.

185). The combination of dance and its communicative values is an integral part of the

Yoruba and Santería cultures. And according to Kamiaru Welsh Asante, who wrote the

chapter *Dances as a Reflection of Life* from the book *African Dance*, African dance itself is the

idea that the dance is dedicated to portraying. Therefore, dance in Africa, and specifically

in the case of Yoruba, is a phenomenon that holds great value in displaying the behavior

and ideas of historically rich and culturally astounding communities.

In *Yoruba Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in a Nigerian Culture*

Ajayi gives a breakdown and physical analysis of the dance movement that goes into the

festivals that celebrate Sàngó. In particular, she talks about how a specific dance

movement or body posture is meant to indicate a specific idea about the festival, how it

relates to Sángo, and how it is physically communicated to and interpreted by the

community audience as meaningful and reverentially essential in Yoruban culture.

In the Santería tradition and ritual practice, particularly during the possession of

a medium by a deity spirit, Mary Ann Clark states that

> [T]he medium, the possessed person, experiences a 'break' in
>
> consciousness, during which she leaves and another is incarnate in her
>
> body. Because there is no direct communication between the invading
>
> spirit and the departed 'soul,' others must be present to manage the
>
> process and to receive any communications and insights from the
>
> Orisha (*Santería*, Clark 110).

Clark is both a Santeria scholar and practitioner and teaches in the Religious Studies

Program at the University of Houston and the School of Human Sciences and

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[4] The spelling Sàngó originates from the Nigerian tradition of worshiping their òrìṣà (deities). The
spelling Changó originates from the Cuban tradition of worshiping their oricha (deities).

Humanities at the University of Clear Lake. Being a scholar and practitioner of the religion, she possesses the knowledgebase to understand the inner workings of rituals in Santería. In the previous quote, she calls for the necessity of observers during a possession ritual, if not for direct performative observance, then for the practicality of having witnesses present to experience and be able to recount the possession and reify their God's wishes; seeing as the medium's soul has temporarily departed. Additionally, Katherine J. Hagedorn (who has taken a few research trips to Cuba where she has interviewed individuals about "Cuba's African-based performance traditions") in her book *Divine Utterances* mentions that "the *orichas* were 'beckoned' through singing and drumming, so that they would 'possess' the dancers, making them literally 'dance the orichas'" (Hagedorn, *Divine Utterances* 57).

By using my own methodologies and these scholars' methodologies of looking at dance performance in Yoruba and Santería (in the festivals that involve Sàngó or Changó specifically) I hope to discover the importance of these rituals being repeated and performed, generally, in the same manner for each performance. Is this supposed to function as form of passing down essential knowledge from one generation of a society to the next, so as to perpetuate integral values within that society? Is 'passing down' achieved through the repetition of ritual practices and performance? I think this portrayal of importance exists within the performance itself as well in the level of absorption of this performance in these rituals, and the studies that have been dedicated to them.

In Chapter 1, section two of my thesis, I wish to address and analyze Vogue dance—a style of movement that was based on emulating the bodily postures of famous models on the cover of *Vogue* as well as other magazines—among the black and Latino

gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender men and women who perform in the drag

ballroom scene of Harlem, New York. Many of the explanations about how behavior is

reified, established, and adapted through vogue dance performance relates to the idea of

'voguing battles', where one dancer competes against another to establish who is the

better performer to receive notoriety, fame, and a level of 'fierceness' that is very much

sought after throughout the balls. This desire was and is very much the crux of the

ballroom community. Many of the black and Latino men and women who participated

in the balls had "two of nothing" (Pepper LaBeija, *Paris is Burning Film*) because, back in

the 60's and 70's when vogue dance began to pick up steam, men and women of color

were not assimilated into the general populous as an "equal". Furthermore, these same

men and women who participated in the balls were not only black or Latino, but

homosexual, bisexual, or transgender as well, which only impeded their chances further

of becoming an "acceptable" member of the larger and extremely hetero-normative

society in New York. Since these individuals could not hope to gain notoriety within the

"real world", they created venues through which they could gain fame, renown, and

adulation (which they could never receive otherwise because of their race and sexual

orientation) just like big name celebrities such as Diana Ross.

> [Diana Ross] influenced all forms of art ranging from fashions to music
>
> to drama. She reigned Supreme and the Ball world at the time absorbed
>
> everything Diana had to offer. She's been the subject of female
>
> impersonation and lip-sync pantomime for more than twenty years.
>
> Diana Ross's make-up, gowns and stage movements have been copied
>
> by some of the most famous and infamous female impersonators
>
> ever… known. One exclusive pose that [is] distinctly Diana Ross is her

Superstar Victory pose. Diana's arms stretched up forming a perfect

V. Her head thrown back, her eyes dazzling. That's the very pose that

is the finale of **Vogue-ing**. It's when a performer stands on the end of

the runway with upheld, angled arms and wave[s] the[ir] fingertips

upwards, si[gnaling]…to the audience to give them their just due. That

final movement says 'I have completed my act to the fullest of my

ability. Do you recognize me… or what?'… Diana Ross, not even

aware, had contributed to today's **Vogue-ing** by simpl[y] being

beautiful Diana Ross. By simply being charismatic with no pure effort.

By simpl[y] being a black American woman (Nyong'o, *Fierce Pleasures*

107)[5].

Diana Ross is a person who was met with fame, fortune, love, adulation,

adoration, and respect and all of the contestants at a ball strived to reach that level of

infamy in their own context of the balls. Everyone who attends these balls attends as a

participant and a competitor who wants to battle other queens for the right to become

legendary, recognized, and remembered (*Paris is Burning* Film). There was only ever room

for a few stars to shine at once, so the notions of battle and competition were

invigorated because of this.

By reading texts like the introduction to *Voguing and the House Ballroom Scene of

New York City 1989-92* by Tim Lawrence as well as many of the transcribed interviews in

it, as well as *Fierce Pleasures: Art, History, and Culture in New York City Drag Balls* by Tavia

Amolo Ochieng Nyong'o (a Wesleyan alumnus who performed research on ball culture

by attending a few in New York), and by watching films like *Paris is Burning* and multiple

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[5] Originally from Marcel Christian's *Idle Sheet X* (photocopied pamphlet) (June 27,1990), 7.

YouTube videos of ballroom voguing battles, I hope to gain a new awareness to how behavior can manifest itself and be perpetuated through dance performance. I would like to especially focus on the film *Paris is Burning.* It is a documentary that was made in the 80's to help portray the world of ball culture in New York City amongst predominantly gay black and Latino men[6]. I will analyze the interviews conducted in this film and the dance footage taken during the filming of the documentary and critically look at the role of the performers in these settings and the behavior they promote and invoke in themselves as well as the rest of the ball community.

I will mostly focus on the notion and the role that "battling" plays in establishing who is the fiercest queen[7] out there, which is one of the founding principles of the ballroom community, and how this ideal is learned or translated from the performers to the other community members. And I will do this by analyzing the historical genesis and evolution of vogue dance dating back to the 1970's, 80's, and 90's.

The ballroom culture, at its most basic level, calls for a definite emphasis on creativity both in movement and in style that is individual but that exists within the larger framework of the community at the same time. In these ballrooms, bringing a character (for example) into the scene and performing as that character (e.g. dressing up and acting like a sailor, a businessman, a model; think back to the Diana Ross example) with complete and utter seamlessness was and is a big part of the culture; trying to prove that you could act like the 'normal' people 'outside' so as to gain some form of acceptance among like-minded individuals (*Paris is Burning* Film) on the 'inside' of the ballroom as well as from yourself, while at the same time being the best one at it. This tradition

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[6] Ball culture in New York was and still is comprised of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender men and women; however the majority of participants were gay black and latino men.

directly translated over to (and actually led to) the physical form of vogue dancing, wherein performers are constantly going in and out of their characters with different dancing vocabularies existing within the vogue vernacular (*Paris is Burning* Film); trying to give a real performance of that character through the expression of vogue dance and win "10s, 10s, 10s across the board" (the best score possible when being judged by the judge's panel on a performance) (Regnault, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York City 1989-92* 11).

The relationship between behavior and social context here is an intricate and complex one (not unlike Yoruba and Santería). The notion of wanting to be the best is rooted in a response to popular society characterizing gay black and Latino men as being unacceptable individuals of society; thereby cutting off any access that these individuals may have had to becoming an acceptable individual of society. As a result these individuals would emulate the people who were the MOST accepted and even adored by society (people like Diana Ross) in their underground ballrooms. These people were seen as icons of originality and individualism and they would therefore strive for this level of originality and individualism in the form of contest and vogue dance battles. So as a way of investigating the role that ingenuity plays in the behavioral pattern of wanting to be the legend of a ball, I want to address the role that improvisation plays in vogue dance. When voguing, there is no set dance phrase in a performance; choreography is set at the time it is performed. This kind of choreographic performance positions improvisation, ingenuity, and creativity as the epitome of authenticity. This is highlighted amongst voguers to the point that when one is within the vogue community the more skillful one is at implementing ingenuity and creativity into the vogue battles, the greater the

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[7] A colloquial term used in gay culture to mean a gay man.

opportunity for that individual to become a legend. As I stated earlier: "Vogue dancing calls for a definite emphasis on creativity both in movement and in style that is individual but that exists within the larger framework of the community at the same time." (Owens, *Moving Bodies, Shifting Contexts: Linking Performer, Audience, and Behavior through Dance Performances* 14). To help explain this idea, I would like to reference Jonathan Jackson, author of *Improvisation in African-American Vernacular Dancing,* who has spent time in the vogue ballrooms of New York, participating in and witnessing the variant vogue battles that go on there. Jackson talks about the art of improvisation as choreography in social dances of the black dance vernacular (under which he places voguing) and it is through choreography (improvised or otherwise) and performance that information is produced, distributed, and learned. "[T]he idea of executing any dance exactly like someone else is usually not valued… Black idiomatic dancers always improvise with intent… [and] with the success of the improvisations depending on the mastery of nuances and the elements of craft called for by the idiom" (Jackson, *Improvisation in African-American Vernacular Dancing* 40). Basically, the level of creative repertoire of vogue movement that a voguer can come up with during a battle will dictate whether or not he is fierce enough to win, in turn saying something about his level of fierceness and renown in the community. Remember: "[T]he idea of executing any dance exactly like someone else is usually not valued." However, to have the facility to improvise at a level so as to avoid looking like someone else, one must have a certain amount of skill and a prior knowledgebase of the dance vocabulary that is being performed. And this is only accessed through watching and learning the dynamics of battle and the vocabulary executed in it through a pedagogical frame of mind. It is after this occurs that one can use the acquired knowledge to surpass their opponents when they battle.

So by watching and learning the behavior that a legendary voguer displays when they are battling via improvisatory vogue dance, one can learn not only how to match that level of excellence (depending on the voguer) but can then use their own ingenuity in vogue dance improvisation to surpass that level and become the new legend.

I will study the work of Merce Cunningham and his use of chance operations and collaboration in Chapter 1, section three. Cunningham's technique and choreography arose out of a post-WWII avant-garde attitude. His choreographic process is rooted in a method of generating movement that is inherently intelligent and does not require pre-conceived notions, storylines, or emotions involved in the movement's synthesis or performance. Based upon investigations into Cunningham's process I have run across two major questions: what can possibly be evoked from an audience or be invoked in an audience that is watching movement performance with no storyline or emotion? How does this affect the audience's perception and behavior toward performative dance set on a proscenium stage?

A lot of the time, when people attend a dance performance, they expect a story to be told, a message (whether stabilizing or catalytic) to be put forth, or an emotion to be explored. Cunningham's dances did not do this. His choreography and technique helped to reflect the behavioral phenomenon that existed within the avant-garde community context at the time; and he was one of many individuals within the arts who accomplished this. For the purposes of this thesis, I would like to frame Cunningham within this larger avant-garde community. Even though I am only talking about his work within this community in my thesis, he existed amongst many other avant-garde artists who did just as much for avant-garde art as Cunningham did. And Cunningham was well aware of this fact and displayed it through his many collaborative works with people like

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John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, David Tudor, and many others. Furthermore, Cunningham made a point about making sure each of his collaborator's works were showcased as independent entities that had simply been brought together into one time and space (a performance). Taking separate entities and putting them together for the first time during a performance (like music and dance for example), became an integral part of his process, thereby staying connected to and even relying on the rest of the avant-garde community.

As part of this community, Cunningham's methodology lies in portraying the body as being solely an articulate form; composed of muscles, bones, ligaments, and tendons with infinity number of combinations that existed in, and could move through, time and space with variant energies (Foster, *Reading Dancing* 32). He wanted to be able to express through performance that rather than being someone or something (a character or an emotion), the dancers are doing something. This idea allowed for the dancers to function as individual entities on stage during a performance. This left the audience in a precarious situation. They no longer had the safety of story or an emotion to relate to. "[T]he performance call[ed] upon the audience to step out of its traditional passive, spectator role, and into an active field of experience, where choice, whim and clear perception must come into imaginative play by the viewer if he is to grasp fully the experience of the work" (Dell, *Far Beyond the Far Out* 14). In essence, he forced the audience to synthesize their own interpretations of what was being performed, giving them a sense of interpretational license and autonomy (Dell, *Far Beyond the Far Out* 14) (Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* 209).

Cunningham accentuated these ideas through his use of chance operations—a method of putting 'A', 'B', and 'C' in different orders and orientations through using

coin tosses, dice roles, and elaborate charts and graphs that used chance to decide these

orders and orientations. This method of performing dances only proliferated dancer

individuality and audience interpretational autonomy. He helped to further these

audience and performer behavioral traits in the context of dance performance.

To help emphasize the notion of autonomy being incorporated into the behavior

of Cunningham's dance performances amongst the audience and the performers, I will

cite works by published authors like Cecily Dell (who published who work *Winterbranch

and Hundreds of Years* in dance SCOPE magazine in 1965 where she talks about the

results of introducing spontaneity into viewing modern dance), Roger Copeland (the

author of *Merce Cunningham and the Aesthetic of Collage* where he compares Cunningham's

choreographic works and how they coincide with idea of 'collage'; he is also a Professor

of Theater and Dance at Oberlin College), Joseph Mazo (author of *Prime Movers,* and also

was a former dance and theater critic for *The New York Times, Dance Magazine*, and

various journals), Merce Cunningham himself, Susan Manning (Professor of English,

Theater, and Performance Studies at Northwestern University, and also the author of

Modern Dance Negro Dance where she analyzes Cunningham's *Antic Meet* and *Summerspace*),

and other dance and performance scholars and authors. Through reading and making

connections amongst these individuals' literary materials, I hope to gain an

understanding into the shift in and perpetuity of behavior that occurred amongst the

performers and the audience during the performance of Cunningham's pieces. I want to

reveal how audiences accessed something beyond emotion and narrative through

Cunningham's use of 'intelligent movement', collaboration, and chance operations.

The second and final chapter of my thesis will deal with looking at my two

semesters of choreography as physical movement research into answering the question:

"How does a performer respond to their audience during a performance?" I will first delve into the choreographic process of my first semester's work, *Mirr(or) Reality*, which strived to connect my scholastic research process with my personal, somatic, and performative process. Through displaying this connection in a performance context, I was trying to generate a deeper level of understanding the ways in which behavior and social context interact among both performers and the audience members present at the performance. I will also include the experiences and notions of audience and performer dynamics and the behavior that occurs in different contexts of the three performers I used to present my choreography. Using their personal insight into behavior and social context, the academic insight that I studied, and my own choreographic insight I would like to unveil some of the boundaries that may be limiting our understanding of behavior in dance performance contexts.

In the next portion of Chapter 2, I will address the process of exposing the nature of audience and performer that I explored in my duet this semester with Sally Williams, entitled *Reflection in Two Parts*. This process was much more about relating back to the personal roots from which my thesis originated: noticing my hyper-sensitivity to behavioral shifts within myself when I was in different contexts. One key aspect and tool that was highly emphasized in this dance was the idea of reflexivity. I explored this idea through approaching audience and performer roles in a performance setting as interchangeable or existing in two realities at the same time. I played a lot with changing who was doing the viewing and who was being viewed as well as asking the question "what would happen if one person was doing both at the same time?" By incorporating this kind of 'play' into my choreography, I had hoped to address behavior in a dance setting at its most fundamental. I didn't want to look at it as a ritual practice, a social

dance competition, nor as advancement in avant-garde thought. Rather, I wanted to analyze it solely as a dramatically fluctuating conversation between an audience and performers to promote a change in behavior. I found this kind of investigation to be extremely rich in untapped ideas and formats for the roles of behavior in social context.

CHAPTER 1

FROM MASTER TO APPRENTICE: DANCE PERFORMANCE AS PEDAGOGY

[D]ance is a mode of communication which utilizes gestures and movement to convey information,

and as such, is a major educational vehicle. Repetitive dance sequences introduce children to

traditional patterns of behavior.

(Nicholls, *African Dance: Transition and Continuity* 47)

There are a great variety of actions, processes, notions, and ideas that are learned

from an early age, or even sometimes at a point when we are much older. These

'lessons' that are taught are of great importance in societies because they act as a baseline

of communication and general knowledge of the inner workings of any community. For

instance, the difference between right and wrong is something we learn from a very early

age. Hurting another person, for example, is considered to be wrong while helping

someone in need is considered to be right. Another example is the pedagogy behind

teaching a certain set of skills. For me as a gymnastics coach, I learned that through very

rigorous and regimental training, gymnasts could achieve a high level of skill. My coaches

coached me in gymnastics via very verbally loud methods of correction and very hands

on approaches to body manipulation to teach the correct form when executing a skill.

Watching and participating (as a student at the time) in this kind of teaching as a practice

for 14 years when I was gymnast—and with a very high rate of success as a result for not

only me but my fellow teammates at the time who were a part of the same experience—

has influenced the way that I coach younger gymnasts today. I'm not nearly as loud or as mean as my coaches were (however, still loud enough) but I have proven to be as much into body manipulation as a method of teaching correct gymnastics technique as they were.

Gymnastics is just one of the many forms of my tremendous interest in looking at how methods of practice and teaching this practice are passed down from generation to generation; dictating different forms of behavior for different contextual situations. At a basic level, I want to know the means by which how we act is disseminated by our predecessors. And one of the ways that is easiest for me to do this is by gaining insight into the progression of an idea from a mentally manifested phenomenon, to a performed physicalized notion, and finally to an audience perceived social value or more; all of which occurs in the form of performance as pedagogy.

Dance at its most basic level according to George Balanchine: "is an expression of time and space, using the control of movement and gesture to communicate" (and these movements and gestures exist as a practice within dance) (D'Amboise, Forward from *African Dance,* 8). Within this practice are different movement vocabularies that are perpetuated and passed down through generations of movers, performers, and dancers; each vocabulary specific to a dance context. For example: ballet technique has been around for centuries, having its dance movement perpetuated and diffused in societies throughout the years; its actual physical tradition being preserved. However, it is within the performance of these practices, and the contexts these performances are framed in that affects the behavior of the performers and the viewers. The way in which these vocabularies are portrayed by a performance and then perceived by a people is where

behavioral solidarity amongst a people or behavioral differentiations amongst a people

stem from; where notions of right and wrong, for example, originate.

This is the most fascinating for me because learning how I perceive notions and

turn them into consistent behavioral practices is a window into human nature; and not

just a window into my own human nature, but also into others. Using the tools I

gathered from studying my own behavior—particularly in dance performance—has

allowed me to begin to study different methods of information dispersal and intake, like

the methods of the Yoruba and Santería traditions, Vogue ballrooms, and the work of

Merce Cunningham on the proscenium stage (all of which I will delve into for the

remainder of the chapter). This toolbox I've created helps me to be able to open these

windows and clearly look through them at the many forms of perpetuated practices that

are apparent in the world and the legacy they leave on a people and their behavior.

NIGERIAN AND CUBAN YORUBA DANCES

The teachings of ancestral knowledge and belief systems are quintessential to

Nigerian Yoruba tradition because social mores are embedded within these teachings

that aid in the society's function. One of the vehicles that is used for this perpetuity is

ritual performance, and in particular ritual dance.

However, before I go on to talk about the role of Yoruba ritual dance

performance in perpetuating social mores, I want to mention that in this section of my

work, I predominantly make reference to Omofolabo Soyinka Ajayi's *The Semiotics of

Movement and Body Attitude in a Nigerian Culture*. This work is an incredibly in-depth

analysis into the aesthetics and significance of Yoruba dance forms. It provides an

impressive "analysis of the dancer's body attitude in communication as well as through the events in which dances take place" (Ajayi, located on the rear cover of the text). In the text, Ajayi looks at the actual practice behind the physical movements themselves and the knowledge behind each movement, and she looks at the way this practice is interspersed in the community through performance. Ajayi's research and description of the Shango festival demonstrates the point I want to make in regards to the connection between ritual dance performances and its associated behavior, as well as the audience's translation and response to this behavior. Additionally this particular text of Ajayi's has been referenced in over 40 written works, some of them talking about Yoruba dance culture.

In Nigerian Yoruba culture, the Immortals (the gods) are kept alive so long as there is an active line of communication between them and their devotees. Without this line of communication the deities would "become irrelevant and cease to exist in the people's consciousness and reality"[8] (Ajayi, *Yoruba Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in Nigerian Culture* 45). Just like many omnipotent figures in many other cultures, both in monotheistic and polytheistic traditions, a god is used to explain both the explainable and unexplainable phenomena or reasoning behind actions and events. As a result and as a form of reverence for their òrìṣà (pronounced *o-ree-sha*, meaning deity), there are many festivals and rituals that are dedicated to these gods. One particular ritual is a festival to Ṣàngó[9] (pronounced *shaang-o*), who is the god of thunder,

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[8] The dance performance aspect of rituals like these is important because, as I stated in my introduction, dance physicalizes ideas and notions of a person, group of people, or community. These lines of communication to the deities are what are being physicalized during the performance, and observed by the audience.
[9] Scholars like Ajayí spell Ṣàngó with the "Ṣ," whereas other scholars spell it with an "Sh." For the sake of ease in this thesis I will follow the "Sh" format of spelling from here on.

lightning, and fire as well as representing male power and sexuality. But more

importantly is Shango's affiliation with being a fearsome and hot-tempered deity known

to deliver justice to thieves, liars, and slanderers; which act as his civic values and morals

that should be kept in mind in the societies that worship him (Ajayi, *Yoruba Dance: The*

Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in Nigerian Culture 76)[10]. This particular festival lasts

for seven days and is used to honor Shango as well as welcome in the dry season in

southeast Nigeria. During the beginning of the dry season, there is a lot of thunder and

lightning, and as a result, a lot of fire. The communities that celebrate Shango see this as

the perfect opportunity to hold the festival because the natural phenomena (thunder,

lightning, and fire) that occur during this time coincide with Shango's celestial powers.

Therefore having the festival occur at this time helps the participants to connect with the

deity himself, as well as with the Shango tribute dance performances that happen during

the festival. These performances are responsible for portraying the civic values attributed

to Shango (for example, strength and masculinity), which are coveted by the Yoruba

community (Ajayi, *Yoruba Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in Nigerian*

Culture 86-87).

More relevant to this thesis, however, are two dances in particular that happen at

the festival: the *Lànkú dance* and the *Dance of Possession*[11]. In the *Lànkú dance* and *Dance of*

Possession dancers perform the physical movement that will help them to establish the

transcendent connection necessary for the manifestation of Shango in an elégùn priest's

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[10] Shango used to be a hot tempered and righteous King of the Oyo Kingdom before he went through a process of deification posthumously, transforming him into an òrìṣà.

[11] The *Lànkú Dance* feeds directly into the *Dance of Possession* which will be explained in greater detail.

body [12] (*Lànkú dance*). The possessed elégùn priest can then carry out Shango's wishes (*Dance of Possession*) (Ajayi, 87-88). Throughout the *Lànkú dance* and the *Dance of Possession*, the dancer[13] performs repetitious, completely embodied, and meticulous physical movement. "The more a movement is repeated, the greater the level of intensity and the closer the dancer gets to the designated deity or ancestor" (Welsh, *African Dance* 18). Before the elégùn priest actually undergoes possession, he/she performs repetitive movement as a means of trying to get closer and closer to the essence of the deity they are trying to manifest. As a result, these repetitive movements attempt to help the priest form a transcendent connection that helps them to go beyond his/her physical experience and become closer to Shango's physical experience. If the elégùn priest is successful in this transcendence, they will invoke Shango into their body and represent him and all of his values and virtues (the section describing the actual physical process of the *Lànkú dance* will be addressed later). This connection that is established between the elégùn priest and Shango serves as a conduit that displays Shango's civic values, virtues, and behaviors to the community (Ajayi, *Yoruba Dance* 92).

In *Yoruba Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in a Nigerian Culture*, Ajayi uses Victor Turner's three liminal phases in ritual process to describe the evolution of the possession process. And through looking at this process we can gain a deeper understanding into the purpose of the transcendent connection between Shango, the elégùn priest, and the community.

The first of the three phases is the pre-liminal phase, where the participants in the performance display what they want to be a reality. The next is the liminal (the most

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[12] An Elégùn priest is a priest of the òrìṣà whose body can serve as a medium for the òrìṣà to possess.
[13] In Yoruba, the dancer is usually an elégùn priest but can also be a member of the community.

crucial phase), where performance brings into reality what was desired. And finally, the post-liminal proceeds the other two phases, where the newly established reality is "acted out 'as if it were so'," (Ajayi, 46). The preparations for the festival are a part of the pre-liminal phase, whereas the *Lànkú dance* is the liminal portion, and the *Dance of Possession* is the post-liminal. So the transcendent connection that I referred to earlier is one that is sequentially established throughout all three liminal phases, and that is used by the elégùn medium to inform the community about all Shango stands for as a celebrated deity. Here we can see the beginnings of how pedagogy and dance performance interrelate. In this case, pedagogy takes the method of informing the community about Shango through the performance of ritual possession dances. So there is a visible interplay between performer and audience at work in this situation.

Now, elégùn priests must prepare for the possibility of possession one day. And as a means of preparation they must learn ahead of time both the *Lànkú dance* and *Dance of Possession* when they are only inititates (Ajayi, *Yoruba Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in Nigerian Culture* 80). It is at this point that we can see the first impressions of continuing the performative practice that helps to create the necessary transcendent connection within an elégùn priest. This transcendent connection is required when linking Shango and his values and virtues to the Yoruba community and when informing the community of their importance. Therefore, the elégùn must learn these two historically relevant dances to become a part of the priesthood with the purpose of one day helping in establishing this important link. The priest must learn the dances and how to perform them in order to perpetuate values that are engrained in the consciousness of the society. And this priest succeeds in doing this by acting as a performer who is

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responsible for relaying culturally important mores and values to the Yoruba community audience.

During the performance of the *Lànkú dance*, the movement is of a slow, calculated, and specific nature that requires a leaning back posture while following a sequence of highly specific steps that occur in a precise pattern, known as counting Shango's steps. This starting posture of the *Lànkú dance* (leaning back while meticulously walking forwards) is supposed to display strenuousness to the watching audience; the moving body's directionality and energy going both forward and backwards places tension on the center of the body (Ajayi, 91). This strain is seen by the community as testing "someone's patience or power of control; the steps forward are like succumbing to the provocation of temper, while the backward movement acts as the restraining force," (Ajayi, 91). The constant provocation of temper is one of the key attributes of the human form that Shango reflects. The first sign of possession appears when the dancing elégùn (or sometimes even festival participant) begins to lose the rhythm and meticulous foot pattern that composes the methodical process of the dance. Eventually the tension-filled center of the elégùn's body snaps and his control over himself wanes and finally disintegrates, forcing him to miss four steps of the dance. This results in him beginning to lurch on the spot (consisting of the elégùn's eyes bulging, his breath becoming very heavy, his skin on his face being overly stretched, and his temper increasing[14]), at which point the other elégùn take him away to prepare him for the *Dance of Possession* (Ajayi, 88, 91). At this point, the elégùn medium has transcended beyond his physical form to embody, physicalize, and perform (and thereby reify) the social values attributed to Shango.

The elégùn medium then comes back wearing the *wabi* (the possession dress), wielding a wand in the shape of a double axed hatchet (a symbol of Ṣàngó), and fully possessed. At many points during the *Dance of Possession* the hatchet will be pointed towards the heavens and then brought down abruptly to point at the earth, emulating the pathway that Ṣàngó's lightning travels (Ajayi, 89). This dance is performed in an energetic and masculine fashion "full of restless, continuous movements, and characterized by fast thrusting movements, leg flicks, and jerky shoulder movements," (Ajayi, 89)[15] showing that "the style of dance is energy vivified while the dancer is its personification," (Ajayi, 90). The last part of the dance is characterized by superhuman acts that are performed by the possessed medium—like carrying a flame that is contained within a very hot perforated metal container. Inflicting harm on oneself during a possession without any repercussions is a format for proving that you are indeed the true medium and not a fraud. This proves to everyone around that the possession of Shango has been established and "the communication cycle is complete from the devotees to Shango and from Shango to the devotees: Shango has harkened to the people's supplications and ushered in the dry season" (Ajayi, 93).

The dances Ajayi described highlight my key interest in why I am investigating dances placed in a ritual performance context. They place notions and attributes of their societies into an easily accessible window that is repeated throughout the lifetimes for everyone to see. By way of performing movement pieces that are repeated in each generation, the Nigerian Yoruba community is forced to prioritize the physical manifestations of these societal notions and attributes, and in doing so, displaying for the

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[14] Shango had this characteristic when he was in the mortal realm.

watching community audience that these ideas have historical precedence and therefore should be revered. And they are not just doing so by saying so, but by actually physically showing it in the form of possession. By doing this, the dances are providing unequivocal proof that these notions and ideas instilled in the society still have a place. This whole process acts as a kind of self-feeding machine, the present uses the historical to reify the legitimacy of the present, thereby bolstering the relevance of the historical.

But there is another necessity involved in the process of how information transference functions in a dance performance setting: that is the importance of properly knowing how to portray a knowledgebase to a community audience; whether that be the elders showing elégùn priests the *Lànkú dance* and the *Dance of Possession* and the societal importance that they hold, or these same priests displaying these dances to an audience or community through the method of performance. This is an aspect of ritualized performance that anthropologists like Margaret Drewal and Pearl Primus shed light on or address in their research. For instance Drewal, who traveled to Nigeria to study the Itefa rituals[16] of the Yoruba, came across a man named Ositola (who later became her guide throughout her research process) who gave her the following quote:

> …even if you were allowed to see inside the *igbodu* [Odu's bush], you
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> would see only the impotent part of it. The knowledge is the
>
> potentiality, the knowledge you must sustain, the knowledge you must

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[15] This movement is incorporated into the festival as a means of displaying or even physically emulating Shango's restless nature.

[16] An Itefa ritual is an initiation ritual where a diviner readies an initiate's personal set of divination palm nuts (representing a male initiate's rebirth, destiny, and the God of divination Orunmila) so as to be able to divine his "personal texts" in the future, providing the initiate with "models for self-examination and self-interpretation" (Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* 63).

learn—not the materials. If the materials are exposed to everybody,

they may just bastardize it. (Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play,*

Agency 66).

History and knowledge is not only passed down from watching and listening to a

performance; information becomes "bastardized" this way. In order to gain the

knowledge, one must experience and learn this knowledge in a holistic manner. Many

times in performative festivals, there will be many different components of a unit that

will require attention; for example the music, the dancing, the ritual items used, the text

involved in the ritual. Ritual dance performance not only takes many components and

turns them into one final product, but evokes the essential foundations from each

component and presents it in an informing and holistic manner. Audiences cannot see

this without proper direction and instruction on how to look at all of these components

and congregate them into one holistic idea (think back to the case where elders showed

the elégùn priests how to properly perform the *Lànkú Dance* and the *Dance of Possession* to

display the important values of Shango). There is a sense here that calls for the necessity

of knowledge to be passed down from elder, teacher, or parent to juvenile, student, or

child as a means of avoiding differentiation or "bastardization" of a knowledge base or

ritual. In the case of Shango's *Dance of Possession*, this is seen in the mediums passage

from self to being possessed. In order to understand the significance of this event, one

must learn the history of the physical movement (like the learning of the *Lànkú dance and*

Dance of Possession from the elders) and the historical relevance behind it; especially if it's

being physically portrayed and communicated instead of verbally. This is a necessity

particularly when the dance is being performed to an audience and the intention of

performing the ritual dance is to accurately reify the mores and values that are important to the deities in their culture.

To continue with this idea of bastardization, Pearl Primus[17] compares the trained dancing body to the person who "just dances" (Primus, *African Dance* 7). She describes the latter as "one who has picked up the dance in early childhood, who has been trained in the dances necessary for his initiation, and who just enjoys speaking with his body," (Primus, 7). The person who "just dances" possesses a certain level of a performative knowledge base that is used for a specific purpose. But in this form, it is bastardized due to the fact that it was not taught to this individual by an elder. An elder would have taught the dance in a format that showed its specific purpose, its history, the form of pedagogy that exists around it, and its legacy; all of which are important when being a dancer. The other side of this same coin that Pearl mentions is the trained dancer:

> The professional African dancer is one trained from childhood to be a dancer. Having shown a special aptitude for dance language, he is apprenticed to a master, usually the oldest and most powerful of the dancers. These master teachers employ whatever method they feel is best. Their authority is absolute, their instruction unquestioned. These fierce guardians of tradition are charged with the divine duty to continue group values. They assiduously train not only the physical bodies but also the minds and spirits of those chosen as the dancers for the next generation (Primus, 7-8).

[17] Pearl Primus was an incredibly important dancer, choreographer, and anthropologist who back in the earlier part of the 20th century—when many modern dancers would exotify foreign cultures through their own dance performances—helped to establish African dance and culture as a legitimate art form and performative technique in the among Western cultures.

These dancer apprentices that are under the tutelage of their master are showed the history, the form of pedagogy involved in, and the legacy of the dances that will be performed for the Yoruba community. But the most important and salient difference between the person who just dances and the trained dancer is that the trained dancer has learned how to perform, portray, and invoke the specific values of a particular dance to an audience so that it perpetuates the dynamics that help Yoruba society to function. And this is where bastardization of a dance form can be problematic; without the informing of an elder the original purpose of the dance is somewhat leached out of the process of movement absorption and performance (like in the case with the person who "just dances").

It is easiest to think about this concept of bastardization in dance performance by using an onion analogy. The innermost layer of the onion is where an apprentice is shown, by his master, the movement vocabulary (e.g. the *Lànkú dance and Dance of Possession*), the performative aspects, and the importance of a ritual. The layer of the onion on top of this one consists of the apprentice performing what he knows to the Yoruba community audience. And the outermost layer is the audience observing the performance and interpreting a notion or a behavior from it. The number of layers that are present will affect the level of bastardization that ensues in a performance.

In Yoruba society dance has the ability to give physical form to ideas, ideologies, and ideals in culture by perpetuation them, imprinting them onto the chronicles of history, and displaying them through performance, thereby further perpetuating them and recording them. As well as giving form to ideas and preserving them through repetition, ritual dance performance deems notions sacred because of its repetitive nature. Only things that are sacred or considered special are worth the repetition. The

audiences watching a ritual performance will pick up on this after years of repetition, and deem it as significant, integral, and sacred themselves. This will inform the performers and the rest of the community of the historical relevance of the topic at hand and the role that this relevance plays in perpetuating and proliferating their social mores and values (Asante, *African Dance: An Artistic, Historical, and Philisophical Inquiry* 187). If we refer back to the *Lànkú Dance* and the *Dance of Possession,* it is very clear that movement serves a dual purpose: it creates the channel for possession and communicates the possession to those involved in the festival, showing Sàngó's manifestation, celestial powers, and civic values, as well as his ability to bring forth the dry season.

Much along the same lines of the Nigerian Yoruba tradition is that of the Cuban Yoruba tradition, more commonly known as Santería. Santería is an adaptation of the Yoruba tradition that occurred during the slave trade when Africans were taken to Cuba for a period of about four centuries, transferring many of the religions and cultural characteristics with them. One of these was Yoruba which combined with European religious notions (the idea of saints) over the four centuries, thereby producing Santería (Hagedorn, *Diving Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería* 75). The gods in Santería are the same as in the Yoruba tradition for the most part, and, as in Yoruban culture, Shango, or Changó[18] in this case, is very prevalent. Additionally there is a *Dance of Changó* in the Santería tradition that is similar to the *Lankú Dance* and *Dance of Possession* that Ajayi describes in her *Yoruba Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in a Nigerian Culture*.

During this dance in Santería, Changó gestures with his arms reaching towards the sky and brings them down and in towards his "lower abdomen and groin area, motioning alternately right and left from diagonal high to low," (Daniel, *Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé* 262-263). This movement is similar to that of the possessed elégùn's arm motions in the *Dance of Possession* when he or she is gesturing from the heavens to the earth (not the groin), mapping the pathway that Shango's lightning travels. In Santería these "movements trace an energy flow to earth from the sky or heavens and into the *oricha* as he appears, materialized and dancing on earth," (Daniel, 262-263). He himself acts as a conduit for the energy he is pulling from the sky towards his lower abdomen and groin in his diagonally oriented arm movements, resulting in him "harnessing the force of lightning, thunder, and that of the entire communal focus on sexual and social power," (Daniel, 262).

This dance also contains kicks and high intensity arm movements where the force of the kicks and the ferocity of the arm movements point to the masculine strength and energy that Changó embodies normally as well as when he is in his role as a warrior. "Changó is known as a fighter, giving instant regard or punishment, and carrying a double-edged hatchet that allows striking from either direction," (Daniel, 263) much like in the *Dance of Possession* where the elégùn medium dances with the double axed hatchet. Displaying his warrior self, full of virility and "youthful masculinity," (Daniel, 263) to an audience, Changó dictates to the audience the role of masculinity in their society. Changó is also seen as "a male lover, provider, and protector," (Daniel, 262-263) who shows his performer participants in his own dance performance to emulate his powerful

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[18] Spelling for Shango in the Cuban Yoruba or Santería tradition is Changó (pronounced *chaang-go*). I will use the Changó spelling when referring to Cuban Santería and Shango when referring to Nigerian **(Cont. on next pg.)**

and dynamic movement. This allows these performers to figure out not only the "range and degree of strong self that is within them" (Daniel, 263) but to take this a step further and manifest this energy as the essence of what it means to be male in Cuban Santaría society. Just as many young men in western societies revere male models or movie stars as the paradigmatic male essence, the young men who follow the Santería tradition place Changó in this same light. But somewhat different from western society is that Changó also teaches the virtues of "truth, procreation, and communication, whose cosmic force is experienced as powerfully as lightning, thunder, and fire," (Daniel, 263). His performance of his dance informs upon the audience the ideal male form: masculine, strong, witty, creative, and one who can protect his children and teach them to perpetuate the ideal of the male form.

Changó's movements also connote stories, histories, preferences, and character traits that are specific to how he was as a human being and, now, as a deity. One of the stories that links Changó to specific civic values and celestial powers is when he was the King of Oyo, as a human. In this story, Changó was well renowned for all of his conquests; taking over other kingdoms, making them a part of his domain, as well as his affinity for the magical arts. At one point he obtained a potion that had the ability to pull lightning from the sky but when he tried , the lightning struck his own castle, killing many of his wives, children, and servants. As a result he went into the forest and hung himself, later rising as an Orisha. "Regardless, thunder and lightning are still the special emblems of the kingly Shango[19]," in Santería (much like the Nigerian Yoruba) and he is "swift to punish transgressions against the social order, such as lying, cheating, and

Yoruba.

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theft," (Clark, *Santería* 57). This myth is still portrayed in the Santería tradition through performative dance as a form of showing that greed and a lust for overzealous power will only lead to the destruction of yourself and the ones you care for. Thus, the social values that stigmatize things like lying, cheating, and theft that are placed into myth are physically placed for an audience to see via performative dance movement. Furthermore, calling down Shango in the form of a possession and having him perform this dance himself, imbues and engrains these social values and mores into the community watching the performance even further. They are then able to see these values performed and reified from their original source. This level of authenticity in relation to societal behavior can be extremely powerful.

Possession in general is desired and sought after amongst Santería practitioners. However, deciding who can be possessed is pretty restrictive. The possessed cannot be someone who has not been prepared for it with the proper teachings and initiation process. A parallel can be drawn between this point and the elégùn in Nigeria learning the *Lankú Dance* and the *Dance of Possession* directly from their elders as a way of avoiding bastardization. In Santería, if a non-initiate member shows signs of possession, that member is removed so that they can be "called back into themselves" (Clark, 110). If a trained devotee is possessed the event is allowed.

> During the possession event, the personality of the priest leaves so that
>
> the personality of her[20] primary Orisha may temporarily take control of
>
> her body in order to experience the material world, communicate with
>
> devotees, and provide insight into the consciousness of the divine. It is

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[19] Clark spells Changó as Shango throughout her book *Santería*. There are many interpretations and takes on the spelling of the name.

important that possessions take place within the drum ritual and in the

presence of the Orisha community. The medium, the possessed

person, experiences a "break" in consciousness, during which she

leaves and another is incarnate in her body. Because there is no direct

communication between the invading spirit and the departed 'soul,'

others must be present to manage the process and to receive any

communications and insights from the Orisha" (Clark, 110).

This quote highlights the baseline role for a community audience during a ritual dance

performance, displaying the necessity and role of the community audience during a

possession performance. Since the "invading spirit" is possessing the body of the

"departed soul" an audience must be witness to the possession so as to act as an

instructional receiver ready to "manage the process and to receive any communications

and insights from the Orisha" (Clark, 110).

By performing ritual movements that "express the collective memory and

understanding of the cosmos" (Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom* 253) (like this *Dance of Changó*) the

social body that houses this collective memory is reaffirmed. And because of this

reaffirmation, the behavior that results in response to the collective memory is

reinforced. All of these reaffirmations and reinforcements help to continue the legacy of

the collective memory within the ritual performance.

For the audience to gain an accurate portrayal of what behaviors should be

invoked, reified/perpetuated, or removed from ritual performance, the dancers involved

in performing have to fully embody the movement they are doing, vocalize the sound

that is coming out of their mouth, and listen and adhere to the instrumental partnership

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[20] This 'her' is not referring to any particular female individual, but a hypothetical 'her' or 'she.'

that is being dictated to them by the instruments. Yvonne Daniel[21] (who wrote *Dancing Wisdom*) went through this process herself: she would do both constant and repeated mental and physical check-ins with her body to make sure that it stayed completely present (Daniel, 250). She noticed that the repeating movements in the performances actually helped her to perform these physical check-ins. In her own words:

> …repetition is critical. It is necessary to build and intensify each body part's involvement. It is through repetition that dancing worshipers harness and display all the energy possible in a given set of movements. At first the pattern is consciously discernible, but with maximum repetition, the dancing worshiper is fully confident, engrossed in the muscular movement, articulating every nuance in every part of the body. The mind is submerged in the dancing and the music, discerning mysteries. Both the body and the mind transcend (Daniel, 249).

Through fully performed, embodied, and repetitive movement, one can achieve a transcendent connection (which I mentioned earlier on in the portion describing the *Lanku Dance* and the *Dance of Possession* in Nigeria). This, in turn, allows for the manifestation of an *oricha;* creating a direct line to the mores and values that the *orisha* represents. This direct line provides a pathway, within the context of the performance, for these mores and values to be reinforced.

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[21] Yvonne Daniel is Professor Emerita of Dance and Afro-Caribbean Studies at Smith College in Massachusetts. She spent a lot of time in Cuba, Haiti, and Brazil studying the ritual cultures and dance forms in those countries. She included herself—with the permission of the elders and festival overseers in the cultures she explored—into many of the dances that took place at the events she attended. I decided to include her perspective in this portion of my thesis so as to add a personal perspective from someone who is considered an 'outsider' (even though after sometime in Cuba, she was no longer considered to be so). I feel it important to include an outsider's view of the event, who originates from a Western perspective, because this allows readers who have no experience with the **(Cont. on next pg.)**

When *oricha* dance movements are performed, they provide for

historical catharsis, contemporary release, and meaningful social action.

These are dances of human resilience. In the moment of performance,

the nonverbal messages—both displayed visually and experienced

physically—of persistence, deliberation, dedication, reliability,

resourceful resilience, and, ultimately, calm, strength, and endurance

are all taught, learned over time, and transferred beyond the

dance/music event to other arenas of social life (Daniel, 252).

The social values listed in the quote above are a few of many that would be

reinforced within a deity dance. In dances that are in tribute to the *orichas,* a transparent

link is established between the values that are coveted by the *oricha* and the community

audience watching these values be performed in a deity dance. Through the

manifestation of the *oricha* in the present, the knowledge that that *oricha* has always

represented is shared in the present community through the performance of a possession

dance. This physically presented knowledge is essential when translating past

information into the relevance of a contemporary context. Furthermore, with dance

performance, the notion of possession, and the audience all congregated into one

context (the ritual performance), we can better understand how social mores and values

amongst the community are permeated. They are displayed through dance performance,

reinforced through the event of possession, and observed and acted upon by the

watching audience (think again of the onion analogy). The latter phenomenon is one of

the most powerful and interesting things to investigate for myself. As a performer, I'm

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Cuban Santería culture to have a similar perspective to relate to and to envision the cultural instance
from.

constantly interested in looking for ways of translating behavior to an audience so they

can experience the same thing I am experiencing. And I think, if one is an artist, this

should be the ultimate goal. This goal promotes universal understanding of values,

morals, actions, and inactions. And people who, at the end of watching a performance,

take these ideals with them, help to create a cohesive social and community dynamic

based on these ideals.

All in all, the community absorbs the physical body's performance of certain

values or ideals, and by doing so has the potential to integrate all of the absorbed

information about that body into themselves, their communities, and prior knowledge

bases. The performers themselves display these same values through repetition thereby

creating a knowledgebase accessed through physical embodiment that they constantly

consult. It is almost as if these "community members are in an open classroom with

dance and music behavior" being performed and absorbed constantly, "in addition to

their references in philosophy and religion, history, physiology, psychology, mathematics,

and botany," (Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom* 265); which brings us back to the notion of ritual

dance infusing itself into areas far beyond its immediate performance.

> Rituals, the saying goes, are both models of and models for the world,
>
> which is to say that they set people into distinctive configurations or
>
> frames of participation that set up particular expectations about how
>
> the event will unfold. Something about these participant
>
> configurations then carries over into life outside of ritual, so that even
>
> when people are not engaging in ritual-like activities, they can draw
>
> upon notions of relation and causality learned in ritual or through ritual

and inhabit those same footings developed in rituals (Wirtz, *Ritual,*

Discourse, and Community in Cuban Santería, 7).

I would like to add to this quote by saying that especially dance performance rituals (not solely by themselves however) are models of and for the world. The information that is portrayed through ritual dance performance is absorbed by audiences, resulting in the development of specific dialogues between performers and their audience. Understanding that this relation of information exists is so important in understanding why people are the way they are and follow certain patterns of behavior. And this translation of material doesn't solely exist in the world of Yoruba and Santería: the notion of a dance performance causing a dialogue among people, and then these same people taking action upon this dialogue so as to reflect it in the community's values and mores can be seen among Western art forms as well.

VOGUE DANCE IN THE BALLROOM

Spectating at a ball, like spectating at a football game, requires the development of a level of knowledge and discernment about the competition and its players. Balls emphasize 'the simple, unassailable fact of… survival' through a powerful identification with specific celebrities whose success at making themselves visible represents the triumph of that survival. (Nyong'o, *Fierce Pleasures* 106)

Vogue dance in the ballrooms of New York is an extremely potent resource where we can see how dance and movement performance can really dictate the behavior of a community culture. Behavior is dictated this way because the form of expression that is most prevalent within this culture is a non-verbal form of communication. Ballroom culture predominantly focuses on dance and movement performance as forms of communicating specific and coveted values and mores that are upheld in the society. And the hallmark of this dance performance culture is characterized by a tendency to create movement that reflects and emulates the poses and mannerisms of famous male and female icons through the vogue dance form. In order to understand this connection between vogue performance, behavior, and the role they both play in their social context, I feel it necessary to give a brief history of vogue dance and the ballroom scene.

The drag ballroom scene's genesis can be traced all the way back to the 19th century, but for the purposes of this thesis I want to focus on the point of time where vogue dance and drag balls become integrated into a singular social happening. In 1972 Crystal Labeija (a drag queen) was one of many black drag queens who was

discriminated against in drag contests because of the color of her skin. As a result, she

and another drag queen, named Lottie, threw their own drag ball called the "House of

Labeija Ball" where Crystal was the 'mother' of the House of LaBeija. Many other black

drag queens then came to compete and show off their own drag outfits at the event,

thereby kick starting the drag ballroom scene in Harlem, New York in the 1970's, and

persisting until this day.

After seeing Crystal's House of LaBeija and her role as 'mother'[22] of that house,

others began to follow her lead and make their own houses "referencing the glamorous

fashion houses whose glamour and style they admired," (Lawrence, *Voguing and the House*

Ballroom Scene of New York City 1989-92 4). At this point, ballrooms became the arena

where houses would battle "to win trophies, with multiple entrants walking along an

imaginary runway in costume and character for each category" (Lawrence, 4). Houses are

so important in the ballroom system because it gives a contestant a place of belonging—

like how a soccer player would feel when associated with his/her team, and a name to go

by when they would compete. According to Dorian Corey (mother of the House of

Corey) "a house is a gay street gang…they get their reward from street fighting. A gay

house street fights at a ball and you street fight at a ball by walking in a category. The

houses started because you wanted a name. The people that the houses are named after

were ball walkers who became known for winning" (Dorian Corey, *Paris is Burning* Film).

Some famous houses are the Houses of Corey, Dior, Wong, Dupree, Christian, Plenty,

Pendavis, Labeija, Ninja, Xtravaganza, and many more.

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[22] A 'mother' or even a 'father' of a house is the individual who is the head of the of that particular house and is responsible for recruiting new members to the house and organizing balls for other houses to attend.

For many youth—who comprised the majority of the balls—belonging to a house was and still is like being a part of a family; they provide a group to belong to, places to stay if a member of the house didn't have one, and of course, a group of individuals to compete with when battling against another house the next time a ball came around. This house dynamic provided a shelter for many individuals in many different ways. One of these ways is of course the physical way of actually putting a roof over one's head, but the other way was that the houses provided a sense of belonging that they couldn't access in any other walks of life.

> 'You have to realize… that, from the onset, there has been a need for
> gay people to have unity. Being a homosexual, a lot of these kids have
> been ostracized, beat up by their families, thrown out of their homes.
> It's no different now than when I was a kid. Some of these kids are
> homeless and struggling. They don't know how much talent and ability
> they have going on. So, if they join a house, they can belong
> somewhere. They can be part of a team.' (Lawrence, 9).

Being a part of a house gave these individuals who were beaten up and thrown out of their houses a sense of security, belonging, adopted family, and purpose in life. Many of these individuals would also hustle and prostitute themselves to get by in life and to pay their bills and feed themselves. So the balls and the houses gave them an escape, even if just for one night, from the horrors that they were involved in in real world New York. Additionally, as another form of expression, the house system provided individuals with

> … a creative outlet to live that superstar, supermodel moment under
> extreme competitive circumstances. Some lived this fantasy world
> every day, some [took] their talents to the real world like Jose

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[Xtravaganza], Tracy [Ninja], and Willi [Ninja], and some [took it] as a

form of entertainment and [left] it like that. Living out on the edge

prepares them for life. And through their talents and achievements,

they build their self-esteem. At balls, the entire community has the

opportunity to participate and to showcase their talents on the runway

(*How Do I Look? Harlem Drag Balls* Film).

It's important to understand that the majority of the men and women involved in

this house culture were black and homosexual, which back in the 70's was a double

disadvantage towards a minority group like black homosexuals. There weren't many

places gay black men and women could go to in the real world and be accepted for who

they were. They had no sense of true belonging in the outside world. So having a home

and 'family' to back them up and provide for them only increased and intensified the

sense of the community and house affiliation in ballroom culture as well as, more

importantly, the sense of ferocity when battling against other houses to prove you and

your house's worth at the balls.

Battling, whether in the form of walking at a ball in a category[23] or voguing, is an

extremely prevalent part of the ballroom culture. The driving force behind gay ball

culture in the 70's, 80's, and 90's and that has bled into contemporary ball culture, is

always striving to be the most fabulous, the most creative, and the fiercest competitor.

This originated from a desire to achieve and obtain what these men and women couldn't

have outside of the ballroom: and that was fame, fortune, respect, adulation, lots of

money, and designer clothes and products.

Those balls are more or less our fantasy of being a superstar. Like the Oscars or whatever; or being on a runway as a model. You know, a lot of those kids that are in the balls they don't have two of nothing, some of them don't even eat. They come to balls starving. And they sleep in 'Under 21' or they sleep on the pier or wherever. They don't have a home to go to. But they'll go out and they'll steal something and get dressed up and come to a ball for that one night and live the fantasy (Pepper LaBeija, *Paris is Burning* Film).

In real life you can't get a job as an executive unless you have the educational background and the opportunity. Now the fact that you are an executive is merely because of the social standing of life. That is just a pure thing. Black people have a hard time getting anywhere. And those that do are usually straight. In a ballroom, you can be anything you want. You're not really an executive but you're looking like an executive and therefore you're showing the straight world 'I can be an executive'. If I had the opportunity I could be one because I can look like one. And that is like a fulfillment. Your peers, your friends are telling you 'Oh you'd make a wonderful executive' (Dorian Corey, *Paris is Burning* Film).

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[23] Competing in a category consists dressing up, acting, walking or dancing under the stipulations and guidelines that category provides, and then trying to be the best one competing. For example, 'sex siren' is a category where one has to have a great body, face, and outfit.

As Pepper LaBeija said in Jennie Livingston's documentary *Paris is Burning* and as Dorian Corey reiterates, however in different words: lots of these young men and women had next to nothing and "some of them don't even eat" so for them to strive after things that they couldn't necessarily have in the real world, but could have a definite and realistic chance at getting in the balls, became an extremely important behavioral attribute for everyone involved in the ball culture. The constant struggle for becoming "legendary" (*Paris is Burning* Film) invigorated the intensity of the battles that occurred, especially when voguing came about as a prominent dance form in the ballroom. For everyone in attendance at the balls "[t]o be legendary is like their gold, to be legendary… To become a legend, you have an Oscar. It's the same thing" (*Paris is Burning* Film).

The context within which vogue dance is embedded in is this constant battle to be the best and gain renown and fame in the world of the ballrooms, just like the famous models and movie stars did and still do in the world outside of the balls. However there is a second side to voguing that is tangentially connected to the notion of battle, but not completely encompassed in it.

> Vogue is really about allowing your body the facility to move the way
> you want it to move as a queer man of color and not having to be
> influenced by any of the expectations that are put upon you as a man
> of color, or even a queer man of color. It is about living within your
> own sphere of influence (Hart, *Interview with Benjamin Hart on Vogue*
> *Dance Performance*).

Both ideas behind vogue dance exist harmoniously together within the context of the ballroom scene.

Now the art of voguing, according to Tim Lawrence (who wrote the introduction to *Voguing and the House Ballroom Scene of New York City 1989-92*), Dorian Corey, and Willi Ninja (both from the film *Paris is Burning*), originated from "throwing shade" or "subtlety insulting another queen" (Lawrence, *Voguing and the House Ballroom Scene of New York City 1989-92* 5). But throwing shade actually has its own genesis, and that is called 'reading'. "Reading is the real art form of insult. If you get in a smart crack and everyone laughs and kikis[24] because you found a flaw and exaggerated it, then you've got a good read going" (Dorian Corey, *Paris is Burning* Film). Reading, as I said earlier, developed into throwing shade, which is basically reading at the next level: it is so apparent that there is a flaw in a person, that that person doesn't need to be told that there is flaw, or in the words of Dorian Corey: "Shade is: I don't have to tell you you're ugly because you already know you're ugly" (Dorian Corey, *Paris is Burning* Film). Even in the practice of reading and throwing shade, people would always try to be the best one at it (again re-invoking the notion of competition and battle in the ballroom setting).

After throwing shade came voguing (which later followed the framework that the house structure was based upon: making multiple categories to compete in—I will delve into this further later on). Voguing began as a physical manifestation of throwing shade and of reading. It first showed up solely in the individual houses and then eventually made its way to the ballrooms (Lawrence, *Voguing and the House Ballroom Scene of New York City 1989-92* 5). An example of early voguing is expressed in the following quote where Paris Dupree is walking and voguing at a ball:

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[24] Kiki basically means to giggle, but it usually exists within the context of when one hangs out with friends. Someone will say something funny, or get a good dig in at someone within the social group at which point everyone will 'kiki.'

'Paris Dupree [the mother of the House of Dupree] was there and a

bunch of these black queens were throwing shade at each other. Paris

had a Vogue magazine in her bag, and while she was dancing she took

it out, opened it up to a page where a model was posing and then

stopped in that pose on the beat. Then she turned to the next page and

stopped in the new pose, again on the beat.' The provocation was

returned in kind. 'Another queen came up and did another pose in

front of Paris, and then Paris went in front of her and did another

pose,'[25] (Lawrence, 5)[26].

This is the epitome of the purpose of voguing and the role that it plays in the ballroom

community. There is a constant flux in one-upmanship when a voguer is performing, or

walking as it was also called. Turning the art form of throwing shade into a physical art

form and using that as another means of competition adds to the notion of trying to

achieve the status of being perceived as the fiercest queen around. I think those last

three words are very important. Being known as the "fiercest queen around" is the goal

of all participants in vogue dance. One must strike down their opponent with precision,

grace, effortlessness, ingenuity, guile, dynamism, poise, and ferocity. This goes for the

catwalk style of voguing (think of the Paris Dupree example), and the more physical and

fully embodied movement vocabulary that I am about to talk about in the following

paragraphs. The more that one can express the above mentioned attributes through

throwing shade via vogue dance, the more likely one is to becoming known as legendary.

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[25] This quote originated from David DePino who was an influential DJ amongst voguers

[26] "The name was taken from the magazine vogue because some of the movements of the dance are also the same as some of the poses inside the magazine. The name is a statement in itself" (Willi Ninja, *Paris is Burning* Film).

Later, voguing transformed from just consisting of walking and posing with an opponent into "a contorted, jerky, slicing style of dance whe[re] drag queens incorporated kung fu aesthetics into their routines, having become familiar with the swift, angular movements of Bruce Lee and his co-stars while working trade inside Time Square's porn cinemas," (Lawrence, 5). Voguing dance also began to include some poses that originate from the influences of African art as well as Egyptian hieroglyphics. The dance form also began to draw upon influences of breakdancing that was performed on the streets of New York. Break dancers would hone "their skills through a mix of competitive instinct, athletic ability and, above all, a desire to be seen," much like the attitude that was highly apparent in ballroom scenes; so the two proved to be a perfect match for one another. This sense of a vogue battle following the same system of values that breakers had instilled in their dancing during a b-boy battle is extremely important. The notion and importance of winning a battle, as I've said before, is what makes the ballroom community perpetuate and function. It is the driving force of the voguers in the ballroom scene to want to gain a fame that they can't get anywhere else except for in the ballroom which promotes the creativity, subtlety, and ingenuity when physically throwing shade. And it can sometimes be a serious and sometimes very heated endeavor. In reality however, voguing tended to include both the battling methodology of breakdancing and the ingenuity and creativity of the world of models, movie stars, and other world renowned artists and celebrities.

I would like to now draw attention to the latter half of the previous sentence. Participating in the balls that occurred was based on performing as an accepted member of society and emulating their clothes, mannerisms, and attitudes. This was also something that voguing attempted to emulate. Vogue dance emulated the vogue

magazine covers and the poses that the women on said covers assumed when being photographed. Adrian Magnifique (a member of the Houses of Ninja first, Magnifique second, and then Xtravaganza third) recalled a conversation he had had with Willi Ninja in which he said:

> Willi explained to me that voguing came from flipping the pages of Vogue and looking at the models. And if you flipped through the magazine really fast then it looks like they are changing poses, and that's how it became vogue. And then they started doing the ballroom competitions (Adrian Magnifique, from *Voguing and the House Ballroom Scene* 160).

And the level of originality with which a voguer could vogue and emulate these pictures would determine his status; meaning whether or not he would be deemed legendary.

During vogue's evolution however, it went far beyond the world of solely imitating magazine covers and adding kung fu, hieroglyphics, gymnastics, and breaker movements; there was a divergence of the art of vogue into sub-categories of vogue dancing whose system is prevalent in contemporary voguing communities. But these communities held and still hold the same goal and behavioral mentality of becoming legendary in mind, no matter the category.

There are four basic categories that exist in the world of vogue today (Hart, *Interview with Benjamin Hart on Vogue Dance Performance*). The first is old way, which is the style of vogue that existed pre-1990's, meaning the kind that Willi Ninja described in his quote about using his hand as a mirror. The second is new way, which "consists of lots of stretching" and the usage of "all kinds of contortionist positions" (Chislom, *Voguing and the House Ballroom Scene of New York City 1989-92* 87). New way also includes a lot of

the same elements as old way (like the use of hieroglyphic body positions and precise arm and hand movements that create specific shapes) that are fused with stretching movements. "If you can put your legs at what they call six o'clock, or if you can do a split this way or that way, or clicking, where you put your arms around your back" in positions that require hyper shoulder flexibility, then you are well suited for new way voguing (Chislom, 87). Then there is butch queen vogue femme which "evolved from butch queens[27] voguing like femme queens[28]" (Chislom, 87). This really consisted of a more soft kind of voguing that emulated the femininity of the character or person the femme queens would dress up as (whether that be an actual character or celebrity, or some manifestation of an individual whom they thought to be creative or sexy; real, fictional or otherwise) (Hart, *Interview with Benjamin Hart on Vogue Dance Performance).* These "femme queens" and butch queens "… just like in ballet, [were] more point-on-your-toes, very graceful, [and] elegant" (Omni, *Voguing and the House Ballroom Scene of New York City 1989-92* 138). And finally there is vogue dramatics which consists of hyper athletic movements consisting of many spins and drops that are dynamic and explosive (Chislom, 87-88).

Nowadays, when competing in a category, the character that a voguer establishes while voguing is not so much focused on emulating a real and well-known character, but rather on creating the absolutely most ingenious and original character (real or fictional)

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[27] A 'butch queen' is a gay man who is not exceedingly feminine acting. Vogue femme is mostly performed nowadays by butch queens because "[voguing] was more the territory of the butch queen than the femme queen, and this increased over time" (Muhammad Omni, *Voguing in the House Ballroom Scene* 139).
[28] A 'femme queen' is a gay man who acts in a feminine manner, and quite generally undergoes hormone treatment or even a sex reassignment surgery as forms of becoming more feminine. With these types of voguers came their own particular way of voguing that consisted of a much more soft, gentle, smoother, and more fluid kind of voguing.

so as to throw shade on everyone else competing. This again brings up the idea of competition behavior amongst a newer generation of vogue performers.

Even though different styles of vogue dancing and different ideas about vogue performance have manifested over the years the main purpose for voguing and the behavioral patterns behind it still remain stagnant: it is to become seen, noticed, iconized, and remembered as a legend. Additionally,

> It is useful to point out, in this light, that ball culture has never been commodified to the extent that other forms of contemporary black expressive culture, such as hip hop culture, have. This has been due in large part to the continuing homophobic disavowal in popular culture of the specificities of lesbian and gay life. But the intermittent and highly unstable visibility of the culture in the mass media should not be taken as an indicator that the culture itself is intermittent and unstable" (Nyong'o, *Fierce Pleasures* 5).

And I feel this to be a main reason as to why, even though some of the dances have changed over the years, the main behavioral purpose that provokes these dances—the desire to be seen as a valuable member of society who can contribute something meaningful, even if it is among people within the same social standing as a gay male voguer—goes on and remains an unchanging force, even today.

Tavia Nyong'o brings up another interesting phenomenon that is apparent in the ballrooms: the "…drag ball scene is a leisure form with both a venerable history and a future grounded in its ability to adapt, change, and remain exciting" (Nyong'o, 5). Much like the voguers themselves the whole ball culture is one that adapts and changes in congruence with the temporal context within which it is placed (refer back to notion

of creating one's own character rather than emulating a non-fictional one). I believe this culture to be a definite reason as to why vogue dance has developed in the format that it has. Its root centralizes in the notion of putting forth efforts to be fabulous, to be surprising, to emit astonishment, and to be able to adapt to a battle scenario (the ball competition themselves) with such expertise and use of faculty that it is clear that one is the insurmountable champion of the ball. This communicates to future and current ball participants that it is that person's style and fierceness that needs to be met and then surpassed so as to become legendary and idolized; one has to adapt to the new standard and then surpass it by creating their own standard. And one way this is done is through the vogue dance form. However, within this form there is no dictated rule book that stipulates particular movements that need to be executed to be seen as the best. As a matter of fact, this would go against the whole notion of ingenuity and cleverness that I spent the first part of this section talking about.

One of vogue dance's strongest attributes is founded in its ability to adapt its movement to whatever an opponent is executing physically with the vogue movement vocabulary. Additionally, there are no choreographed phrases in vogue dance that one can simply learn and then later regurgitate through performance. Therefore it is important to already have a knowledge base of the happenings at a battle and within the dance vocabulary. Furthermore, one must not only have prior knowledge of the movement vocabulary within voguing, but also how to use it effectively so as to best their competitor and win the competition by 'pinning' them[29].

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[29] Pinning an opponent in vogue dance is stipulated by one individual forcing an opponent through the vogue dance vocabulary into a situation where they will not have the physical space to perform movement that will allow that opponent to best them.

[The] [m]ovements [in vogue performance] are a display of not just

accuracy and physical precision, but also knowledge of the art form and

how to correctly perform them. There are different styles and

categories, but if you mix them together you'll be chopped or

disqualified. But you still have to be able to go full out in that category

and exceed expectations (Hart, *Interview with Benjamin Hart on Vogue*

Dance Performance).

At the end of the day, Voguers must have the means "to go full out" creatively and with

enough artistic flare, style, and physical voguing knowledge that they are undoubtedly

declared the clear winner of a battle.

One extremely important aspect of black vernacular dances and of dances in the

African diaspora—particularly voguing—is that they "…[place] great importance upon

improvisation, satirical and otherwise, allowing freedom for individual expression"

(Jackson, *Improvisation in African-American Vernacular Dancing* 40). This is the key aspect

that is most involved within the vogue dance performances. Improvisation in a particular

movement vocabulary, like voguing, is a skill that is developed over time and that exists

within a framework of gaining expertise at that particular skill over that time.

When talking about dance, "[m]ost performers…have been trained from

childhood in particular techniques enabling them to play spontaneously with learned, in-

body formulas" (Drewal, *Improvisation as Participatory Performance* 119). The same can be

said for individuals in ball culture. Many of the voguers learn the vocabulary from a very

young age; usually starting in their early teens which is when they first start going to the

balls (*Paris is Burning* Film). These individuals learn by watching and interpreting the

vogue dance performances and their physical vocabulary at the balls, and as a result,

build up a technical background that they can refer to if and when they begin to vogue themselves in battles. And the stronger the knowledge base of the vocabulary, the stronger the vogue improvisation during a battle. A parallel can actually be drawn here between Yoruba culture and ball culture in regards to how a vocabulary and a behavior is absorbed that will help stipulate the idea of improvisation in the balls.

The elégùn priests from Shango's *Lànku Dance* and *Dance of Possession* have to absorb information from their elders by spending years observing their physical dance techniques, the specific dances that they perform at festivals, and most importantly, their behavioral qualities in these performances. In a ballroom, a similar pattern is followed. A novice voguer must watch a more experienced voguer to not only understand the physical vocabulary that goes into voguing, but also to understand the performative qualities and behavior characteristics that are stressed in vogue dance performance. Only at this point can a vogue dancer begin to engage in the improvisational structure that dominates vogue dance battles.

Margeret Drewal, who spent a lot of time among the Yoruba peoples in Africa suggests the idea that "…improvisation springs from an ensemble of learned, embodied knowledges about the social world in which the improvisers operate, the techniques and skills to deploy them, and imagination" (Drewal, *Improvisation as Participatory Performance* 119). And this is clearly evident in the balls where you have an audience and a performer or performers. Additionally each improvisation serves a specific purpose and differs, whether greatly or marginally, from other improvisations. "'…the idea of executing any dance exactly like someone else is usually not valued" particularly in the vogue dance arena where one is voguing to show their own expertise, ingenuity, and therefore placement in the world of the balls. For the individuals who regular the balls, the

regularity with which they are exposed to different improvisations introduce them to or reinforce "repetitive dance sequences [that] introduce children [and the rest of the community] to traditional patterns of behavior" (Nicholls, *African Dance: Transition and Continuity* 47).

Jonathan Jackson, the author of *Improvisation in African-American Vernacular Dancing*, brings up the notion of improvisation existing as choreography in African vernacular dance forms, of which he considers vogue dance to be a part of. He insists that this idea of improvisation as choreography completely nullifies the principle of improvisation and choreography existing as a dichotomous relationship. The idea of improvisation existing independently from choreography is a very western notion and is prevalent in many western dance forms, particularly ballet. It proves to be a big part of western dance culture and forms. This idea also explains the dichotomous relationship between audience and performer in the proscenium stage setting as well as black box theater venues that are also a big part of western dance performance. However, this paradigm is broken down within the black dance vernacular.

> Delineating improvisation as choreography in black vernacular dancing
> reveals the intrinsic value of oral communication and sensing in the
> dancing. By oral communication, I mean the passing on of values,
> aesthetics, and actual movement traditions through experiential
> knowledge and ritual work. By sensing, I mean the valorization of
> emotion as a path toward intelligent knowing. Sensing also signifies a
> heightened, in-the-moment, understanding of one's relationship to
> forces in the environment around the body … (Jackson, *Improvisation in
> African-American Vernacular Dancing* 43).

As Jackson puts very eloquently, improvisation in black vernacular dance displays vividly the value that oral communication and sensing in dancing possess. Both are important notions that hold an important place in vogue dance performance. For the first notion, oral communication, I would like to focus more on the portion that details "actual movement traditions" in black vernacular dance as providing a form of inheritance of "values, aesthetics, and actual movement traditions" between generations. When we are applying this notion to vogue dance performance, this form of inheritance doesn't take the normal prescribed 'final will and testament' format that we come across in everyday experiences; more accurately it takes the form of, as I mentioned earlier on, being passed down as a knowledge base in the voguing battles that are watched by other voguers and by the ballroom community. During these battles a hierarchy of good impressions as well as what is "ovah"[30] and what isn't, is set into place. The performers, or really the competitors in this case, translate between themselves and the watching audience (composed of other voguers as well as ball participants and ball aficionados) who the better, more fabulous, and fiercest voguer is by winning the battle. In vogue dramatics, for example, this individual is the one who creates the most exciting stunts, tricks, and dips[31] in comparison to their opponent according to the consensus of the judges panel watching.

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[30] "ovah" is a colloquialism that is used in ball culture to mean exceptional or incredible.

[31] A 'dip' or a 'drop' (also known as the "death drop" on occasion) is a vogue dance maneuver where an individual bends one knee, places it on the ground and then, with that same leg, sits down on the heel attached to foot attached to that leg. After this occurs, the individual extends the other leg out into the air while simultaneously laying their back onto the floor and splaying their arms out above their heads in a 'V' formation with their fingertips only in contact with the floor. So it ends up looking like you are sitting on one leg, with the other leg extended out straight in front of you and elevated in the air, with your arms in 'V' formation above your head and your fingertips touching the floor. This movement is sometimes achieved in a graceful and slower manner that is done congruently with **(Cont. on next pg.)**

In the voguing community "…**you must copy an opponent's steps, only to reinvent them on your own terms.** What you copy and how you copy it shape your reputation as a dancer… You steal, but you alter and then allow inspiration to carry your performance in new directions in the moment" (Hill, *Stepping, Stealing, Sharing, and Daring* 93). This concept of using your opponent's strengths against them and exploiting their weaknesses and flaws is all a part of the concept of throwing shade which I explained earlier. The vogue dancer has to have the facility and wit to translate a witty a comeback to what their opponent has physically said, with a vogue movement that will throw shade on their opponent and win them the battle. In New Way voguing for example, dancers will particularly respond to what the other party is doing. Sometimes these individuals even come into physical contact; responding to and playing with their partner. Within this play, one partner is always trying to shame the other. If that partner is shamed, what are the ways in which they can respond? Will they ignore it? Or will they use it to throw shade back onto their opponent? (Hart, *Interview with Benjamin Hart on Vogue Dance Performance*). Willi Ninja explains this concept very clearly in the film *Paris is Burning*:

> "Voguing came from shade because it was a dance that two people did
>
> because they didn't like each other. Instead of fighting, you would
>
> dance it out on the dance floor, and whoever did the better moves was
>
> throwing the best shade basically. You could take the pantomime form
>
> of the vogue, which is what generally sometimes I do as I make my
>
> hand into a form like a compact, or a make-up kit and I'm like beating
>
> my face with blush, shadows or whatever to the music. Then usually I'll

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voguing hand movements and flourishes. Or it can be executed in a fast, falling manner that is seen as both dangerous and very fierce (this version is normally called the "death drop").

turn the compact around to face that person meaning like almost like

my hand is a mirror for them to get a look. Then I'll start doing their

face, because what they have on their face right now needs a dramatic

make-up job. So voguing is like a safe-form of throwing shade" (*Paris is

Burning* Film).

The mastery of the voguing form and of throwing shade through vogue is

essential in establishing who wins battles and therefore who is ovah. This mastery is one

that is learned by watching and by participating as well. And this is the only route to

becoming legendary. Becoming legendary through vogue dance "requires a mastery of

the form and the ability to 'deform' the mastery—to creatively extend or embellish the

form in order to reflect the individual expression of the creator" (Hill, *Stepping, Stealing,*

Sharing, and Daring 93).

Now the actual winning of a battle shows the audience that that individual is the

best at that particular time, thereby inscribing into others present that that form of

voguing or that particular fierceness when voguing is the one to match, and eventually,

the one to surpass in a way that is individualistic, innovative, cunning, and clever.

In response to Jackson's second notion (mentioned in his quote on page 60),

sensing, I concur that by sensing "one's relationship to forces in the environment around

the body," one can respond adequately in vogue battles. To use vogue dramatics again as

an example, the two opponents use the downbeat of the music to instigate a dip or death

drop. A lot of the time, you will see both opponents initiate and perform the death drop

at the same time, but the way that they precede the death drop—the movement that

occurs before it and then goes into it—is what differentiates who is more creative, more

dramatic, more daring, and fiercer than the other. For example, a lot of the time you will

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see some voguers do a sequence of spins that go directly into the dip or even using one dip to get into another dip. In order to best one's opponent, one must sense what their opponent is about to do and have the facility to respond to it with ingenuity.

The notion of individualism when improvising with the vogue vocabulary, which I have already described, brings up two more extremely important points that have merit within the realm of vogue dance performance and its relation to behavior. The first of these concepts is 'individuation'.

> My framework conceptualizes improvisation in black vernacular
>
> dancing as the experience of two overlapping and interrelated fields of
>
> symbolic physical action…The first field I call *individuation*. Here,
>
> processes… characterize the work of the individual dancer as she or he
>
> moves to establish a unique identity according to her or his own
>
> physical capabilities, personal style, and capacity for invention (Jackson,
>
> *Improvisation in African-American Vernacular Dancing* 45).

This is an important notion that I have come across in my studies that exists in improvisational dance. In vogue dance individuation is the quintessential skill that must be acquired by vogue dancers and applied when battling in the confines of the ballroom. Jackson's quote "perhaps the most extreme form of individuation occurs in… freestyle dancing in nightclubs today" (Jackson, 45) helps to accentuate this fact. Like I mentioned earlier on, all vogue dancers must know some of the vogue dance vocabulary and its movement traditions (relating back to the notion of inheritance that I talked about earlier on), enough so that "her or his own physical capabilities, personal style, and capacity for invention" are apparent to themselves and the people watching and/or participating in the vogue performance. "This form of individuation involves asserting

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such a pronounced sense of personal style that the black vernacular dancer's actions invite a charged, voyeuristic attention from the community at the ritual event" (Jackson, 46).

Jackson later goes on to further describe individuation as existing as three different components, repeating, braiding, and layering. However I would only like to focus on the first one for the purposes of this thesis. Repetition, which serves to intensify the performative experience, can be seen as an intensification force meant to stress a notion or value (Jackson, 46). For example, the dips or death drops that occur frequently in vogue dramatics are a perfect example of this. The more dangerous the dip and the more times you repeat it only adds merit to the positive legacy of yourself as a vogue performer. A parallel can additionally be drawn between the repetitious movements of Shango's and Chango's axe movements and the dips and drops in vogue dramatics: both are used to emphasize an important indicator of values in their own respective cultural contexts. For example, the repetition of dips and drops can be dangerous and therefore, give the dancer who performs them credibility and notoriety for achieving such a feat. From these repetitive movements are generated behavioral markers that dictate what is of importance in that dance setting, and therefore what is of importance in that particular culture that the dance setting is centralized around.

All of these notions so far that Jackson has mentioned—individuation, the knowledge of the movement tradition, and the ability to sense and respond to the dancing bodies around the voguers—play into the improvisation that takes place during voguing battles. The level and ability with which a performer can combine and execute all three of these notions harmonically and with more proficiency than the other performer, dictates something to the audience about that performer; thereby teaching

them, the audience, something about that performer and the way that they perceive vogue dance to be. This can lead to the establishment of a social status on the part of the performer that the audience will recognize as true. Take Willi Ninja for example. He was a vogue dance performer who became legendary because of his proficiency at displaying individuation, a comprehensive understand of the movement vocabulary, and for his use of sensing when battling. He also became the head of his own house (the House of Ninja) because of his skill and ability in voguing. This is a perfect instance of establishing a social status based on the integrity of a vogue dance performance.

This last idea that I mentioned about establishing a social status does tie into Jackson's second notion involving ritualization. In the words of Jackson: "*Ritualization* refers to the level of movement organization that occurs among performers in the throes of making community—whether in contestation or celebration—at a ritual event" (Jackson, 46). I wish to take Jackson's notion of ritualization a step further by applying it to the vogue community. When generating a sense of community dynamics in vogue culture, establishing a performer's sense of artistic self is not the only consideration to be addressed in establishing community dynamics. One has to take into account the definitions of the community's standards of aesthetics and expectations involved in establishing social status off of a battle's outcome. As a result we see an interesting interplay between individuation and ritualization in between the performer and the audience. In this relationship, a dancer will start by performing certain movements that he wants to do (possibly because he is trying to be innovative, or because he is responding to something). Afterwards the audience might select some of these movements and call them fierce, thereby turning them into movements that are coveted by the audience; or behavioral ideals I like to call them. At this point these behavioral

ideals are then constantly trying to be met and surpassed by other performers who are trying to create new behavioral ideals by going through the same process as the first performer. This cyclical dynamic between individuation and ritualization, I think, really incorporates all off the key elements that make up and explain vogue dance's role in interacting with behavior in the ballrooms. And this helps us to gain a deeper (if not fully comprehensive) understanding of the ways behavior functions in the ballroom scene.

From what I can tell about exploring vogue dance vocabulary (in my very limited sense) at different social dance events at school and back at home "[p]erformers learn to make rapid compositional choices based on their knowledge of a system of meaning. These choices encourage a dialogue within the community; the other performers make decisions in response to each dancer's contribution to the work" (Hayes, *The Writing on the Wall* 106). Individuation in vogue dance performance involves a constant pattern of negotiation between personal aesthetics, community expectations and standards, and sensing and responding to what your opponent is displaying. Even though I do not practice the vocabulary in its inherent context (the ballroom) I still encounter a certain amount of feedback and dialogue between myself and the people watching me perform some of the vogue dance vocabulary in a social dance setting dance.

CUNNINGHAM TECHNIQUE AND CHANCE OPERATIONS

In Cunningham… 'intelligence' is a quality of the movements and bodies that his choreography

comprises… [H]e presents the body as intelligent in a specifically contemporary way.

(Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* 110)

[Y]ou do not separate the human being from the actions he does, or the actions which surround

him, but you can see what it is like to break these actions up in different ways, to allow the

passion, and it is passion, to appear for each person in his own way.

(Brown, *Vision of Modern Dance* 91)

During and after WWII, the effects of the war were very traumatic for everyone
all over the world and the notion that life is a fleeting phenomenon became alarmingly
apparent, especially for artists. The idea that "[n]obody is going to live forever" (Mazo,
Prim Movers: The Makers of Modern Dance in America 202) became incredibly apparent. As a
result "[t]he urgency of the immediate became utterly important; what matters in art, or
in anything else, is what is happening at this moment" (Mazo, 202). For many individual
artists at the time, the following quote/notion became a milestone that would dictate
how they perceived art from that day forward: "The events of last week are meaningless
because they no longer exist; tomorrow, we may all be dead" (Mazo, 202). As a resultant
attitude towards this WWII caused reality, the idea that existing in, perceiving, and
understanding the current moment was the most important ideal of all. This developed
into individuals understanding that if one singular moment is important in that moment,
then every moment existing within its own timeframe is important; and this idea
branched out to include every point in space and all living organisms. "The ultimate
democracy had been reached" (Mazo, 202). Art and artists became committed to

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expressing this democracy within their respective themes. "In dance, this art devoted to immediacy, relativity, and logic demanded a performance without narrative, without dramatic characterization or theatrical trappings, without a central figure or climactic event, and without projected emotion" (Mazo, 204). One of the dance artists/choreographers well-known for his contribution to this movement was Merce Cunningham.

Cunningham, like many post-WWII artists, was very much interested in the idea of existing in the moment and not in any other timeframe, storyline, or emotion. And this gave birth to his technique and philosophy towards dance which said: dance is inherently intelligent and does not require narrative, story, or emotion for it to be so. For Cunningham, dance only existed in one time and place, and that was in the time place that it currently occupied.

In his technique "Cunningham…incorporated a number of ballet steps as well as ballet turn-out (in addition to parallel positions) and…stressed high extensions of the legs and comportment in which the weight was lifted off the legs to give the body a sense of lightness" (Morris, *A Game for Dancers* 168). However, he wanted to investigate the ways in which the torso could be much more involved throughout balletic movement. Cunningham developed a more flexible back and torso that would make the entire body more legible when the legs moved with speed," (Morris, 168). Cunningham's technique also contained relaxed shoulders and arms that made it seem much less formal than classical ballet and "[t]his sense of informality was reinforced in choreography that incorporated walking, standing, and other movement of everyday life" (Morris, 169). Eventually Cunningham took his very movement-oriented technique and "developed a [style of] dance that focused on movement and dance structure rather than on the

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communication of emotional essences" (Morris, 168). Cunningham's technique was also influenced by Zen Buddhism and by the work of Marcel Duchamp, looking for ways to install variant facets of daily life (like the walking and standing that I quoted earlier from Morris) into their works (Cunningham, *Art Performs Life: Cunningham/Monk/Jones* 11).

His technique differed from expressional modern dance in a few very relevant and important ways. Like I mentioned earlier, it used a notion of dancing with lightness (like much of classical ballet) but also emphasized weight in relation to gravity and the use of the floor as other modern dance vocabularies did. He would perform a non-floor based warm up (unlike traditional express-based modern dance techniques that were around before his technique) where he would begin with warming up the back and torso, and he kept the notion of dancing barefoot. But most importantly "Cunningham concerned himself with how movement worked and the shape it took rather than with communicating meaning" (Morris, *A Game for Dancers* 170).

At this time both Cunningham and John Cage (an avant-garde musician who worked collaboratively with Cunningham for 50 years) together became interested in beginning to develop a new approach to perceiving modern dance in a way where

[T]he dancing, the music, and the décor all coexisted in the same time-space continuum while maintaining their autonomy. That is, the dance wasn't choreographed to the music, nor was the music composed to the rhythms of the dancing, but both were created separately while sharing a single time frame (Cunningham, *Art Performs Life: Cunningham/Monk/Jones* 11).

All of these ideas about movement that Cunningham created had incorporated themselves into his movement vocabulary, his technique. He was very much "concerned

with something being exactly what it is in its time and place, and not it's having actual or symbolic reference to other things," reflecting the WWII mentality that was shared with many other artists. To Cunningham "[a] thing is just that thing…Dance should not attempt to represent something else, but rather should be itself." He says that "When I dance, it means: this is what I am doing" (Morris, *A Game for Dancers* 171). Here is a quote from Susan Foster's *Reading Dancing* that better stipulates Cunningham's ideal of modern dance:

> Merce Cunningham arranges opportunities to view the human body in
> motion by juxtaposing articulate human movements. He claims that
> his dances express nothing but themselves, that instead of telling a
> story they focus on the physical facts of the body—what arms and legs,
> torso, and head can do in relation to gravity, time, and space. Although
> many movement sequences require great skill and dexterity, the dances
> do not emphasize virtuoso accomplishment, nor do they allude to ideal
> forms of movement. Instead, they emphasize the individuality of each
> human body: each dancer's body shape, style or quality of moving, and
> 'appetite for motion' (Foster, *Reading Dancing* 32).

Movement for Cunningham existed as nothing but itself and should not try to exist as anything but itself. "The meaning in movement, to Cunningham, is intrinsic in the movement and in the person doing it—it is not imposed by an external convention" (Mazo, *Prime Movers: The Makers of Modern Dance in America* 208), unlike many of Martha Graham's pieces which would sometimes feature herself as the protagonist in a rendition of a Greek tragedy in which the story was 'told' through the point of view of the female lead character (Graham, would generally play this role in her works). Within

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Cunningham technique's ideal of movement being intelligent in and of itself, was an emphasis on the individual and the intellectual information that existed within a singular physical body (which both Mazo and Foster stated in the previous quotes). He then focused on how to access and interpret that information through his physical movement vocabulary. And in the end, this information would be physicalized for and interpreted by an audience (whose role I will get to later on) through dance performance.

At this point, the notion that music and dance "simply started at the same time and ended at the same time" (Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* 203) became to be known as Cunningham's (as well as Cage's) first innovation and founding principle behind his movement philosophy (Manning, 203). And it was a philosophy about dance that Cunningham would use for the rest of his career as an artist and as a choreographer:

> Dance was not about emoting, Cunningham said. Rather 'in its essence, in the nakedness of its energy it is a source from which passion or anger may issue in a particular form'… He added: 'I am no more philosophical than my legs, but from them I sense this fact: that they are infused with energy that can be released in movement—that the shape the movement takes is beyond the fathoming of my mind's analysis but clear to my eyes and rich to my imagination'… A concrete dance, then, not only disrupted cause-and-effect meaning, it also escaped reasoned analysis and instead found a reality born of practice and bodily intelligence (Morris, *A Game for Dancers* 171).

According to Cunningham through this relationship with movement, people have the ability to sensually comprehend the essence of movement; they do not need for

it to be explained through an emotion or narrative. This disrupted the traditional "cause-and-effect meaning" found in the majority of modern dances previous to Cunningham. At this point, the Cunningham technique was expanded with incorporation of his second innovation that branched off from his notion of dance as existing as unilaterally and inherently intelligent: that was his usage of chance operations.

After the creation of his technique and the solidification of his philosophy behind movement, Cunningham introduced the notion of chance operations into his choreography. Chance operations is a choreographic process that was used to make and perform some of Cunningham's dances. It can range from creating dance phrases that are performed in a particular order due to the result of a coin toss, to a much more sophisticated system of phrase sequence numbers, varying lengths of times to perform a dance, and charts numbering the directionality that dancers should follow in space; all of which help "to select elements in a predetermined gamut of movements, body parts, or stage spaces" (Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* 103)(Bremser, *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers* 6). By using this methodology towards making a number of his dances "Cunningham had developed a technical style characterized by unexpected juxtapositions of action" (Banes, 103). These juxtapositions only reinforced the delineation between emotion and dance and the traditional cause and effect relationships that existed around "normal" modern dance; thereby helping conventional forms of continuity in modern dance to become obsolete. In these chance dances

> [t]here are familiar and unfamiliar movements, but what is continuously
> unfamiliar is the continuity, freed as it is from usual cause and effect
> relations. Due to the chance method, some of the movements listed in
> the charts were used more than once in different space and directions

and for different lengths of time, and, on the other hand, many movements, to be found in the charts, do not appear at all in the final choreography (Morris, *A Game for Dancers* 173)[32].

To many, chance dance and chance operations existed as "irreproachably plotless," "cold as a star," and without a "particular will" (Abeel, *The NEW New Dance* 22); whereas in reality chance operations was and is important to note because it sparked new notions in regards to finding different ways of perceiving dance. And much like in Yoruba and Santería dance, these new ways created a discourse or a dialogue between performer and audience, as well as between audience members, that affected their own analytic pathways in regards to dance performance, yielding new ways in which audiences could witness these dance performances. (Abeel, 22).

Cunningham's legacy of changing how dances are perceived by removing psychological and emotional value from them is reflected in the behavior of many of the post-modern choreographers' and dancers' behavior when choreographing and when dancing. He paved a new way of conceptualizing dance for both audience members and performers alike and built a spring board for post-modern dance to flourish into what it was in the 70's and 80's. Furthermore, Cunningham's technique left room for people to question what is and what isn't dance when he took away the emotional and psychological values that had been in dances for centuries. People's behavior in dance (like doing non-dance movements in dances) pays homage to how Merce's dance performances affected and reflected a new established behavior pattern to an audience (Abeel, 26). However, it is important to keep in mind that even though Cunningham

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[32] This quote was originally sourced from a summary that Remy Charlip (one of Cunningham's dancers) wrote about the procedures used in his dance *Suite by Chance* from 1953.

acted as a catalyst for the post-modern movement, he was not a part of it. He was still a part of the modern movement in that he believed in a codified vocabulary that was taught in explicit ways, and that was not a notion valued among postmodernists. However his notion of audience and performer autonomy was a notion that was kept and valued by postmodern groups like Judson Dance Theater (Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* 113).

Continuing along the same lines of the question "what is modern dance?" that Abeel mentioned above, Cunningham completely changed the notions behind what Western dance was supposed to be according to Westerners and aficionados of Western dance forms. However "Westerners are not very good at just letting things happen. Our philosophers have been unable to explain the creative act because they insist that the whole artifact must be thought before it is put in a physical form" (Dell, *Winterbranch and Hundreds of Years* 20). Cunningham has taught a legacy of questioning modern dance through a lens of spontaneity and incongruity in movement sequence, and has provided a very particular format on how to do this. Cecily Dell writes "'Dance by chance' is, it seems to me, a Western device for arriving at this spontaneity long lacking in our art" (Dell, 21).

Here a parallel can be drawn between vogue dance and Cunningham's choreography and technique. In black vernacular dances, such as vogue, improvisation—or to take it even further—an acceptance of not knowing what will ensue, how things will play out, and what the ending will be (this exists even in the performers eyes and minds) is engrained in the culture that practices these such dances. With Cunningham it is the same case in that with his chance operations, the outcome is completely uncertain, even to the performers. However, with Cunningham technique and performance "[t]he

use of chance mechanisms to determine movement allows for a spontaneity that approaches total objectivity—the self cannot get in the way and the thing is allowed to happen" (Dell, *Winterbranch and Hundreds of Years* 21) whereas with Vogue dance and even with some African dances it is all about the subjective and the individual portraying a notion or telling a story. Therefore, Merce's choreography and phrase material suggests to an audience to challenge the notion of dance as existing within a musical context and existing within a frame of psychology and emotions.

I think the idea to look at now is how understanding chance operations and the idea of delineating dance and music both play a role in gaining a deeper understanding of my larger question in regards to the ways in which dance and social context interact. So I find it necessary at this point, to investigate the role that the audience plays within Cunningham's world of chance operations and incongruity between dance and music. With this investigation I hope to shed some light onto the ways that Cunningham's dramatic shift in the modern dance paradigm affected the audience's role at a performance.

According to Cecily Dell's *Winterbranch and Hundreds of Years* article from *dance SCOPE*

> Merce Cunningham … put aside the self, yet with chance
>
> determination and strange uses of movement and the human form, [he]
>
> gives us penetrating experiences concerning our humanity. [He]
>
> involves us in [his] movement and show[s] us we needn't feel guilty for
>
> not having grasped a meaning we can put into words (Dell, 21).

Through his movement vocabulary, his choreography, and most importantly, through chance, Cunningham gave audiences a physical format to watch through a different lens.

And this lens strayed from human psychological, emotional, and narrative characteristics that were associated with modern dance at the time—which were brought to popularity in the proscenium stage by choreographers like Ruth St. Denis and Martha Graham. For choreographers like St. Denis and Graham, their choreography provided "a sense of coherence and interconnectedness—a sense of overarching intelligibility grounded in the illusion of causal linkage" (Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* 112); referring to the causal linkages that existed within the framework of emotional, narrative, or psychological cause and effect scenarios (e.g. Graham's use of contraction to connote angst).

With many audiences, Cunningham's ability to choreograph outside of emotion and narrative allowed for viewers to see beyond the self, the emotional, the psychological and to view the realm of the purely physical and movement oriented as something transcendent and unexplored. This method of looking at dance in a completely different light was a new notion and I think it was effectively taught to watching audiences or to the people dancing the pieces because of this novelty. The fact that it was a new notion of modern dance intrigued people to watch it, absorb it, learn it, and then reflect upon and decide whether or not it would change their ways of looking at, interpreting, and responding to dance performances. "It is rather a wonderful thing to realize that dance is profound enough to challenge the very roots of our thought" (Dell, *Winterbranch… and hundreds of years* 21) and invoke new roots into the thought process when interpreting dance. And I reason that through thinking of movement as intelligent on its own and then explicating this philosophy and utilizing it in the form of chance operations is absolutely brilliant and completely transformative. I think that by going through this metamorphosis and changing the ways of viewing dance, one can gain a broader

appreciation of the way dance performance and behavior relate, and therefore the way behavior and social context interrelate.

As I mentioned Abeel stated earlier on, Cunningham's choreography was seen as "irreproachably plotless," "cold as a star," and existing without a "particular will" (Abeel, *The NEW New Dance* 22) at first and audiences would inquire "'How can you obscure the human image?' 'How can you make an entire dance without apparent meaning?' 'Why do you let things happen by chance instead of controlling them by creating out of your conscious mind?' The answer they may receive is 'Why not?' and they'll have to answer that one" (Dell, *Winterbranch and Hundreds of Years* 21).

"[C]hance procedures gave him [Cunningham] a method for escaping the causal logic of dance meaning" (Morris, *A Game for Dancers* 181); chance procedures made it so that "his pieces lack[ed] many of the most typical and conventional representations of causation found in dance" (Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* 111). This imposed upon the audience the role of being the unequivocal interpreter that was responsible for her/his own interpretation on what was happening on stage, and for finding their own cause-and-effect connections.

At this point, it is important to reiterate that within this process of chance operations and audience observations, the performers have the facility to express their individual movement essences because of the lack of emotive (and therefore universal) [33] dancing that can sometimes hinder this (Mazo, *Prime Movers: The Makers of Modern Dance in America* 218). When movement is made as a way of expressing an emotion or telling a narrative, the essence of the person actually doing the movement can become lost in

translation to the audience. In scenarios like this one, the audience's primary focus is not on the individual or the movement they are performing, but on the expression of emotion or narrative that is being physicalized by the dancer. The same can be said for very virtuosic movement performed in traditional modern dance: Cunnigham believes that "'[v]irtuosity narrows the scale,'… and presents 'less possibility for the diversity of human beings… so many dancers think that if they learn to do a step well, that's it, though great dancers go beyond.' … He does not demand something less than virtuosity [from his dancers], but something more" (Mazo, *Prime Movers: The Makers of Modern Dance in America* 222). The bodies performing on stage are exceedingly intelligent and rich with new information that has the potential to be learned by a watching audience. Furthermore, extracting cliché cause and effect relationships in emotive dance contexts, going beyond virtuosity, and placing the physical body in new randomized contexts helps the information in an individual body to be transferred to an audience. And when you involve other bodies in the process within randomized contexts "where every dancer [is] at once a soloist and a member of the ensemble" (Mazo, 207), the levels of bodily intelligence and information transference has the potential to be astronomical. As Gay Morris would put it:

> [I]t is important to note that although the procedures Cunningham
> developed disrupted familiar ways of structuring dances, they did not
> negate all rational processes or personal choice. Rather, they enlarged
> the possibilities of sequencing, shuffled continuity, interfered with
> norms. This in turn helped eliminate the imposition of narrative

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[33] "One of the things [Cunningham] dislikes about older forms of dancing is that they set and force relationships between the dancers" (Mazo, *Prime Movers: The Makers of Modern Dance in America* **(Cont. on next pg.)**

elements on the dance and gave it an openness that led to greater

freedom of interpretation (Morris, *A Game for Dancers* 174).

The idea of having more room for individuality amongst performers and more room for

interpretational license for the audience to play with is a huge achievement among

modern dance choreographers. The idea of showing the audience autonomy when it

comes to the interpretation of movement and showing performers the idea of the

individual still existing within the ensemble is incredibly special among dance

performance. It adds layers of complexity and allows room for deeper understandings of

performed movement. Because of his work "Cunningham's dance suggested that art was

no longer an authoritarian given. Instead, each individual was free to find her or his own

meaning in the dance" (Morris, 174).

Chance procedures within Cunningham's work also accentuates the idea of

breaking down and dislodging "normal" or cliché cause and effect dances, allowing

space for "each individual to find her or his own meaning in the dance." For example, if

you look at a ballet or even some modern dance choreographers (like Martha Graham or

even Doris Humphrey for instance) many of the physical actions that are done or

performed carry with them a predictable or minutely expected outcome or response.

From my own personal awareness of watching performances by choreographers like

Martha Graham in works such as *Heretic* and *Night Journey,* these responses are

characterized by a sense of familiarity; I drew upon this sense of familiarity in order to

establish a relational link between myself and the performance. This relational link

contained a lot of extraneous information that existed outside of the realm of only

physical movement, thereby adding an extra layer I had to sift through so as to get at the

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essence of the work. In Graham's piece *Heretic,* Graham's ensemble dancers performed a harsh four stomping step sequence that was done with crossed arms. They would repeatedly use these steps to form and reform a judging semi-circle around Graham (who was the soloist in the piece, as well as the character being judged). This situation brought about ideas and notions of the Salem witch trials for me as an individual—the trial proceedings that had occurred whether justified or not, and most importantly the notion of the singular individual pitted against community opposition. But this whole scenario was viewed within the frame of a judgment trial; disallowing focus to be attributed to the roles of each individual within the dance. This is what I mean by cliché relational links that are established during specific dances; links that would portray and paint a story or history that was connected to the physical performance at hand, and that would hinder the individuality of the performers themselves. I'm not saying that these kinds of situations never occur for audiences watching Cunningham's works, perhaps they do or perhaps they don't; that depends on who is watching. But in his works, these kinds of relational links are not the **only** thing dictated through movement, and certainly are not the notions that are being emphasized. Many more possibilities for interpretation are introduced into the performance, which are available for audiences to pick up and become aware of.

In Cunningham's work the audience is required to look at the performance in an unconventional manner. This manner exists outside of the realm of the "normal" confluence of events that occurs in the forms of more homogenous modern dance (like Graham, Erick Hawkins, Doris Humphrey, and others). In each performance of Merce's choreography "the performance calls upon the audience to step out of its traditional passive, spectator role, and into an active field of experience, where choice, whim and

clear perception must come into imaginative play by the viewer if he is to grasp fully the experience of the work" (Dell, *Far Beyond the Far Out* 14). The audience must step out of their narrative/emotion observational framework when watching a performance by Cunningham and attune their senses to perceive what is not explicitly laid out in front of them. That does not follow the "normal" cause and effect relationship formulas that many people who watch traditional modern dance are used to. The audience or viewer(s) must realize that instead of an explicit and intentional notion always being presented in a performance, sometimes the movement involved in a performance is "a suggestive possibility…and the ebb and flow of feeling-energy in the viewer will be determined by his imagination in conjunction with the sensations he selects out of the continuum of the performance" (Dell, 15).

With Cunningham's work the protection of the proscenium that used to exist no longer existed and both dancers and viewers alike had to begin to think and analyze performance autonomously; rather than shielding themselves behind the predictive and explicit cause-effect format that dance performance took before people like Cunningham came to popularity. This establishes an adaptive relationship between what is happening onstage and what is being perceived by an audience. Viewers had to individually adapt to/learn and develop a new frame of understanding the information that was trying to be relayed through a dance performance. These newly created frames of understanding and perceiving also elicited more potential discoveries and realms of interpretation that were not around previously.

In turn, many of these 'realms' helped people and groups involved in the post-modern dance scene (like Judson Dance Theater) to find ways of invoking sometimes more profound and meaningful conclusions about a dance performance within an

audience (Dell, 14). So by removing emotional structure and overlaying, as well as predictability from his pieces, Cunningham provoked autonomy, depth, and complexity in dance performance that essentialized "the presentness and presence of each movement unit" (Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* 112).

One of Cunningham's pieces that combines all of the previously mentioned hallmarks of his genius as a choreographer (the delineation of dance and music, his collaborative processes—which I will delve into shortly, his use of chance operations, his way of establishing individuality amongst his performers, and his forcing of the audience to switch their observational paradigm to one that was more open to interpretational license) is his work *Story.*

With his choreographic work *Story* (as well as some of his other chance dances), Cunningham introduced to the dancers—and indirectly to the audience—the notion of being both the embodiment of the choreography as well as the choreographer him/herself. This was the case because with Cunningham's chance dances, and particularly with *Story*, was the ability to spontaneously determine what was going to happen and/or improvise what was going to happen in a dance. In other words, "[t]he choreographic structure [of *Story*] allowed the dancers at points to make certain decisions regarding the given movements and in other sections to invent their own movements" (Banes, 104). This autonomy that his dancers had and that the audience could watch the dancers have, made them, at times, both the choreographer and the choreography of *Story* and other pieces like it. And this autonomy and freedom of the dancer and the audience, again, was the milestone that Cunningham's choreographic process established and perpetuated through dance performance.

Story additionally was a play on words:

The title does not refer to any implicit or explicit narrative but to the

fact that every spectator may see and hear the events in his own way.

Within a section the movements given to a particular dancer could

change in space and time and the order the dancer chose to do them in

could come from the instant of doing them (Banes, 105)[34].

As stated above, the title *Story* could be indicative that there is going to be a story

involved within the piece, but as we already know, Cunningham was not one to put

ANY form of narrative into his choreography; but rather story generation should be and

was left up to the audience when it came to Cunningham. Again this reinforces the

notion of audience autonomy that was involved in all of Merce's works (Banes, 104).

Within *Story* indeterminate elements were also put into play that existed outside

of dance. For example, the costuming that was used during the piece was done by

Robert Rauschenberg, a well-known neo-Dadaist artist at the time, who used a basic pair

of yellow tights and a yellow leotard for each dancer. However, he gathered up "dresses,

shirts, pants, and sweaters from second-hand stores and Army navy surplus stores; a

football player's shoulder padding; an old pair of long johns; and a gas mask" (Banes,

104), all of which were put in the wings for dancers to rifle through and pick out what

they wanted to wear for *Story*. "Thus each dancer's costume varied, not only from

evening to evening, but also during the course of a single performance" (Banes, 106).

Additionally the lighting for the piece was indeterminate as well, ranging from very light

to very dark. The set (also created by Rauschenberg) was an indeterminate factor as well.

For each different performance of *Story* a new set was created. Rauschenberg says:

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[34] This is quote from Cunningham himself.

I never repeated the set. A new one was made for each performance

from materials gathered from different places…. I never knew where

anyone was going to be; the space was not defined. The set had to be

made out of what you could find, given the amount of time that you

had in a particular locale, out of stuff that was there… out of in the

alley or any place you could get (Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of*

Postmodernism 107).

The music for the piece, called *Sapporo*, was composed by Toshi Ichiyanagi and it

contained a number of variable elements. "[T]he rules governing the music in *Story*

generated different sounds at each performance… [For example] John Cage played a

mirror by rubbing it with a cut bottle" (Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism*

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To emphasize the role that Cunningham's collaborative processes played in

works such as *Story*, and to help understand why these processes are pertinent to my

thesis I would like to mention the correlation that Roger Copeland talked about between

the notion of collage and Cunningham's work. Copeland applies the idea of collage onto

Cunningham's work. He describes it as "varieties of 'found' movement exist[ing]

alongside varieties of 'found' sound" (Copeland, *Merce Cunningham and the Aesthetic of*

Collage 12). The spontaneity and sometimes incongruity of his collaging or collaborating

of the different art mediums functions in the same way as his idea behind only

performing movement as presentational and not representational: it emphasized

unfamiliar relationships of causes and effects and sometimes would just create a cause

and an effect that were individual of each other. Thus, reinforcing the notion that "the

spectator's choices about where and when to focus visual and auditory attention" relied

upon that spectator (Copeland, 13). For Cunningham, "Being able to take fragments, long and short, and put them together in different ways" could be analogous to the things we do "in our lives all the time, although we don't think about it" (Copeland, 13).

Copeland also mentions that the perceptions that manifest themselves in people when they are watching movement (when looking at Cunningham's material) are very much context specific. To quote him "The 'meaning' of movement… is largely a function of the context in which that movement is performed" (Copeland, 18). And when applying this theory to when Cunningham is undergoing a collaborative or collage process with people like John Cage or Robert Rauschenberg, "seemingly unrelated elements begin to 'resonate' off one another—across gaps of both space and time—resulting in protean, unstable, and wholly provisional relationships" (Copeland, 15). I feel this to be exceedingly important because Cunningham's collaborative works where "found" movement may meet "found" music, costuming, or sets, leave many more points of unconventional overlay between mediums. This lead to many more points of autonomous interpretive license for audiences to synthesize.

Copeland's idea of collage is just another way of interpreting Cunningham's ideals towards the roles that the audience should play when relating to performers and the performances they are giving.

To bring this section of Chapter 1 to a close I would like to quote Susan Manning and Cecily Dell: "Cunningham's dances exponentially multiplied the possibilities for interpretation and yet at the same time negated the possibility of interpretation altogether" (Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* 209).

"In other words, movement is used as presentational and not representational; it is not offered as symbolic, or connotative of any feeling, although it may be played with by the viewer's imagination" so as to incorporate interpretation or nullify it altogether (Dell, *Far Beyond the Far Out: Some Experimental Choreographers* 15).

All of Cunningham's dances, and in particular the ones that were based on chance operations, allowed for interpretive license on both the part of the performers and the audience. And I refer to chance operations especially because of the levels of complexity and variation that occur in the dances where chance is used. The more variability that one is able to watch in a piece, the more variables one has to make connections with, whether those connections are purely focused on noticing the physical movement being performed solely for the purpose of being performed as physical movement—negating "the possibility of interpretation altogether" (Manning, 209) or for the purposes of something more existential—thereby "exponentially multip[lying] the possibilities for interpretation" (Manning, 209).

All in all I think that "Cunningham's dances reoriented the workings of cross-viewing so that individual spectators recognized that their perceptions potentially differed from all other spectators'" (Manning, 209). This is the major behavioral pattern that manifested itself among audience members as well as other performers whenever Cunningham's company would perform, and this notion allowed for the establishment of the Judson Dance Theater, paving the way for post-modernism which took modern dance to the point it's at today (Manning, 208).

I'd like to leave you, as the reader, with a quote from Susan Manning's *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* that I feel epitomizes the essence of Merce Cunningham's choreographic genius: "'If meaning [does indeed] exists in Cunningham's

work, it lies in this paradox: there is never more to see than what is present and there is always more present than one could possibly see'" (Manning, 209).

CHAPTER 2
THE INTROSPECTIVE PROCESS OF CHOREOGRAPHY AND DANCE PERFORMANCE

I would like to write this second and last chapter of my thesis in the same format that I started writing my thesis: writing from a personal perspective. In this chapter I will address my choreographic research geared at trying to answer the question: what are the ways in which behavior and social context interact? By looking at the relationship between the behavior in dance performance and the audience—as a focused case that I used to try and answer my question—in the case studies of the previous chapter, I feel that I have already delved a fair amount into the notion of behavior and social context dynamics. In doing so, I have hopefully shed a little more light onto that relationship; thereby deepening the readers understanding of the behavior/social context phenomenon.

However, at this point in my thesis, I would like to investigate this phenomenon in a different format. Within this new format, I wish to illuminate and further the connection between the genesis of my interest in this topic—analyzing my personal behavioral roles in social contexts mentioned in the introduction—and the role that this topic plays when it is extended beyond the introspective. In an attempt to deepen our understanding of this connection, I will once again state the following question as a way of having a specific case to investigate: "How does a performer respond to their audience during a performance?"

This time however, I will use the last two semesters worth of choreographic work that I have set in the '92 Patricelli Theater at Wesleyan University as my case

studies. I believe that by incorporating my own introspective process of investigation—as well as those of my dancers over the last two semesters—into this thesis, we can see if there are any parallels between the academic observations I made throughout Chapter 1 and the introspective observations that I will make in this chapter. By seeing if there are any correlations, we can all gain a multi-layered insight into the ways that behavior and social context interact.

MIRR(OR) REALITY

In the Fall of 2011, I first embarked on my journey to look for a way to research my immense interest into the relationship between a way an individual behaves and the context that that individual is in. In *Mirr(or) Reality* I begin investigating this interest through a choreographic process. I started out this process by simply asking myself what the different kinds of correlations between behavior and social context were, that I noticed among my everyday happenings. For example, while living at my house on Home Avenue at Wesleyan University I found myself behaving in ways that were loud and overzealous and quite frankly, annoyed my housemates somewhat from time to time. However I was interested in the genesis of this behavior: where did this behavior come from? And why has it perpetuated itself? What significance does it hold to be deemed worthy of perpetuity? It was questions like these that launched me into the investigative process for my research. This curiosity into the nature of behavior in social contexts managed to manifest itself in my choreographic process.

So as to understand and investigate my interests further, I began to read academic texts that were geared towards answering the same questions I was asking at

the time. And in so doing I ran across Yoruba, Santería, Vogue, and Cunningham dance performances. The way that behavior interacted with audience in each one of these dance performance setting was so different and varied. So I asked myself, "What better way to understand social context and behavior dynamics as whole than to try and understand a few of its parts?" The "parts" in this case were the four different dance performance contexts. As a result the first semester's choreography was mainly geared towards connecting these academic findings to the personal research that I wanted to conduct in order to respond to the questions I stated earlier. My goals going into the choreographic process was to find some overlay between the academic research and the somatic and personal research I was conducting, so as to gain a deeper understanding of the roles that behavior played in social contexts.

In the finished product of *Mirr(or) Reality* I had the pleasure of working with three beautiful dancers—Lindsay Kosasa, Iman Bright, and Sierra Livious—who were all equally invested in the idea of uncovering deeper layers of the behavior phenomenon. Our process together began with me asking them what their particular thoughts were in regards to the ways that behavior in dance performance related itself to an audience. And of course the answers I received were very different (because they were three very different individuals, with very different contextual backgrounds and spheres of influence). For example, when asked about what their impressions of the behavioral dynamic between audience and performer in ritual/traditional dance contexts (like Yoruba and Santería dance performance) their answers covered a wide range. The range went from describing the relationship as having an expected outcome between both the audience and perfomer(s), to many different people doing the same thing for particular purpose, to expressing a spiritual and traditional frame of mind.

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These personal reflections on their own thoughts were important for me in this process because that was half of the purpose of the process. The other half consisted of looking at these personal inflections against academic and scholarly ideas and notions of the same things. Additionally, I felt it important to include their personal thoughts about the research because they were the individuals who would be performing the research in the concert; their performance would be responsible for accurately relaying how the personal and the academic can come together to achieve a deeper understanding of behavior and social context. So to achieve maximum authenticity in the relay of their personal information to an audience, it proved mandatory that their ideas be incorporated into the process. However, as the choreographer, finding ways for the academic world to meet with the personal world was a very difficult job and one that required a lot of thought processing. We later on continued this same process with social dance (to parallel the case study I conducted Vogue dance) and then with dance set in the proscenium stage context that was void of narrative (to parallel the work of Merce Cunningham).

The other part of the choreographic process was the actual movement vocabulary that was used. Most of the vocabulary that ensued was of my own invention, after which I taught it to the Sierra, Lindsay, and Iman. The physical movement of the piece was broken up into three sections, where each section would serve as a common ground between an academic analysis of a case study and an introspective analysis of that same case study.

The first section, which was colloquially labeled as "Hommage" was meant to combine the ideals of Merce Cunningham's work with the personal notions about the proscenium stage context that my dancers and I had talked about earlier on. This portion

of the piece was performed to Philip Glass and Ravi Shankar's *Offering* and was a section that was very much based upon the notion of playing with the interchangeability of group ensemble, individuality, and presenting oneself to the audience as an intellectually moving individual. I gave Lindsay, Sierra, and Iman specific tasks to follow at certain parts of this section of the dance so as to emphasize the notions I just stated. For example, there was a phrase that was repeated throughout this section multiple times (sometimes cut up into a different order and sometimes remaining the same). Each time they performed the phrase, I asked the dancers to play with their individual interpretations of the virtuosic movement vocabulary (meaning they could change the rhythm, dynamics, or levels of the material, but not completely change the material itself), to play with performing the phrase as a cohesive unit that was solely aware of the group ensemble as the primary entity in the performance, and finally to play with finding a mixture of the two while at the same time incorporating a visual gaze link with the audience. I decided to include the gaze because, for me, it is one of the most direct ways to involve the audience into the process that is occurring onstage.

Throughout all three styles of movement in this section, the audience was watching and noticing the shifts that occurred. Since I was an audience member for all three of the performances, I noticed that with each change in style of movement within the section, I would find myself become hyper-aware of that change; trying to figure out the purpose of the constant shifting in focus from self, to group, to audience. Upon further reflection of this section's performance I noticed that there was some correlation between what I had read about Merce's ideals behind performance and my dancers notions of performance on the proscenium stage. This correlation manifested itself in the idea that when I was watching the piece, my mind didn't interpret ANY of the

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movement as narrative nor emotive. My mind was actually left blank. All I noticed were bodies moving in patterns onstage with very virtuosic vocabularies. When I envisioned this portion of the dance being performed, I was not expecting "nothing" to come up. But that is indeed what happened. And that is what happened with some of Cunningham's works as well when people watched them: they didn't see anything except for bodies moving through space. And it was in this that the correlation laid; the end result for me was the same in both cases.

The second section of *Mirr(or) Reality* was dedicated to paralleling the scholarly notions behind ritual/traditional dances (like Yoruba and Santería) alongside the individual perceptions of ritual/traditional dances from Lindsay, Iman, and Sierra. The hybrid that ensued was a combination of my movement vocabulary—which was (for this section) of a very methodical, calm, and repetitive nature—and the notion of gathering for a particular purpose so as to celebrate that purpose through dance performance. I used the song *Ave Maria Morena* by Raices Habaneras in this section whose rhythm followed of a traditional Cuban rhumba beat that was repetitive and methodical, like the movement being performed in that section.

In this particular circumstance, the goal of the choreographic decisions I made was to have the audience understand that there was a particular and methodical purpose that drove the movement performed in this section; that there was an importance to the movement being showed on stage and that each movement served a particular function. Now for this piece, I had trouble finding a connection between what I had read about behavior in ritual dance performances and its relation to the audience and my dancers' personal research into the matter. When I was watching it being performed onstage, I caught a sense of methodical movement that served a purpose however I couldn't

discern what this particular purpose was. Whereas with many of the dances in the Yoruba and Santería cultures, the purpose of the dances is clear. After some thought it came to my attention that this section of my dance, even though it displayed that it had a purpose, this purpose was not articulated. Perhaps this section really didn't display any specific sense of purpose in the movement because the movement wasn't engrained in a history or a tradition that had been practiced for quite a long time; like Yoruba and Santería ritual movements are.

In the third and final section of *Mirr(or) Reality* I wanted to draw analogous relations between the social dance scene (which I wanted to include individualism and precision of voguing as well as the social group dynamic that existed in voguing) as some scholars see it and the social dance scene that was prevalent in the lives of my three dancers. This section was defined by its upbeat music (*Groove Me* by King Floyd) and a sense of social dance dynamics that was dictated through the dancing. Each phrase that was created was done so as to exploit the features of individuality as well as group dynamic in a social dance setting. This consisted of the performers using the heavy down beat of the music to dance to, and then showing individual flare even when performing group choreography. Additionally there was a sequence of solos that were performed back to back so each performer could have a few moments to show off their individuality and expertise at their own style, when they were dancing. For example, Sierra followed a much more subtle, strong, rhythmic, and casual approach to movement; Iman performed her movement in a technical, jazzy, presentational, virtuosic, sultry, sassy, and very interactive with the audience format; and Lindsay delivered her solo performance with soft, quietly dynamic, thoughtful, ritualistic, and internal movement. I wanted each movement personality that I just described to be

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emphasized throughout this entire section, whether it was in the performance of solos or group phrases, or to the audience. For this section, as I described earlier, I was trying to bring together both scholastic (that talked about Voguing) and personal definitions of social dance. One aspect that I really saw and thought about and that seemed to bridge both worlds was the notion of individualism. This section of the piece really showcased the different dance behavioral patterns while at the same time maintaining a sense of group ensemble.

At this point in my process of creating *Mirr(or) Reality,* I felt that the relationship between the three academic and the personal physical investigations were used efficiently as methods of inquiry to the dynamics that existed between social context and behavior. However, they only existed in their own separate fields of influence. There was not a sense of congruence in the time that existed between the different sections. In order to establish some sense of timeline or flow in the piece I had to figure out a way to have at least one common theme in all three contexts; but that could be manipulated so as to fit the context it was in at any given time. I did this by introducing snapping into the piece.

Originally the snapping was only used in the first section to signify among the dancers when a movement should occur. I asked myself at this point: well if the snapping can signify a shift in movement, why can't it signify a transition in movement context? As a result between each section I involved a "snapping scene" in which all of the performers or one of the performers would snap in a format that would set the mood for the next section; signaling to the audience a change in the behavior of the dancers and the mood of the piece. For example, going from section two to section three, Sierra created a snap pattern that started at the end of section two in a very internal and meditative manner, and then carried on into the beginning of section three,

becoming a "subtle, strong, rhythmic, and casual" mover that section three called for. This mood shift indicated to the audience that the sense of the piece was changing and that they must change with it in order to stay with the flow of the piece. I witnessed this in the transition between sections two and three. But particularly at the beginning of section three when *Groove Me* (a funk song) began to play and the physical tone and mood of the audience changed to adapt to the new upbeat music and movement.

In all three sections, the combination of personal research and academic research, for the most part, helped in creating deeper understandings of how the performance of dance, behavior, and audience interact with one another. Even though trying to combine the personal with the academic didn't always work out, it still managed to evoke reasons as to why it didn't work out, or even reasons as to why it did. And these understandings actually laid an appropriate ground work from which I could launch the next semester's choreographic process in creating *Reflection in Two Parts*.

REFLECTION IN TWO PARTS

Reflection in Two Parts used *Mirr(or) Reality* almost like a spring board from which it could develop. The main thing to keep in mind about *Reflection in Two Parts* is that it not only includes the aspect of using personal experience as research (like *Mirr(or) Reality* essentialized) but that it is also dominated by a reflexive and very introspective lens whose foundations lie in *Mirr(or) Reality*; it holds the notion of using reflexive and

personal research as a method of inquiry when investigating the relationship between behavior and social context.

But the true nature of this piece lies in the fact that I utilize the idea of making decisions while making decisions which is an inherently reflexive idea. For example, in one section of the dance my duet partner (Sally Williams) is wiggling her fingers and I decide to verbally describe how she is wiggling her fingers. Then, I begin my movement phrase and as I am making the decision to describe her wiggling fingers, I make the decision to try and describe her wriggling fingers physically by wiggling my own in the same manner. The theme of two identical events happening at the same time is a common event in *Reflection in Two Parts*. And I incorporate it so often into my piece because I believe that through comparing something against itself, you have the facility to have a deeper understanding of that thing's essence. It is almost like looking in a mirror. You are looking at yourself looking in the mirror so to gain a deeper reflexive understanding of what you're face looks like at that particular time. The following quote from *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece* helps to explain this concept a little more: "the body acting upon the world is, in turn, acted upon by the world the body has helped to create" (Cowan, *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece* 22). In this piece there is a constant and almost instantaneous free-flow of information that is affecting the performance and at the same time affecting the audience that is watching the performance.

I think that the notion of reflexivity in dance performance is important when trying to understand the links between behavior and social context. I say this because it can make hyper-apparent the behavioral patterns people follow in certain settings. This hyper-awareness can lead to one being aware that they are in fact aware of their

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awareness, and from there dedicate a certain behavior to either change that awareness (by changing their behavior) or maintain it. In my choreographic work *Reflection in Two Parts*, I play with this notion in multiple ways.

One of these ways begins with the title *Reflection in Two Parts,* which pays homage to the fact that this piece was a duet and also to the fact that it was about reflexivity on both the part of the performers and the audience.

However before I delve into the analysis of my dance I feel it to be relevant to explain why I made this project a duet in the first place, and why I didn't decide to make it a solo dance. For this I will use my duet proposal that I submitted to the dance department in the Fall of 2011:

> I think that by going through the choreographic process as the performer and externally physicalizing my own internal notions as well as internally sourced physical manifestations, I will have the facility to exhibit the level of authenticity that this thesis demands. Additionally, the conjunction of being in my own work and having this semester's exposure to other performers' ideologies and physical formulations of audience/performer relations will not only add necessary legitimacy to my work and showcase my choreography in a primary/instinctual way, but it will also evoke secondary/non-instinctual notions, allowing for a more complex and in-depth analysis.

> I hope to go about this by performing in a duet. With a duet I would be able to clearly portray my own interpretations of performer-audience relations and dynamics, and emphasize them by comparing and contrasting them with another performer's. The same would be

said for the other performer. The two of us would, additionally, juxtapose our ideas against other critiques on audience-performer relations…and filter these critiques through a personal lens. Consequentially this would add a layer of authenticity to the piece by not only portraying my and my collaborator's ideas, but by portraying others' ideas through our respective lenses. This would then, finally, cast and depict our interpretations on previously conceived notions, providing a clear reference point for an audience member to attribute their thoughts to.   This development would establish a clear, apparent, and truly authentic chemistry between the audience and the performers (Owens, *Senior Thesis Proposal for Spring 2012*).

The collaborative process of the duet will prove to be so essential because of its ability for each individual to trade roles of playing audience and performer, on top of having an actual audience to interact with. But I will touch on the notion of audience/performer interchangeability in a few.

Sally and I started out our collaboration with simply talking about the idea of finding a connection between behavior and dance performance contexts, and how the two connect with the role that the audience plays. We both eventually arrived at the conclusion that the best way to investigate this idea was for each of us to play the role of both the audience member and the performer in our piece. Having both the role of audience and performer exist within one body leads to an instantaneous and reflexive process of acting and responding within that singular individual. The best way to further explain this process is to explain the beginning of our piece.

After the lights on the '92 Theater stage had been up for few seconds, I walked out onto the stage. Sally then joined me a few seconds later, performing a movement phrase that was accompanied by text. At this point I would pantomime whatever I saw Sally doing and she would verbalize whatever she saw me seeing her do. So right away, we were both in the roles of both the performer and the audience; I was physically describing her movement (me as performer) while she was watching me do that (her as audience), and she was verbally describing my movement (she as performer) while I was watching her do that (me as performer). Having both performers exist as audience members at the same time creates a layer of reflexivity and complexity that allows for a much deeper introspective process into analyzing what is going on.

As Sally reset to repeat the same process over again, I began my own phrase while verbally explaining what Sally was performing. At this point we both still played the role of audience and performer; meaning that onstage there were always two audience members and two performers, each one being compared against its twin partner and undergoing a process of reflexivity.

Proceeding this portion of the performance was a gestural phrase that Sally and I also created and that we repeated multiple times in the piece. These gestures were originally the result of a kind word association activity that we wrote down and eventually turned into movement. In this activity one of us would pick a word that somehow related to the idea of behavior and social context, and the other person (without hesitation) would say whatever word would come up in their brains and then write the word down next to the original word that gave the first impetus. Then that person would do the same activity again, but this time with the newly associated word. One example is the following one: Sally picked the word relationship from which I

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associate the word mom. She then said mom and I said hair, she then said hair, I said disgusting, then when she finally said disgusting I said chocolate and that was the end of the process. The purpose of this activity was to further delve into the baseline ideas of audience interpretation on a subject. By saying our gut reaction to a word that related to performance, I was trying to emulate the process of how an audience has an initial response to a performance. I did this in the hopes that it would enlighten us into the process of how we interpret events at dance performances. In the end, we both picked several initial words to do this word association exercise with.

At this point we made gestural phrases out of these chains of words that eventually got lumped into one long gestural phrase. For every word in a chain, we would have to do the first movement that came to mind when we heard that word uttered aloud; it was the same procedure that we followed for the word association. I wanted to use this format for creating movement because it physically manifested a trail of behavior in response to verbal stimuli; and this trail emulated the trail that existed between what an audience sees and interprets immediately from a performance.

After our gestural phrases were completed, we simply came together and performed them at the exact same time. We would watch each other do our phrases and wait for a physical stimuli that would act as impetus for our next gestural movement. So there was this constant sequence of cause and effect.

After playing with the ideas of reflexivity and cause and effect on ourselves, we wanted to see what would be evoked if we included a third party into the mix, and that was the role of the audience members. To adapt the notion of reflexivity to include an audience, we went back to our original form of verbalizing what we saw in the audience, verbalizing it, and then portraying it mimetically in our bodies.

During the performances a light cue was set up to shine light (at a pretty good intensity I might add) on the audience members at which point Sally and I would both stop what we were doing and describe what the audience was doing, thereby not only invoking the notion of reflexivity but also changing up the roles of audience and performer.

> The protective proscenium arch, which long served to separate the audience from the performance, is now often removed, thus including the audience in that spatial environment of the dance. The viewer may find dancers closing in on him, or things happening behind and beside him, so that rather than being 'glued to his seat', he finds himself suspended in the very center of the dance. Or, being accustomed to sitting back watching the dancers, he may suddenly find the dancer watching, imitating his reactions (Dell, *Far Beyond the Far Out: Some Experimental Choreographers* 14).

Even though Sally and I were onstage describing what the audience was doing, the audience became the performers in conjunction with us through our descriptions of them; but at the same time still existed as the audience because they were watching us describe them. So for about a minute or so, everyone in the '92 Theater played the role of both the audience and the performer; interchanging roles and playing with the notion of reflexivity in a three-way battle.

One of the most relevant aspects about this part of the performance though was when either Sally or I would describe an audience member both verbally and with physical gesture, and that audience member would respond by physically changing their viewing behavior. For example, when Sally mentioned that a few people in the audience

were sitting with their arms crossed, looking like they were bored, they immediately uncrossed their arms and sat up straight in their seats. They maintained that behavior for the rest of the performance after.

It is moments like these that I find so incredibly potent when looking at behavior and dance performance; when one can change the behavior of someone else through dance performance. Yvonne Daniel says that:

> [Y]ou [the dancer] are the connector between the physical action and the mental activity… In dancing or in the kinesthetic world, you rely on a simultaneous multisensory experience that is at once physical, cognitive, and emotional. It is, in fact, the consequence of learning that is not simply learning about something but knowing something (Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahían Candomblé* 270).

Daniel emphasizes the dancer as the catalyst between the mental thought and the physical activity in dance. I think this to be a true statement especially when looking at the example with the crossed-arm individuals. The performer was the one who made them aware of their current behavior and because of this a mental process was triggered within those audience members that made them change their behavior.

The last portion of my choreography for *Reflection in Two Parts* consisted of two parts: the first being our sentence structure phrase, and the last part being where we described the audience again. The sentence structure phrase was provided as more of an explanation as to why we kept either mentioning or visually or physically noticing a certain aspect on, of, or about the other performer. And with each new sentence structure that we talked about, we would step downstage two steps, start our dialogue

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again and perform the phrase that accompanied said dialogue. We did this a total of four times until we were all of the way up to the edge of the stage. With each incremental shift downstage, we were both symbolically and physically transporting our stories and patterns of behaviors that we had in the performance to the audience directly, offering them our senses of behavioral patterns that we dictated in the performative dance setting.

In the pen-ultimate phase of the dance, we described the audience one last time with the lights blaring on the audience again. Except this time when we described the audience it was in a way where we would try and choose novel behaviors or items that we hadn't described beforehand. And the things that caught our eyes that weren't novel in some form or another, we would describe as "not that interesting." The rationale behind this kind of description was to display the autonomy that sometimes can exist when looking at the forms of intersection between behavior and social context. As an example of this let's go back to the scenario with the people who had their arms crossed: when we mentioned to these individuals that they were sitting in the audience with arms crossed, looking bored, they could have responded with no response at all; leaving their arms crossed. But this would still be a change in behavior because they are consciously making the decision to not uncross their arms; very similarly to the people who made the decision to uncross their arms.

I started and ended the dance with the same thing: myself on stage scanning the audience visually with hands folded in front of my pelvis, energizing the audience with my gaze.

I feel this piece to be the most influential of my choreographic pieces because of its reflexivity and rotational capabilities when it came to switching instantaneously from

audience to performer. Additionally having the ability to physically change someone's behavioral patterns in a specific context is also a very interesting and exciting notion. Actually going through all of these roles myself as a dancer has benefited my curiosity into my personal process of understanding behavior. But most importantly this piece really explored many of the regions of the ways in which behavior and societal context can relate with each other.

CONCLUSION

The search for ways to comprehend the relationship between behavioral patterns and social contexts, whether on a small or large scale, is and will continue to be an incredibly complex and multi-faceted endeavor. By using an exemplary framework like dance performance to help me investigate this phenomena, I have gotten a little closer into uncovering the mysteries within the relationship between behavior and social context. Additionally by taking my research one step further and narrowing the search field to looking at case studies where performers of dance and the audiences that observe them have a clear and distinguished relationship, we can get that much closer to fathoming the correlation between social context and behavior.

I have begun to undergo this process by looking at four specific case studies. The first of which was investigating Nigerian and Cuban Yoruba dance performance. In this case study, I analyzed the role that Shango or Changó played in these societies. In particular I looked at the ritual dance performances that were performed in tribute to the deity. In these dance performances, the social mores and values that were attributed to the deity, and also coveted in the societies that celebrated him, were perpetuated through the form of possession dances wherein Shango or Changó would manifest himself in a medium. These performances informed upon the audiences watching them, of the integrity of the values that needed to be upheld in their society so as to have cohesion as a community.

The next case study I researched dealt with vogue dance and the role that it played in the ballroom community. Gay black and Latino men (predominantly) back in

the 60's and 70's were only at the very precipice of beginning to be recognized as fully fledged human beings in American society. As a result and as a form of manufacturing a form of societal acceptance, the ballrooms were created where gay black and Latino men and women could congregate and enjoy the freedom of expression that they were denied in the 'real world'. Many manifestations blossomed out of these ballrooms, one of which was Vogue dance. Voguing had its foothold predominantly in the notion of battling for acceptance in the ballroom community. And the better you were at voguing, the more of a bump in societal status and notoriety you received. Within vogue dance, creativity, ingenuity and fierceness were all coveted virtues. And these notions, in combination with the idea of battling, drive ballroom culture. They are perpetuated and intensified through performing in battles in front of watching audiences, where everyone there is looking for ways to learn how to match your skill level, and then surpass it so as to become legendary.

In my final case study I investigated the role that the Cunningham technique and the concept of chance operations played in reestablishing and perpetuating both the roles of the audience and performer in proscenium stage performances. Cunningham introduced into modern dance society the idea that movement is inherently intelligent and does not need help in being understood by means of displaying emotions or narratives. This radical and avant-garde approach to modern dance bestowed upon the performers a sense of individuality in performance that was never there before and bestowed upon the audience the notion of having interpretational license of the movement being performed (due to negation of emotions and storylines that dictated interpretations previously).

Finally I used my choreography from the past two semesters as forms of investigating not the scholarly side of dance performance and the way it relates to behavior and audience, but as a form of investigating the somatic and physical side. My findings through this physical research helped me to develop a deeper physical understanding of the relationship between performer and audience in a performative dance context.

All of these different ways of investigating the link between social context and behavior that I have investigated make up only a very small percentage of the possible avenues that can be traversed as a means of performing research. And they are in no way providing a universal formula for investigation. Therefore, it is paramount that this research not stop at this small percentage. We must keep asking the question "What are the connections that bind behavior to social context?", we must keep looking at case studies, we must keep using exemplars from other disciplines as well as dance to try and get closer and closer to the essence of the link between social context and behavior. For it is through this link that we can all connect as a species, and further understanding of this link is how we will continue to grow as a species.

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