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RESPONSIVE BODIES: TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE

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One by one, the performers in Anna Halprin's *Circle the Earth: Dancing with Life on the Line* (1989), stepped forward and shouted: *I want to live!* Yet, a few months, or, in the best case, a couple of years later, all of them were dead. Exclusively performed by HIV and AIDS patients, *Dancing with Life on the Line* was part of Halprin's series *Circle the Earth,* "her signature statement about the dancer in everyone, collectivity, and health" (Ross 2007a, 318). Emerging from a workshop on Mount Tamalpais, north of San Francisco, the performance took place in the Redwood High School gymnasium in Larkspur, Marin County in 1989, at a time when AIDS was still a socially hidden and above all incurable disease (Ibid., 326). Not only did *Dancing with Life on the Line* become one of the first examples for the "AIDS dance" genre (Gere 2004, 32) and, as a form of artistic activism, raise awareness for the disease, at the private micro level, too, the performance had a revelatory character: Some of the parents in the audience realized for the very first time that their sons had HIV when they saw them dancing in front of their eyes (Ross 2007a, 326).

Far exceeding the already transitory character of any performance and almost mocking the notorious complaint about dance's ephemerality, *Dancing with Life on the Line* had a temporal community of dancers and audience members that was explicitly short-lived. This urgency added to the social activism and the uncovering function of the event and rendered the performance into an anticipated commemoration. Looking back from a perspective after the death of all the performers, their shouts of *I want to live!* already hinted at loss and parting and marked the looming bereavement of all participating dancers.

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 8, NO 2 (2023):120–125
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2023.82510
ISSN 2057-7176

This death-relatedness, however, did not contradict Halprin's own view of the performance that she understood as a necessary element in a holistic process of healing. Distinguished from *curing*—the mere elimination of illness—Halprin's idea of *healing* also included a positive reference to diseases such as cancer and AIDS for which, according to the state of medical research at her time, 100% effective treatment was often or generally impossible. To address these conditions with the assumed healing power of dance, Halprin conceived

Dancing with Life on the Line as part of *Circle the Earth*, "a series of moving ceremonies and prayers in the tradition of a dance ritual" that linked holistic healing to the experience of being integrated into a community (Halprin, quoted in Ross 2007b, 157). On a poster for a second version of the performance in 1991 she described this experience:

> For a time, the circle of death, isolation, ignorance and fear was broken; the circle of health, peace and trust was strengthened. A healing had begun. But healing is an ongoing process, not an event. There is still a crisis. There is still no cure for AIDS, for cancer, for war, for pain, for whatever may separate us from each other and keep our lives unlived. We all want to live. And in some ways that means that we all have AIDS and we all have cancer. We all have war, doubt, struggles and pain. And only by crossing the lines that we draw between us, only by joining together in action, in feeling and with spirit, can there ever be an end to any of it. (Halprin 1991, n.p.)

Dancing with Life on the Line was a prime example for the effectiveness of dance as social action and the political dimension of contemporary dance (see Bennahum 2022). As such the two workshops and performances of 1989 and 1991 "not only erased the isolation and loneliness of terminal illness but turned a state of hiding into a moment of bold public declaration" (Ross 2007a, 326). With this publicness, the event highlighted the connection of performance, witnessing and responsibility: The audience members saw before their own eyes how vulnerable and doomed bodies presented themselves and thus became witnesses to their anticipated death. Bodies that would live on saw bodies whose lifespan would soon be cut short. In the simple process of watching and witnessing, the spectators became responsive bodies, and the mere fact that they would live on put them in an irrefutable position of responsibility.

In a nutshell, the example of Anna Halprin's *Circle the Earth: Dancing with Life on the Line* demonstrates the questions that confront an ethics of contemporary dance: How does an ethical responsibility arise in the situation of a performance and extend beyond the moment of dancing and of experiencing a dance piece? Based on but also going beyond the co-presence of moving and kinaesthetically responding bodies, ethics of contemporary dance address an extended audience and transcend the present moment of dancing into the past of ethical reflection and into the future of responsible action. What role do vulnerability, resilience, and non-identity play in terms of the temporal community of philosophers, dancers and spectators? How can we understand contemporaneity beyond shared time and presence so that contemporary dance can acknowledge the fragility and incompleteness of the past and unlock the potentiality of the future?

And how is this understanding of contemporaneity linked to ethical responsiveness in dance and dance reception?

These questions addressed the workshop *Responsive Bodies* held at the Freie Universität Berlin in the Cluster of Excellence EXC 2020 *Temporal Communities: Doing Literature in a Global Perspective* in summer 2021 (Schwan 2021). The idea for this workshop was born in 2019 as a small on-site event for German-speaking dance scholars with a particular interest in philosophical approaches to dance. Then the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and in the course of several postponements, the workshop evolved into a larger and international online event with an audience from China, India, Australia, the USA and many European countries. This workshop has now grown into the present issue of *Performance Philosophy*, with selected contributions from the Berlin conference and invited texts from other parts of the world, all of which relate philosophical connections of ethics and performativity to the materiality of moving bodies.

Responsive Bodies follows a deliberately broad understanding of dance based on the assumption that phenomena of dance are created in the interplay of movement perception and moving entities, not restricted to human bodies only, but including all creatures, objects, and substances. In this understanding, it is the phenomenological perspective through which movement is perceived as dance. When it comes to dance as human movement in time and space, the compilation looks at stage or concert dance as well as social dancing or dance partnering and even includes dance videos on YouTube and TikTok. This approach assumes perspectives on dancing that encompass spectatorship and the dancer's experience of moving, as well as the rich kinaesthetic transmissions between audience and dancers.

With regard to the aspects of temporal community, the issue adopts Giorgio Agamben's definition of the contemporary, unfolded in his introductory lecture of the course in Theoretical Philosophy 2006/7 at the Faculty of Arts and Design at the Università Iuav di Venezia (Agamben 2009). Agamben interprets contemporaneity more broadly and disparately than the mere participation in a shared time. For him, contemporaneity is on the one hand afflicted by the potentiality of the future anticipated in dense moments of the present, the now. On the other hand, the idea of the contemporary is characterised by a constructed reference to the *arché*, to the idea of a beginning in the past whose "indices and signatures" are perceived "in the most modern and recent" (Agamben 2009, 50).

Working with a model of contemporaneity that is not limited to current phenomena is particularly helpful regarding the ethical dimension of dance. For contemporaneity in art and dance draws its awareness of the darkness in the present situation, its entanglement with suffering and injustice both in envisioning a better life in the future as well as acknowledging the unfulfilled promises of the past. It is this aspect of a necessarily discontinuous experience within current forms of dance that also enables the specifically contemporary dance aesthetics that are linked to the expression of non-identity, singularity, and disruption to replace outdated models of dance aesthetics such as virtuosity, self-expression, and uncritical subjection to norms of movement and bodily appearance. This radical embrace of the singularities of movement, its disfiguration, imperfection,

unpredictability, and unrepeatability also sharpens the research focus significantly: *Responsive Bodies* sees contemporaneity in dance as both an ethical and aesthetical prerequisite.

Responsive Bodies builds on existing approaches to dance ethics (Rothfield 2014; Ruprecht 2017; Schwan 2017; Bresnahan, Katan-Schmid, and Houston 2020; Whalen 2023). Yet, both the workshop and the present issue do not focus on propagating morally good dancing (Bannon 2018, Jackson and Shapiro-Phim 2008) or a "more humane dance culture" (Jackson 2022), but rather scrutinise the fundamental ideas that underlie such projects. Ethics in contemporary dance is therefore discussed as an aspect of philosophical ethics and combines ethical theory with the practice of bodily movement. Starting from this basic assumption, the six contributions approach the question of ethics in contemporary dance in a spectrum that ranges from the general to the particular. Firstly, questions of society and community, dance partnering, and intersubjectivity are discussed. The relationship between community and exclusion, particularly of Black dance bodies, is then analysed from an Afropessimist perspective and with a focus on theories of Black feminism. The issue concludes with an outlook on the potential of dance ethics in the digital space, focussing on new strategies of self-empowerment in video dance.

Raf Geenens (KU Leuven) opens the discussion with his reflections on choreography and social dance, which is understood here as a constitutive outside for theatre or concert dance. Without its embedding in communities, dance as an art form must deal with social and ethical questions from the artificiality of its own medium. These choreographic strategies are discussed using exemplary works by Bronislava Nijinska (1891–1972) and Tino Sehgal (*1976), both of whom have a keen awareness of the nature of dance as an artistic medium with a particular ethical dimension.

Ilya Vidrin (Northeastern University) delves into the question of what conditions, enables or prevents responsible knowing in dance partnering. He attempts to gain a clearer picture of how expectations of interacting inform the dynamics between dance partners and what, in turn, partners can actually achieve in and through their connection. Arguing not as a utilitarian interested in maximizing good *simpliciter*, but as a social epistemologist thinking about the contingent goods that are present in relation, Ilya is particularly interested in considering what features of interaction are necessary for maximizing the affordances of dance partnership.

Victoria Wynne-Jones (University of Auckland) scrutinizes the ways in which somatics as a normative system tends to promote homogenised, a-historical and so-called natural bodies. This ideology is contrasted with the concept of kinaesthetic queerness and the role it might play in de-naturalising somatics and somatic attention, with particular attention to the concept of intersubjectivity and its connective function. Using theories by Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas, the text analyses artworks by queer Indigenous performance artists Forest V. Kapo (Te Atiawa, Ngāti Raukawa) and Val Smith (Pākehā) as well as Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz (Berlin).

Mlondolozi (Mlondi) Zondi (University of Southern California) addresses ethics of contemporary dance from an Afropessimist perspective. Through a reading of Nelisiwe Xaba's dance work entitled *Sakhozi Says "Non" to the Venus* (2010) Mlondi maintains that the machinations of antiblack

capitalism co-opt all sides of the debate. The gesture of inviting African performers to dance in European museums as substitutes for repatriated African objects goes together with the act of white psychic rehabilitation and an attempt to redeem enduring European colonial violence.

Stefan Hölscher (Berlin) takes a closer look at current Black feminist identity politics in German theatre. Focussing on the video clip series *Colonastics* (2020) by Joana Tischkau, he analyses how Afro-German feminist theatre makers have reacted to white dominant culture in the recent years. Based on theories by Caribbean philosopher Sylvia Wynter, Stefan explores how responsiveness corresponds to aesthetic practices of theatre-making and thus work towards a more pluralistic society.

Juan Manuel Aldape Muñoz (Cornell University) unravels the ethical implications of blockchain dance tokens and how they reshape the dynamics of race in short dance videos. By examining two different choreographic initiatives, JaQuel Knight's work for Beyoncé and Jalaiah Harmon's *Renegade Dance* and its popularisation on TikTok, Juan Manuel shows how artists can monetise their work and bridge the gap between labour and circulation. The innovative legal and financial pathways of dance Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) enable Black artists to re-imagine and realise a post-extractive dance world and signal a transformative shift in aesthetic economies and the limits of choreographic copyright.

These six contributions are of course only the first steps on the way to an ethics of contemporary dance. Their compilation is still incomplete but also an important indication of the desiderata for future debates on dance ethics. These debates will need to discuss additional key topics, such as the questions of vulnerability and care, or an analysis of how vision, touch, and kinesthesis are connected to ethical responsibility in the context of dance training and performance, and in the political realm as a whole. The same applies to the idea of dance witnessing and how this invokes aspects of guilt and responsible commitment that exceeds mere empathy and leads to proper social action. In short, a thorough examination of the *conditio humana* in dance is still on the horizon, but with this issue the first steps have been taken. From there we can and need to move onwards and upwards.

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Biography

Dr Alexander H. Schwan is a dance scholar and theologian with a research focus on spirituality, religion, and ethics. He is the author of the book *Schrift im Raum. Korrelationen von Tanzen und Schreiben bei Jan Fabre, Trisha Brown und William Forsythe*, which was honoured with the Tiburtius Award in 2016. His current book project, *Theologies of Modern Dance*, researches theological implications in the works of modernist choreographers in Europe, Israel, and the US. He has been a visiting lecturer at the University of California Santa Barbara and has held visiting fellowships at UC Berkeley, Princeton University, and Harvard. His article "Queering Jewish Dance: Baruch Agadati" (*Dance Research Journal* 2022) was awarded an Honourable Mention for the Dance Studies Association's Gertrude Lippincott Award for the best English-language article in dance studies.

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COMMUNITY AND CHOREOGRAPHY: A REFLECTION ON DANCE'S CONSTITUTIVE OUTSIDE

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Introduction

Browsing through the programmes of contemporary dance performances, one encounters numerous ambitious promises: to remove the distinction between spectators and performers, to address burning political issues, to rebuild communities and even to share the creation process with members of the public. These attempts to connect the aesthetic with 'the social', in the broadest sense of the word, have been discussed by scholars under such headings as "social choreographies" (Klein 2013, 196) and "immersive performances" (Kolb 2013, 34) and can be classified as part of a broader "relational aesthetics" (Bourriaud 2002). Although these choreographies are a continuation of the happenings, installations, and radical performances that flourished in the 1960s and 1970s, their number has significantly increased since the early 2000s (Kolb 2013, 34). Ever more choreographers seek to *bridge* the gap between onstage dancing and the world outside that stage: the audience, the broader community, and the urgent ethical and political challenges that we face today. Alexandra Kolb, among others, has investigated the political significance of this trend and doubts whether the widespread assumption that these immersive performances are "liberatory", "innovative" and "anti-establishment" is justified (Kolb 2013, 35). Rather than a countercultural force, they might just as well be the ideological "reflection" or "mirror" of a new phase of capitalist production that is centred on creativity, cooperation, and participation

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 8, NO 2 (2023):126–146
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2023.82423
ISSN 2057-7176

(Kolb 2013, 41, 48). (In the field of the visual arts, a similar tone is struck by Claire Bishop [2012, 277].)

In this essay, I will not address the trend towards social or immersive choreographies head-on and I will mostly leave aside its political implications. Instead, I propose to take a step backwards and ask a more basic question. Why is this *bridging* such a challenge? Why does contemporary dance not have a more natural or self-evident connection with the communities in which it finds itself? The relation between dance and the outside world seems fraught with obstacles and is a source of permanent concern, but why is this so?

My premise is that this question can only be answered by taking into account the constitutive outside of artistic dancing, namely *social dancing*, the kind of dancing that can today be found in clubs, at parties, in private homes, and in retro ballrooms. This is where most dancing actually happens, but it falls outside the remit of contemporary western dance as an artform. In social dancing, the nature of dance is on full display: dancing always served community formation and used to be an intrinsic part of life's most important rituals. Anthropologists and historians abundantly show that the original purpose of dancing was social: collective dancing strengthened communities and contributed to communal flourishing (cf. Turner 2017, McNeill 1995, Ehrenreich 2006).

Yet in order to become art, dancing was transformed into *works*, which populate an "imaginary museum" (to use the term of Lydia Goehr) and which transcend the moment of performance so that they can be seen, re-seen and contemplated by audiences and critics.[1] This transformation allowed artistic stage dancing to flourish and to rival the status of the fine arts, but it also deprived dancing of its embeddedness in the life of communities, that is, of the very role that had given dance its purpose and its meaning. I believe this historical constellation might help to explain the condition in which contemporary dance finds itself. No longer an organic part of communal life, it must re-connect with societal and ethical issues from within the artificiality of its own medium.

I will flesh out these intuitions in four separate sections. I will start by offering a brief historical account of the way music and dancing emancipated themselves from their earlier social roles in order to become autonomous artforms. In the second section, I will seek to explain why this background remains relevant for the medium of dance today and why it puts dance in a difficult and somewhat tragic position. I will then discuss two examples of choreographers who deal with this condition in very different yet remarkably lucid ways. In the third section I will look at the historical case of Bronislava Nijinska's *Les Noces* (1923). In the final section I turn to the work of contemporary choreographer Tino Sehgal.

Dancing as art

My reading of the history of dance is strongly inspired by Lydia Goehr's book, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Goehr 2007). In this book, Goehr reflects on the convoluted process through which music became an artistic medium. It is worth looking at this process, and at Goehr's

presentation of it, in some detail because it provides a good template to understand what happened in the history of dance. Both music and dance started out as ephemeral social practices but ended up as mediums of high art. Today, many people take it for granted that composers and choreographers can produce autonomous works of art: works that are, like the products of visual artists, available for aesthetic appreciation independently of their context of creation. But this way of understanding music and dance is not a natural given. It is the outcome of a specific historical development.

In the case of music, this development has to be situated between the Renaissance and nineteenth-century Romanticism. Somewhen in this period, the way music was perceived underwent a profound change. According to Goehr, the watershed is the beginning of the nineteenth century. Up until the late-eighteenth century, musical practice was understood and evaluated in light of extra-musical ideals. Music was, for instance, an instrument at the service of religion or a pedagogical tool. (And it served pedestrian causes like dancing or military marching.) Such extra-musical purposes were operative in discourses about what music is and in its self-legitimation as a practice. The word practice is of particular importance here. As Goehr explains, music was sometimes included in broad definitions of the arts, but was mostly seen as separate from painting, sculpture, and the decorative crafts for the simple reason that it is performative. To the extent that music was accepted as a form of art, it was because of the skills involved in singing, playing an instrument or composing music. But it fell short in comparison to the other arts because nothing permanent was created: music might be an admirable form of "skilled doing" (Goehr 2007, 149), but it was tragically distinct from the productive arts because it "did not result in lasting or concrete products" (151).

As the eighteenth century progresses, however, aesthetic discourses about music shift and music gradually frees itself from its entanglement in non-musical concerns. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Beethoven is producing his mature works, this process is complete and music is accepted as an autonomous artform. Analysing a great variety of texts, Goehr demonstrates that music is now discussed and evaluated in light of intra-musical ideals. Music, it turns out, can "be divorced from everyday contexts, form part of a collection of works of art, and be contemplated purely aesthetically" (Goehr 2007, 173–174). This outcome is less obvious than it might appear in retrospect. The material that was actually available, "transitory performances" and "incomplete scores", was hardly comparable to the concrete objects or "commodities" turned out by the fine arts (Ibid.). Important conceptual help came from the notion of a *musical work*, which emerges around 1800. The notion of a work established an analogy with the visual arts and conveyed the message that musical compositions should be "valued and contemplated as permanently existing creations of composers/artists" (174). Moreover, it helped to construct what Goehr calls (borrowing an expression from André Malraux) an "imaginary museum", in which the music of great composers is arranged as if it is a series of discrete objects, perfect upon completion by their author, in a clear chronological order, always available for retrieval and inspection, and with a value that can be greater or lesser than that of other objects in the museum.

This "objectification" of music, as Goehr also calls it (Ibid.), was not a merely conceptual move. It involved concrete changes at the level of composing, playing and listening to music. One striking change is the appearance of *Werktreue*, the norm that performers should be faithful to the work and execute music exactly as intended by its maker. This was necessary to give musical compositions the permanent existence already enjoyed by paintings and sculptures. Musicians were also increasingly expected to *rehearse* before *performing*, a novel distinction that broadened the gap between merely playing music and showcasing 'the work'. Equally striking are the new rules for listeners. Before, music was often part of a ceremony or was played in the background during other activities. In consequence, compositions were not necessarily performed from beginning to end and audiences rarely bothered to listen all the way through. The practice of listening to lengthy musical compositions in silence and full concentration had to be invented and imposed upon audiences. These and other changes gradually lifted music from its embeddedness in social practices—in churches, courts, and elsewhere—and turned it into a self-sufficient artform enjoyed in dedicated buildings and settings. As Goehr notes, this process went hand in hand with greater commodification: if music consists of works or objects, then it can circulate more easily in the marketplace of art.

Similar stories can and have been told for other art forms. But I believe music offers the best model to understand what happened in the history of dance. On the one hand, this is because dancing also had to make the bold jump from an immaterial collective practice to a form of objecthood before it could join the elevated ranks of the high arts, a challenge which painting, for instance, never had to face. On the other hand, it is because the chronologies correspond. Around 1800, the professionalization of dance accelerated and ballets were increasingly designed to be independent works of art, repeatable and available for aesthetic enjoyment by passive spectators. Thus, the emergence of dance as an autonomous medium of art seems to coincide with the emancipation of music as an artform. Let me spell out this evolution for the case of dance in somewhat greater detail.

As anthropologists have amply demonstrated, dancing already played an important role in early human societies. The practice of dancing together, be it in ceremonial or non-ceremonial contexts, always served to forge a sense of community. Dancing, Barbara Ehrenreich writes, can be considered a form of "biotechnology", invented and developed to strengthen group cohesion (Ehrenreich 2006, 24). Moreover, dancing patterns often carried symbolic meaning, expressing what participants shared in common and offering a condensed representation of social structures and communal norms—as is attested, for instance, by Victor Turner's classical analyses of rituals in indigenous societies (cf. Turner 1987, 94; 2017, 117). One should be wary of using the anthropological record for making universalizing claims about the ritual or societal role of dancing (cf. Savigliano 2009, 171–172) or for painting an overly harmonious picture of early human societies (cf. Geenens 2023, 219–223), yet recent empirical research in psychology certainly confirms that there are deep causal connections between dancing and social bonding (e.g., Reddish, Fischer, Bulbulia 2013; Tarr, Launay, and Dunbar 2016).

What matters here is that in European Renaissance and Baroque dancing, the soil from which dance as an autonomous artform has sprung, this communal role can still be recognized: even here, dancing remained deeply embedded in collective life. This is certainly true for the social dancing of common people. Weddings, fairs, and other events provided ample occasion for joint dancing, often including dance competitions (cf. McGowan 2008, 202), a far precursor to the way today's amateur competitions continue to connect dance and community. And staged performances, including dance sections, were regularly set up in schools or richer homes. But it is especially true for the complex and codified dancefloor interactions of the higher classes in this period (as attested by ample historical research). Although partly done for enjoyment and entertainment, aristocratic dancing was highly structured and normative and it was suffused with meaning as it presented, in the terms of Jennifer Nevile, "a moving depiction of the relationships between men and women" (Nevile 2008a, 5). Moreover, it had an unmistakable function in communal life, as a centrepiece activity at major social and political meetings and as a means of establishing or maintaining personal connections. Social dancing also played a role in upholding hierarchy and class structure. On the dance floor, couples were typically "arranged in order of rank" and it was "those who were the highest in rank or were the most honoured guests" that initiated the dancing (Nevile 2008b, 80–81). At the same time, the elite's dignified style of dancing was an important social marker: as a sign of their purportedly superior self-control (and other mental and physical qualities), it served to assert the distance from the way ordinary people moved and danced (Nevile 2008b, 81). The writings of Renaissance and Baroque ballet masters testify to this, for instance when they connect dancing skills to morally desirable character traits (cf. Nevile 2008c, 19). On a sidenote, it can be mentioned that these same features—affirming hierarchies and performing purportedly superior identities—remain pervasive in social dancing today (see, among many other examples, the illustrative work of Cindy García on different salsa techniques and their social meaning in contemporary Los Angeles [García 2013, 47–65]).

Dance's societal role was also on display in the dance performances staged in aristocratic and court circles, think of the seminal *Ballet comique de la Reine*, held in 1581, or the numerous similar ballets organized throughout the next century. These ballets were performances executed before a public, carefully crafted and often very costly, but they were not understood as autonomous works of art. The name of the choreographer seemed irrelevant (often it is not even recorded) and there was no intention to make these ballets endure beyond the moment of performance. Particularly telling in the case of the *Ballet comique de la Reine* is that the lavishly expensive decor pieces were burnt in a bonfire at the end of the celebrations.

Moreover, the line between dancers and spectators was fluid (Prudhommeau 1989, 81–82). Those who were watching could become dancers, and the other way around. This reversibility of roles was possible because the steps were not particularly challenging. As Julia Sutton explains, the steps performed during spectacles were largely the same as those that were used in ballroom settings. At most, they "enlarged upon or heightened the standard steps and dance types of the time" (Sutton 1995, 22).[2] Thus, theatrical dances in this period were not designed to "demonstrate a vast division in skill between amateurs and professionals" (Ibid.). It was rather the case that "aristocratic amateurs and professional dancers performed side by side in these productions" (Ibid.). Margaret

McGowan, in her standard study on Renaissance dance, writes that spectators were "not separated from but really part of the performance. Performer and spectator belonged together through their mutual knowledge of dance steps and figurations" (2008, 58).

The fact that the steps were often standard steps from social dancing, helps to explain why the choreography was not seen as a work of art. The movements were not supposed to express anything particular, and they were certainly "not designed to give an audience the choreographer's dramatic or philosophical vision" (Sutton 1995, 22). There was simply no need to create distinct movements for the purpose of one specific ballet. The primary purpose of this period's sophisticated dance vocabulary was to help people appear in an elegant way in front of others in prestigious social settings. Stylish dance moves functioned, just like expensive clothes and jewelry, as props in an all-important status game (Nevile 2008b). As McGowan put it: "in Renaissance dance each movement, each step and each gesture served to display the person" (2008, 18).[3] Although Renaissance choreographers sometimes tried to convey philosophical or mystical messages to their audience (for instance through geometric floor patterns, cf. Nevile 2012, 30–31), the focus was really "on self-presentation and display through dance, rather than on choreography conceived (in twentieth century terms) as art" (Pakes 2020, 27).

Of course, all of this will change dramatically. Already in the early 1700s, authors like Pierre-Jean Burette and John Weaver explored the idea of dance as a serious artform, but it is Jean-Georges Noverre's 1760 *Lettres sur la danse* that shows most clearly the emergence of a new discourse. Part of Noverre's motivation in writing this book was to rebut criticisms that had been levelled at the successors to virtuosos like Marie Sallé. Professional dancing, as it started to flourish outside earlier court and ballroom settings, was often perceived as hollow entertainment and empty technical display. Even Jean-Jacques Rousseau weighed in, for instance accusing the celebrated ballet master François-Robert Marcel of performing mere "monkey tricks" (in the French original: "*singeries*", Rousseau 1969, 391). In satirical prints of the day, dancers were sometimes mocked for providing merely physical feats, such as jumping very high (Au 1997, 33). Noverre went on the offensive and laid out an ambitious programme for dancing as an artistic medium, seeking to demonstrate that ballet can reach the same expressive heights as painting and other respectable arts. He argues that, "under the direction of a man of genius", dancing will, "in time, obtain the praises, which the enlightened world bestows on poetry and painting, and become entitled to the rewards with which the latter are daily honored" (Noverre 2014, 257).

Noverre's attempts to emancipate dance as an artform centres on its potential to tell stories in pantomimic form. He agrees with the criticisms levelled by Rousseau, Denis Diderot, and others, admitting that much of the ballet of his time is "dull" (Noverre 2014, 248), "mechanical" (250) and mere "*divertissement*" (285). But he believes that ballet is capable of much more. Against the "mechanical-material" dancing he dislikes, Noverre presents the ideal of a "pantomimic-soulful" form of dance (Pakes 2020, 47), in which every movement becomes meaningful and expresses inner feelings, just like "every stroke of the pencil conveys a meaning" (Noverre 2014, 253).[4] Noverre also proposed novel ways of viewing dance, insisting for instance "that the theater should be dark and quiet" (Homans 2010, 76).

Thus, in Noverre we see an analogous development to the one Goehr observed in the history of music. Eighteenth-century dance is seeking a justification to be elevated into a serious artform. It is no coincidence that for Noverre, more than for any of his predecessors, the evanescence of dance—the fact that, unlike the fine arts, it does not result in stable, tangible products—was so intolerable (Lepecki 2004, 125–127). Expressiveness and narrativity have to step in and compensate for this weakness. In the terms of Anna Pakes: "For a dance to be a work of fine art, it seems, the presence of meaningful gesture is crucial" (Pakes 2020, 46). Dances should thenceforth be "interpretable or *about* something", "their semantic content is what renders them *art* rather than 'mere' entertainment or divertissement" (Pakes 2020, 52–53). This distinction between expressive or representative dancing on the one hand and mere dancing around on the other, is also connected to a growing gap between professional and non-professional dancers, and between performers and spectators. The theoretical dichotomy, Pakes notes, "reflects the growing division between social and theatrical dancing" (46).

Despite Noverre's innovatory programme, the actual steps and poses in theatrical dancing remained mostly those of social dancing. Noverre, by the way, admits that he is not so much after changes and improvements at the level of steps or the technical quality of execution. In this regard, he writes, the art has already "attained the highest degree of perfection" (Noverre 2014, 256). Thus, even if Noverre and his contemporaries see themselves as artists creating individual artworks, it is not "the detail of the danced pas or even the pantomimic action, but rather the dramaturgical construction for which (they) [...] take authorial responsibility" (Pakes 2020, 57). It is only after the French Revolution that the vocabulary of stage-dancers will drastically change and will be divorced from its background in aristocratic conventions (Homans 2010, 97). Some authors, like Edmund Fairfax, claim that the movement vocabulary of ballroom dancing and that of stage dancing had already drifted apart in the first half of the eighteenth century, with higher jumps, ornate limb movements, bodily exaggerations, lifts, and even acrobatic tricks giving stage dancing an exuberance that went far beyond the decorum acceptable on the social dance floor (Fairfax 2003, 17, 37, 42, 135).[5] This pertains especially to lighthearted, comical or grotesque dances (precisely the kind of entertainment that Rousseau, Noverre and others criticized), with the serious ballets that dominated the Parisian scene maintaining a slower and more subdued style (86, 161–162). Fairfax's findings suggest an evolution rather than a sharp break, with the increasing complexity and virtuosity of theatre steps making them gradually unattainable for non-professionals. Yet this evolution certainly accelerated in postrevolutionary France, as professional dancers now subjected themselves to gruelling training regimes, in line with new anatomical insights. Dance training, Susan Leigh Foster writes, became a "science" (Foster 1996, 154). Ballet dancers thereby acquired things like advanced point technique and extreme turnouts and executed ever more complex combinations of pirouettes, cabrioles and entrechats (Foster 1996, 157, 168; Garafola 1997, 4; Homans 2010, 128), technical developments that helped to harden the divide between professional and amateur dancing (cf. Foster 1996, 173).

After the French Revolution there was not only technical but also increasing artistic innovation, with new ballets requiring new and original movements, leading to, among other things, the collapse of Feuillet-notation as it could not accommodate these newly designed and ever-changing

steps (Pakes 2020, 43). At the same time, choreographers and dancers stumbled upon the thematic content that perfectly befitted the medium of ballet as it had now developed: the evocation of a dreamy, sensual world outside of modernity and populated by such delicate creatures as sylphs or wilis, characters "whose modus operandi was dancing itself" (Foster 1996, 199). This delightful, otherworldly atmosphere is evoked, not just by the plot or the costumes, but most of all by the new dance vocabulary: it is the ethereal steps and body movements that pointed to an alternative, imaginary realm and that captured the imagination of romantic writers like François-René Chateaubriand. Thus, with ballets like *La Sylphide* and *Giselle*, dancing can finally present itself as a distinct and fully fledged artform, with its own unique language and purpose (Foster 1996, 209–218). And that means that the break with social dancing is now complete. Two distinct fields of dancing have replaced a previously unified field. Foster summarizes this momentous development in particularly strong language when she states that dancing, "as the celebration of shared physical values through which individuals discovered and defined identity no longer existed" (1996, 173). According to Foster, an eighteenth-century spectator to a nineteenth-century ballet would immediately notice and complain that the connection with "performative sociality", a connection previously maintained through the language of social dancing, has been lost (173, 253).

Again, one should not exaggerate the sharpness of this historical break. Anna Pakes has argued that the emergence of dance as an autonomous medium did not exactly happen in 1800: dance's expressive force remained long dependent on music or programme texts and dancing was often closely wedded to the medium of opera (Pakes 2020, 45–67). Against Foster it can also be argued that nineteenth-century ballet maintained connections with social dancing by prominently featuring scenes of ballroom dancing and folkloristic dancing, thereby including an, albeit stylized, representation of some of its ancestry within itself. And this was not just a matter of looking back at the past: the national dances on stage were connected to an ongoing craze for national dancing in the audience, especially in the 1830s and 1840s, when amateur dancers "flocked to dance studios to take lessons in national dancing" and "purchased national costumes to wear to public balls" (Arkin and Smith 1997, 17). One could also point to the broad and rich current of spectacular, popular ballets, playing in music-halls and commercial venues from the 1870s onwards. The ballets performed in this circuit were driven by profit rather than artistic ambition, but they did occupy a central place in the social world of urban nightlife. Sarah Gutsche-Miller provides vivid descriptions of the Parisian music-hall ballets and emphasizes that they pulled in very diverse audiences (although usually not the highly cultured or intellectual) and as such certainly had a community-creating effect (Gutsche-Miller 2015).[6] And there are further popular side-currents and social phenomena that are all too often overlooked, think for instance of the ritual role *The Nutcracker* has come to play in North American society (cf. Fisher 2003, 171–194). Yet it seems undeniable that ballet, in its dominant form, eventually made the jump to high art and, just like music, came to be recognized as an autonomous and serious artform, with a value that transcends momentaneous pleasures or social effects. Early confirmation of this jump is provided by the acceptance, already in nineteenth-century legal practice, of the choreographer's intellectual ownership over their artistic creation (cf. Alsne 1994; Marquié 2012), neatly in line with the work-logic described by Goehr.

Further confirmation of dance's credibility as a medium of high art is provided by the development of modern and postmodern dance. One could even claim that the ultimate part of the jump was only made here. It is impossible to cover, within the bounds of this article, the full spectrum of twentieth century dance. But among its many strands it is probably American modern and postmodern choreographers who most self-consciously distanced themselves from popular and commercial forms of dancing. Among other stylistic choices, this often implied a marked preference for difficult, i.e., less 'dancey', music. The ambition of these choreographers, like that of Noverre two centuries earlier, was to bring artistic dancing close to other, more prestigious forms of art, in particular the modernist visual arts as they triumphed in the middle of the twentieth century. I believe it is here, and in the contemporary dance that inherits and today continues their technical and aesthetic practices, that the divorce between artistic and social dancing has been consummated most radically.

The constitutive outside

The historical ground I am covering here, will be familiar to most readers. Yet I bring it to mind because I believe that, even today, dancing as an artform continues to be haunted and defined by that which it separated itself off from. French philosopher Jacques Derrida has a concept that accurately captures this particular relation: the constitutive outside. For Derrida, identity is constructed by excluding and by establishing hierarchy: things are what they are by distinguishing themselves from something else. And in order to remain what they are, maintaining the division is necessary. Yet the excluded object is not completely different or outside: it remains present on the inside and is even constitutive of it. Derrida incites us "to speculate upon the power of exteriority as constitutive of interiority" (Derrida 1995, 313).

This scheme has been fleshed out in various contexts. Ernesto Laclau invokes it when explaining that the objectivity of political identities is achieved by denying, excluding, or repressing something else which, at the same time, continues to threaten "the identity of the inside" and prevents it "from achieving positivity" (Laclau 1990, 137). Judith Butler uses it when discussing the form-matter distinction in *Bodies That Matter*, where she states that a system's "constitutive outside" is "nevertheless *internal* to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity" (Butler 2011, 13). And in *Gender Trouble* she claims that heterosexuality derives its libidinal energy (i.e., its "cathexis") from an initial yet forbidden homosexual attraction (Butler 2007, 80–81). This is the dynamics of the constitutive outside: the self is identified by excluding—and by elevating itself above—something else which, nevertheless, remains present and even productive of the inside.

I do not wish to propose this scheme as a general ontology, but I think it might reveal something about dance, which, as an artistic medium, cannot be exhaustively defined or understood in reference to itself but remains tainted by that which it separated itself off from, namely social dancing. This differentiation is a work without end: dancing as art has to continue proving that it is *not* social dancing. Note that the word dancing, in most languages, refers to both practices indiscriminately. In daily language use, the first meaning that listeners hear is probably that of social dancing: the kind of dancing that happens in familiar settings for enjoyment and

entertainment without any artistic aspirations. Yet artistic dancing does have a lot in common with social dancing—the relation between these two forms of dancing is not merely homonymic—which makes it all the more important to mark the difference. The very identity and legitimacy of dancing as an artform depend on securing the distinction. Even if the uninitiated might see in contemporary dance nothing more than just 'dancing around', for dance as an artistic enterprise it is crucial to establish beyond doubt that the dancing on stage is different and more meaningful than what happens on the social dance floor.

At the same time, the outside continues to exercise a strange attraction. Stage dancing, at its most energetic and engaging moments, comes close to the dynamism of intense social dancing and maybe even depends for its aesthetic effect on the audience's familiarity with the frenzy of non-artistic dancing. At some occasions, contemporary choreographers seem to deliberately recreate the energy and intensity that we associate with the delirious dancing at, say, a rave party. Of course, even if choreographers hope to evoke the excitement and the wild abandon of a dance party, they do not want their work to be fully identical to it. Yes, the audience should experience a moment of total involvement, but all the while sitting quiet and motionless in their seats, consciously aware of the fact that they are consuming an artwork. At such moments, choreographers are walking an interesting thin line. They want to conjure up the vitality and involvement of social dancing, while posting enough signs to mark the difference between their work and an ordinary dance party. In fact, nineteenth-century ballet already offered a version of this. When the first act of a ballet is set in the real world, it is often to display ballroom or other social dances that the viewer might be familiar with.[7] These stylized representations of social dancing forge a connection (the dancing you will see on stage is not unlike the dancing you might do yourself) all while maintaining a clear separation (the professional dancers have 'balleticized' the vernacular material and the audience is certainly not expected to join in). In one and the same operation, the audience is drawn in and excluded.

All of this suggests that the medium of dance finds itself in a somewhat tragic position. It is connected to the practice of social dancing, with which it has a lot in common. Yet historically it has separated itself off from social dancing, a separation that needs to be constantly reaffirmed. At the same time, this outside continues to present an appealing picture of what dancing ideally is. And I think this outside is particularly appealing because of its manifest and almost effortless communal role. Social dancing is naturally embedded in the lifeworld and—even when it takes a critical or countercultural form—rarely fails to engender a community. This is in sharp contrast to artistic dancing, which has lost this firm embeddedness in communal life and now has to try and re-connect with the community (and with the issues that occupy the community) from within the artificiality of its own medium. This is a tall order, and often it does not go well.

Erika Fischer-Lichte, in her book *The Transformative Power of Performance*, explains in detail how the performative turn of the 1960s had this precise aim. Performers wanted to make the hard boundary with their spectators permeable and even tried to make the roles of performers and spectators reversible again (2008, 40–41). There was a very diverse range of participatory techniques, experiments, and strategies, but the idea was always to explore the bodily co-presence

of performers and spectators so as to establish a temporary community of co-subjects, the most intense examples being the ritual performances directed by, for instance, Richard Schechner or Hermann Nitsch (2008, 40, 51 ff.). These temporary communities did sometimes have a "transformative" effect on all those involved and, according to Fischer-Lichte, could even achieve a "reenchantment" of the world (2008, 181). However, even if the boundary between art and everyday life was sometimes successfully erased, it has to be admitted that these small communities quickly fell apart after the performance. Moreover, the participation of spectators sometimes led to rather undesired outcomes. Even Fischer-Lichte wonders whether these performances were not simply recreating the old, hierarchical relationship between performers and spectators in a new guise. One is reminded here of Victor Turner's lucid warning that a true return to ritual is impossible: the differentiations of modern society cannot be undone.

Gabriele Klein, in turn, has analysed the new wave of participatory projects that swept the performance arts from the late 1990s onwards, when performers and choreographers again sought to blur the boundary between art and life. Although they often do so by operating outside the traditional buildings dedicated to the arts, one should not forget that such initiatives are politically and institutionally welcomed and stimulated. Klein rightly remarks that funders increasingly expect the performance arts to justify themselves in reference to their impact on social integration and participation (Klein 2013, 205–206; see also Kolb 2011 and Mullis 2021, 433). Inspired by Andrew Hewitt, Klein uses the label "social choreographies" to indicate choreographers who try to establish explicit connections "between the social and the aesthetic" (Klein 2013, 198). As Klein explains, the participation of the audience in such choreographies can take different forms. Sometimes things are set up so that the presence of the audience becomes, at least conceptually, an indispensable part of the work. Other choreographers aim for active participation and try to turn spectators into genuine performers. On occasion, the audience is even invited to take part in the artistic creation process and becomes a co-producer of the work. Such projects sound promising, but Klein sees a yawning, inevitable "chasm between the theoretical promise of and political aspiration towards participation and the actual aesthetic practice of art" (Klein 2013, 202). In reality, "the promise of community" leads to a tension or even a "conflict" with the artistic commitments and with the expectation of "artistic quality" (Ibid.). A true return to the integral embeddedness of dance in social life, as we imagine it before the emancipation of dance to high art, seems impossible.

In order to counter the pessimistic tone of this message, I would like to discuss two examples of choreographic strategies that are interesting precisely because they display a clear awareness of the ambivalence of dance as an artistic medium. On the one hand, choreographies are works of art: the use of a specific formal technique (imposing movements on human bodies) generates products that circulate and compete in the marketplace of art. On the other hand, they remain internally connected to what seems to be the inbuilt telos of dancing, namely to provide a collective experience that serves community formation. I believe that Bronislava Nijinska and Tino Sehgal, each in their own way, play with exactly this doubleness and smartly exploit it for their own artistic purposes. Of course, they cannot offer an escape from the artificiality of the medium of dance (there is no escape). But by using the medium of dance in a lucid way they might be able to reveal

something of the condition in which that medium finds itself. Moreover, their work shows that there is no reason to be nostalgic or to hope for reconnection. Dance's ambivalent situation is tragic, but maybe this is also what makes dance so interesting.

A countryside wedding

Bronislava Nijinska's choreography, *Les Noces* (1923), is a key work in the history of dance for many reasons, but here I will concentrate on the way Nijinska dissects the connection between dancing and community.[8] The theme of *Les Noces* is a Russian peasant wedding which Nijinska depicted in sober colours and rigid movements. This was in opposition to the initial plans of Sergei Diaghilev, who imagined Igor Stravinsky's music as the soundtrack for a dazzling, colourful Russian countryside feast. Nijinska, who had developed into a self-confident choreographer in the context of Kyiv's modernist art scene (cf. Garafola 2011), had no desire to embellish the harsh reality of Russian peasant life and present a folklorist fantasy. Nor, by the way, was she ever seduced by the new, utopian collectivism propagated by Soviet authorities.

In *Les Noces*, Nijinska's political views are clearly on display: her choreography criticizes the oppressive nature of organized countryside weddings and, beyond that, of community and tradition in general. Nijinska would have preferred to convey this message through a completely abstract choreography, but had to compromise on this point with Diaghilev, who insisted that a ballet should have a clear story (cf. Nijinska 1937, 617–618). The result is an unusual mixture of abstraction and figuration. The ballet's four scenes depict four consecutive moments in the wedding feast, but the plot is only thinly sketched.

The ballet's severe, abstract and very rhythmical movements, often danced in unison by large groups, clearly symbolize the oppressive effect of tradition and uniformity. Think for instance of the energetic male group dancing (with many steps borrowed from Russian traditional social dancing) or the monumental mass scenes. Nijinska uses the corps de ballet, Susan Jones writes, to reflect "the will of the community" (2013, 124). Often, the spatial positioning of the dancers, on long lines with their bodies fully facing the audience, or in tight blocks and tableaux, melts the dancers together in an anonymous collectivity—an effect that can be traced back to Russian icon painting (Johnson 1987, 155–158). Nancy Van Norman Baer captures the effect well when she writes that Nijinska "manipulated masses [...] as an impersonal body, thus symbolizing the weight of custom and the inexorable working of fate" (1986, 34). Jones talks of "massed human blocks" (Jones 2013, 124).

In stark opposition to these heavy masses, Nijinska regularly draws attention to what can only be described as the *humanity* of the dancers. Nijinska makes their presence as individuals felt, for instance by emphasizing their eyes and faces and sometimes by having their gaze linger unusually long on the audience. (Stephanie Jordan describes other "flashes of humanity" as well (Jordan 2007, 360).) This contrast, between a monolithic and geometric choreography on the one hand, and the presence of the dancers as recognizable individuals on the other, vividly evokes the powerlessness of the individual Russian peasants (and, in particular, their young daughters). This theme is

expressed most strikingly at the climactic moment of the choreography, close to the end of *Les Noces* (at number 122 in the score), when all dancers incline their head and bodies in a grave and ceremonial way. This collective moment of solemn bowing, by the newlyweds, their families, and the entire corps de ballet, is inspired by the libretto, which describes, at this very moment, how the bride will have to be obedient and bow to everybody (cf. Stravinsky 1986). Nijinska expresses here, in a gripping and monumental scene, both the enormity and the terror of collective subjection to tradition. Somewhat surprisingly, the pivotal importance of this moment is overlooked by the existent interpretations of *Les Noces*.

In all these ways, then, Nijinska has turned the dancing and feasting at a wedding party into an activist denouncement of the oppression of the individual by convention and community. But it seems to me that there is a second level to *Les Noces*. Nijinska is also suggesting that dancing itself has something oppressive about it. Or, at least, she uses dance's oppressive potential as a means to convey her political message. In Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel "We", written in Russian in 1920–1921, and like *Les Noces* dealing with the tension between collectivity and individual, there is a striking passage where the protagonist wonders what makes dancing beautiful. He concludes that it is beautiful because it is "constrained movement". Fitting the body into abstract shapes and collective rhythms points to an "absolute and ecstatic obedience". And he adds that if our ancestors danced at the most important moments of life, in religious rituals and military ceremonies, "it is because the instinct of subjection always existed in man" (Zamyatin 1924, 6). It is not known whether Nijinska read anything by Zamyatin, but I believe that, in *Les Noces*, she is operating on a similar intuition.

Nijinska has altered the ballet vocabulary to make it harder and less natural. Already by putting her dancers in very stark, "flat", front-facing positions, all movements acquire a rigid character (cf. Johnson 1987, 158). And she strongly emphasizes the geometric shapes inherent in the academic vocabulary; arms, for instance, are extra rounded so as to form clearly visible circles. Several other features, such as the machine-like *pas de bourrée* on points, similarly contribute to the geometric and harsh quality of *Les Noces*. As Van Norman Baer explains, Nijinska consciously used pointe technique, not to make the dancers look elegant, but in order to strip "naturalism from the movement" (1986, 34). This effect is further strengthened because the dancers often seem to "approach their material like a series of facts" (Jordan 2007, 347) and execute it in a "task-like", "untheatrical" manner, as Stephanie Jordan aptly notes (356). Combined with the grueling, repetitive rhythms of Igor Stravinsky's music, *Les Noces* uncompromisingly brings out the constraining and mechanical character of the ballet vocabulary. Dance is ultimately about forcibly imposing collective forms on the movements of individual human beings, or so Nijinska suggests in *Les Noces*.

This betrays a lucid awareness of the specificity, and the ambiguities, of dance as an artistic medium. Yes, dance has an inherent connection with community formation. But Nijinska sees nothing attractive there. To the contrary, she uses dance's inbuilt collectivism as a means to expose the risks of too much community. Hence, Nijinska would see little reason to be nostalgic about times when dance had a more organic connection with community life. This creates a sharp

contrast with *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) which, as conceived by Igor Stravinsky and Nikolai Roerich, was driven by fantasies about archaic peasant communities in an imagined pagan Scythia. Roerich, in an early programmatic text, had already set up an opposition between the rationalism and artificiality of intellectual, high art and a new art that would recreate prehistoric spontaneity and would unite "artist and spectator [...] in a creative ecstasy" (Roerich quoted in Taruskin 1996, 853).

This is ... dancing in a museum

A second, very different example that I would like to discuss, is the work of contemporary choreographer Tino Sehgal, who creates what he calls "constructed situations" (cf. von Hantelmann 2010, 128–174). Typically, this is a group of casually dressed performers doing relatively simple things within a museum setting, to the slight bewilderment of visitors. The performers might chat and sing. They might play games or converse with the spectators about politics. Often they move around in slow motion. But there can also be exuberant dancing. According to Sehgal, the work of art (i.e., the constructed situation) is the complete experience as it is lived in the moment, including the actual interactions between performers and audience members. To underline the situational nature of his works, recordings in any format are strictly forbidden. Yet his works are not ephemeral events or unique interventions; they are usually on display for weeks on end. Museums can even buy Sehgal's works—for steep sums—to continue showing them in the future. For Sehgal, this is a semi-ironic way to participate in the art market: he sells immaterial products, in line with today's increasingly postmaterial capitalism.

On one possible reading of Sehgal's work, he fulfils the promises listed at the beginning of this article: removing the distinction between spectators and performers, bringing them together in a new community, all while addressing burning societal issues. *Yet Untitled* (2013), for instance, is sometimes interpreted as an "enthralling union of spectators and performers" (Engels 2015, 9). Similarly, it has been claimed that *This Situation* (2007) creates "a collective bodily attending" of performers and spectators, a union that "goes beyond conscious acts of individual participation" (Pape, Solomon, and Thain 2014, 90). At certain moments, *This Situation* "is fully experienced as a shared embodiment" (92).

The reading of Sehgal's work that I wish to propose here, goes in the exact opposite direction. It is true that many of his pieces create intricate connections between performers and spectators. To the outsider, performers and spectators are sometimes hardly distinguishable. In *Yet Untitled*, for instance, the performers initially look identical to regular museumgoers. Yet at some point they proceed to sit down on the museum floor, slow their movements and start going through an endless series of poses, often accompanying themselves by beatboxing. Thus, a contrast emerges with the other museum visitors, who are of course moving in a perfectly ordinary way: walking, scratching their hair or pushing a stroller. The difference in movement quality marks the separation between spectators and dancers, but in a very minimal way. Spectators and dancers supposedly share the same experience, but in fact the latter occupy an intimate sphere from which the audience remains excluded. The separation is not spatial in nature, as in a classical theatre

building, but is marked by the choreography: the performers' movements are highly stylized—they are slower and non-functional—which gives them away as danced or constructed.

The same contrast can be seen in *Kiss* (2002), which features two casually dressed dancers going through a number of kissing and intimate poses from the history of art (Rodin's kiss, Klimt's kiss, and so on). Their horizontal positioning on the floor and the very slow tempo of their movements, even more than the eroticism of their poses, sets them strongly apart from the standing and walking museum visitors. When, at the end of their sequence, the dancers stand up and casually walk away, they re-enter the register of ordinary movements and the distinction dissolves.

It seems to me that Sehgal is playing, in a subtle way, with the boundary that inevitably excludes the spectators from the work of art. Dance movements are consciously shaped, constructed or scripted, and this always sets them apart from ordinary movements. Hence, dance as an artform, even in the very stripped-down version offered by Sehgal, creates a boundary between dancers and spectators, between those who are part of the artwork and those who are not. Seen in this light, Sehgal is clearly not trying to close the gap between performers and spectators, as Fintan Walsh also notes (2014, 65). He is rather revealing something important about dance as an artistic medium. As soon as movements are intentionally planned and created, a product or an 'object' appears—albeit a non-material object—that the spectators can only approach from an outside perspective. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Sehgal affirmed that this is what really interests him: "The experiment at the core of my practice is to see what happens if you don't produce something material but still produce something" (Lescaze 2018, 48). Of course, the spectators might feel involved and can be defined as part of the situation. They might even join the dancing, as some spectators do when they see Sehgal's performers dance. But no matter how well they dance, they remain outsiders. Sehgal's constructed situations obstinately remain works of art. We can observe and contemplate them, just like material objects. We can even dance along with them. But we cannot access them. Sehgal's rejection of recordings and written scores pushes this tension to the limit. He does not want the performance to leave any physical trace (to prevent it from becoming a physical object). Still, his interventions as an artist result in 'objects' or 'products' that are understood as such by spectators and that have a very tangible value in the art market.

Ramsay Burt's observations about Sehgal's *Instead of allowing something to rise up to your face dancing bruce and dan and other things* (2000), confirm this interpretation. Burt notes that the performers, who were simply doing what Sehgal asked them to do, appeared to him "anonymous, servile and almost disturbingly deindividuated" (Burt 2011, 273). In regular dance performances, the programme at least mentions the dancers' names and possibly some biographical information, but Sehgal's interpreters in this piece (as in his other pieces) are "objectified and rendered entirely anonymous" (275). According to Burt, this is exactly what Sehgal is after. The performers are physically close to the spectators and in many ways indistinguishable from them, yet the boundary is palpable. The performers are executing a work of art (a form of "servile, non-productive labour") whereas the spectators are looking at these objectified human bodies from the outside, so they clearly do not belong to the same community (276).

Conclusion

Bronislava Nijinska and Tino Sehgal, each in their own way, display a clear awareness of the peculiar condition in which dance, as an artform, finds itself. Dance, as social dancing, was embedded in communal life in an unmediated way. But when dance is used as an artistic medium, it is inevitably shut off from this possibility. Any hope that artistic strategies can overcome this gap, abolish the distinction between performers and spectators, and rejoin art to the 'promise of community', is illusionary. At the same time, dancing, even as an artistic medium, continues to elicit a certain sense of community. Artistic dancing cannot but invoke potentials and energies which, by its very constitution, it also has to exclude.

The choreographic strategy of *Les Noces* is lucid precisely because it plays with this communal appeal of dancing. Nijinska shows us that dance generates a sense of community because it imposes identical forms—shapes, rhythms, spatial patterns—on people's movements and thereby melts individual subjects together. But rather than celebrating this mechanism, Nijinska activates it for critical purposes, namely to expose and denounce the oppressive potential of communities and traditions, deliberating shattering romantic visions of happy communal dancing. Nijinska does so on the side of artistic dancing, but one could of course do similar work on the side of social dancing. For contemporary examples of strategies to counter the potentially oppressive conventions of social dancing, see Savigliano (2010, 142) and Khubchandani (2020, 23).

Tino Sehgal's work is, at first sight, aimed at creating genuine moments of community, experiences shared by performers and spectators. But this is deceiving. No matter how minimal his choreographic instructions, there is always a marked difference between the danced (or constructed) movements of the performers and the ordinary, unscripted movements of the museumgoers who, in the end, remain excluded from the work. Sehgal knows that every artistic intervention, even an immaterial one, results in an experience that is not just an experience but also a product or an object that can circulate, as a commodity, in the marketplace of art.

It seems to me that Nijinska and Sehgal, despite their artistic and chronological distance, point to an inspiring choreographic ethos. Whereas some social choreographers try to reconnect the practice of staged dancing with communal life in a direct way, Nijinska and Sehgal reveal the naiveté of such an approach. Instead, they take into account the specificity of the medium of dance. Historically, dancing became an artistic medium by separating itself off from social dancing and hence from the lifeworld where it used to find its purpose. This separation, which *constituted* dance as an artform, might be tragic but it cannot be undone. Nijinska and Sehgal show that this does not need to be a story of decline and that there is no reason for nostalgia. To the contrary, it may be this peculiar condition that makes dance so interesting and makes it different from other artistic mediums. Yet this also poses a challenge for choreographers and demands a specific attitude from them. Dance, as an artform, is inevitably defined by that which it no longer can be. Rather than denying this tragic condition, Nijinska and Sehgal—in very different ways—deploy choreographic strategies that deal with this situation in a lucid manner. They subtly play with dance's constitutive outside, knowing perfectly well that they cannot undo the separation with this outside, even if it

continues to haunt dance from the inside. As such, they show that the medium of dance is an unanticipated yet intriguing example of Derrida's concept.

Ultimately, this points to a lesson that contemporary choreographers would do well to heed. Faced with many incentives—including financial ones, as Klein notes—to direct their artistic practices towards societal and communal goals, Nijinska's work might inspire them to, instead, critically reflect on dance's ambivalent relation to community formation. And instead of thoughtlessly embracing today's discourses on creativity, cooperation, and participation, they might do well to see family resemblances with the current mode of capitalist production, as pointed out by Kolb. This is also why Sehgal's work is so instructive: in all its ambiguity it does, rather unambiguously, lay bare the connection between artistic production and market mechanisms. But these are of course unfashionable proposals. Not just because they assume that understanding cultural and ethical norms requires looking at underlying economic processes (cf. Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 469), but also because they imply a return to questions about the specificity of artistic mediums (cf. Krauss 2000).

Notes

[1] Marta Savigliano makes a related and highly interesting observation. She discusses how the inclusion of "world dances" into scholarly discourses and into the global market requires turning living dance practices (with "cultural moorings and social functions") into "products" or "objects" available for leisurely and intellectual consumption (Savigliano 2009, 165, 168, 174, 179). These products or objects are then collected and exhibited in ways that are analogous to the operations of museums (Savigliano 2009, 176).

[2] This is a matter of some controversy. Mark Franko, discussing the findings of Julia Sutton, states that he disagrees with her. According to Franko, there might have been some "overlap between courtly social and theatrical performance", but "the differences between them were probably greater than their similarities" (Franko 2022, xxi). In Franko's view, "social dance was not a basic form of theater dance in French court ballet unless there was a need to quote social dance on stage" (Ibid.).

[3] In this brief historical summary, I follow the lead of scholars like Margaret McGowan, Jennifer Nevile, and Julia Sutton. A slightly different interpretation of this period can – again – be found in the work of Mark Franko (2015, 2022). According to Franko, baroque ballet (in particular burlesque ballet) did already contain elements that point to dance's later position as an autonomous artform (see Franko 2015; and see the discussion in Pakes 2020, 36, 39). McGowan would not put it in these terms, but she agrees that sixteenth century grotesque and acrobatic dancing by professional dancers deserves attention as a specific phenomenon that challenges the "permeability between professional and noble performances" (McGowan 2008, 231). In a recent text, Franko writes that earlier ballets functioned and can be read as "poetic structures" and suggests that the question of their status as art is not particularly important (Franko 2022, xxx). Maybe dance in this period can even be seen as "proto-modern art" (xxxii).

[4] Noverre is certainly not unique in this. Gasparo Angiolini, for instance, also criticizes the use of "physical virtuosity for its own sake" and defends the ideal of a "speaking body" (Pakes 2020, 49). But it is Noverre's description of this ideal that became most influential.

[5] Interestingly, Fairfax claims that the misrepresentation of eighteenth-century stage dancing already started at

the beginning of the nineteenth century, with Carlo Blasis for instance providing in 1820 a misleading and disdainful picture of dancing skills in the previous century (Fairfax 2003, xi).

[6] These ballets were often structurally similar to work shown at the Opéra (Gutsche-Miller 2015, 97, 111), but differed in their lighter tone and their strong preference for lascivious and sensuous themes that justified flaunting the female dancers' bodies (Gutsche-Miller 2015, 60, 164, 183).

[7] I have to thank an anonymous reviewer for making this point.

[8] In what follows, I summarize an analysis of the choreography of Les Noces that I developed in more detail elsewhere (Geenens 2010). A thorough analysis of the choreography is also provided by Robert Johnson (1987). For an excellent analysis of the relation between the choreography and the music, see Jordan (2007, 351–373). For background information on the creation process of Les Noces, see Lynn Garafola's recent biography of Nijinska (Garafola 2022, 127–148) and see Nijinska's own account of the process (Nijinska 1971).

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Biography

Raf Geenens is a professor of philosophy at KU Leuven (University of Leuven) in Belgium. He was trained in philosophy at the universities of Brussels and Leuven and in dance studies at the University of Paris VIII Vincennes. He has held visiting positions at Columbia University, at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, and at Queen Mary University of London. Raf Geenens's primary teaching and research interests are in the fields of ethics, legal and political philosophy. In the past years he has conducted a research project on the role of constitutions in the life of communities and he is now in the process of completing a monograph on French philosopher Claude Lefort. Yet he also maintains a vivid interest in the history and philosophy of dance.

PERFORMANCE
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RESPONSIBLE KNOWING IN DANCE PARTNERING

ILYA VIDRIN NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Introduction

In dancing together, how partners encounter each other plays a role in whether they will be able to sustain their interaction.[1] A tentative approach may be seen as uncommitted, while a domineering one can signal danger. Yet what counts as tentative to one person may be careful to another; and what is domineering to some may be seen as confident to others. Encounters often entail quick, intuitive judgments about skill and trustworthiness. Is this person a suitable partner? Will they cause harm, intentionally or unintentionally? Do they have requisite skills to make the dance pleasant, meaningful, and/or worthwhile? Answering these questions will depend on the values of each partner—if one is seeking pleasure while the other seeks spiritual connection, the underlying desires and motivating factors may be at odds. The quality of movement, while potentially open to interpretation, significantly influences the quality of interaction. These are all psychological features of physical interaction.

This paper considers the concept of partnering as a particular quality of interaction. Elsewhere, I have argued that the act of partnering requires certain conditions; namely, the ongoing negotiation of proximity, orientation, and point(s) of contact—including sound, touch, visual cues, and/or choreographic patterns (Vidrin 2020). My interest in generic conditions of partnering moves beyond particular traditions, protocols, or structures (e.g. duet-form, couple-dance, pair-dance, coordinated or synchronized dances). Rather, I am interested in the interplay of ethical and epistemic dimensions for maintaining physical interaction (even in the ephemeral act of a single dance event that lasts only a few minutes). As such, I am interested in the relationship between

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 8, NO 2 (2023):147–161
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2023.82487
ISSN 2057-7176

psychological orientation (especially deliberative and non-deliberative beliefs) and physical manifestation—not as a distinction between mind and body, but as an entry point to assessing the relationship between thought and action in dance. Drawing on Western concert dance forms (contact improvisation, classical and contemporary ballet), social forms (west coast swing, lindy hop, blues, fusion) and vernacular forms of South America (salsa, bachata, tango), I have been interested in finding commonalities across forms in much the same way linguists parse out commonalities of verbal language.

How partners go about maintaining their interaction reveals features of their epistemological system, particularly with respect to factors like what they know, what they take to be relevant to the interpretation, and what they value. In this way, the value system (what partners want) and the epistemological system (what partners know[2]) intersect. Feminist epistemologist Kristie Dotson suggests that an epistemological system "is a holistic concept that refers to all the conditions for the possibility of knowledge production and possession [which] includes operative, instituted social imaginaries, habits of cognition, attitudes towards knowers and/or any relevant sensibilities that encourage or hinder the production of knowledge" (Dotson 2014, 121). Rather than argue for the rightness of one system over another, Dotson's work illuminates how individuals with differing systems can interact responsibly and fairly. In considering ethical dimensions of contemporary dance forms, I seek to understand how epistemological systems differ within and across traditions of practice, and how the epistemic and the aesthetic intersect to prioritize certain actions.

This essay elucidates normative issues concerning the act of dancing together. Rather than state what the normative issues are, I consider what it means for partnering to be normatively constrained. I will defend a contextualist approach to dancing together, drawing on insights from my own practice as a practitioner in contemporary concert dance, contact improvisation, and social partner forms in order to provide a normative account that considers the epistemic conditions of ethical partnering. Rather than present a how-to guide for dancers, my interest here is illuminating how ethical principles are embodied and enacted in and through movement. I will begin by considering ethically saturated matters of fact in the context of dancing together. I will zoom out to consider how partnering is socially and temporally extended. The uncontroversial claim is that our views on dancing (as dancers and as outside observers) do not emerge in a vacuum but are the product of shared background assumptions, which form and inform broader social imaginaries. Drawing on Dotson's claim about instituted social imaginaries, I consider the embodied archive of gestures and habits that are collectively shared, implicitly or explicitly, by people who dance together. What are the social imaginaries relevant to dancing together *ethically*? How do dominant social imaginaries express themselves through dancing activities? There may be multiple social imaginaries vying for the same space, and it is certainly possible to draw on and from multiple imaginaries at the same time. Yet how can people respectfully and ethically choose and discern between competing social imaginaries? I will consider the relationship between an ethics of knowing, which focuses on the fairness of interactions among individuals, and a politics of knowing, which considers individuals as constituents of social collectives. The shift from ethics to politics provokes a reframing of individual agency as inseparable from collective agency.

Given the plurality of practices and traditions, dance already poses a sort of problem for what counts as credibility and intellectual authority. How people view dance matters—as a form of entertainment, as a religious and/or spiritual practice, as a reflective, somatic practice; the possibilities go on. While certain approaches and perspectives may overlap, there may also be implicit competing values that contribute to ideas of rightness and wrongness. Each form of dance has its own set of normative commitments—these are what distinguish one practice from another. Indeed, each form of dance partnering involves visual and kinesthetic markers that guide reasoning about what people see (as observers) and feel (as participants). By normative commitments, I mean the contingent rules and expectations about how to move within the form, which may include the kinds of movements, the quality of movements, and the broader etiquette about bodily and relational comportment. For example, if I see three dancers moving in and out of the floor, in constant contact, shifting on and off their postural axes, I might infer the form is contact improvisation. If I see two dancers moving upright, facing each other, maintaining a fixed embrace whilst shifting in intricate foot patterns and leaning into each other, I might infer the form is tango. If I see several dancers moving in synchronized formation to percussive, Carnatic music, I may infer the form is Bharatanatyam. Traditions have their own norms and structures, which of course may be disrupted or broken (e.g., the emergence of Contango or ContacTango, blending contact improvisation with Tango Argentino).

Despite certain aesthetic differences, I believe there is something common across forms when it comes to shared physical action. I believe there are common ethical constraints that come from, among other things, the fact that dancing together is a joint enterprise. Some of the constraints likely follow a basic "do not harm" principle, but there must be some agreement between partners about what they are trying to do, which includes what is permissible and what is forbidden. This is so regardless of dance form, though some dance traditions will certainly have more freedom baked into the expectations, and partners themselves may decide to alter constraints in ways that fit their own practice. The actual agreements may differ, but the generic agreements are likely quite similar. The kinds of questions an individual asks through movement (and indeed, whether they ask questions at all) are products of their frame of reference. As frames of reference do not emerge from a vacuum, I consider the broader social imaginaries around partnering.

At a higher level of abstraction, principles are common, but the specifics are different across dance forms. David Kaminsky, an ethnomusicologist and dance scholar, takes up this question of generic principles in his work on social partner dance, though notably he focuses exclusively on those dances that have been "formalized, standardized, and cosmopolitanized" (Kaminsky 2020, 5). Even broader, there is a rich philosophical discourse around the study of togetherness. Key concepts include John Searle's *we-intentionality* (1983, 1990), Michael Bratman's *collective intentionality* (2013), and Margaret Gilbert *joint commitment* (2013), all of which strive to illuminate what makes action intentionally shared. Phenomenologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone takes up this question as well in her paper "Moving in Concert" where she suggests "to move in concert with others is, as indicated, to move in harmony with them. To be able to do so is to think in movement, not just one's own movement but one's own movement in conjunction with the movement of others" (Sheets-Johnstone 2017, 2). My interest here is in considering the epistemic, ethical, and aesthetic

obligations at this higher level of abstraction. My argument rests on the idea that, across forms, the intersection of aesthetic and epistemic values creates a blend of freedom and constraint that requires serious attunement. Without the requisite attunement, partners may be unduly constraining aesthetic options, fueling false presuppositions, inadvertently disrespecting each other, even causing physical and/or psychological harm.

Rather than suggest that there are specific epistemic, aesthetic, or ethical norms within the act of dancing together, I will consider the differing textures and status of norms. Importantly, my concept of a norm is a descriptive social behavior that is typical or expected of a culture. Though I will not argue for specific types of norms, I think that there are certain attitudes associated with particular branches of thought. For example, a few standard epistemic orientations are credibility, authority, and reliability. When considering conditions of understanding in partnering, one may reflect on how reliable a partner is in terms of their shared action (as well as in terms of personal qualities such as whether they show up on time and/or fulfill promises they have made). I feel strongly that the same concepts may be analyzed through an ethical lens: the reliability of a partner will affect the quality of our relationship and determine the potentiality for harm to occur in that relationship.

In addition to norms that typify social behavior, there are also normative considerations—including conditions and standards of excellence for dancing together (e.g. moving in accordance with each other, listening, rather than just doing whatever movements one wants whenever one wants). These may be different across form, and indeed partners may dispel common standards of excellence in favor of emergent processes (e.g., a curiosity to see what happens if they do not coordinate their actions), but I will take these to be uncommon instances of partnering. The normative considerations can be prescriptive (what partners *ought* to do) and/or evaluative (what are partners doing *well* or *poorly).*

By focusing on the role of reasoning and understanding, I believe we stand to gain a clearer picture of how expectations about interactions inform the dynamics between partners. This, in turn, affords a picture of what partners can actually achieve in and through their connection. I am particularly interested in considering what features of interaction are necessary for maximizing the affordances of the partnership. I say this not as a utilitarian interested in maximizing good *simpliciter*, but as a social epistemologist thinking about the *contingent* goods that are present in relation (e.g., care[3]). The epistemic picture assumes that there are things that are knowable in dancing together, while the ethical picture assumes that partners are responsible for the things they ought to know.

Matters of Fact

In order to frame the epistemic dimensions of dancing together, partners can consider what they need to know to maintain their interaction. There are the matters of fact about dispositions, such as the ability and capacity of each partner, transient (in-the-moment) facts like physical position and weight distribution (e.g., balancing on one leg, forward-weighted on the ball of the foot, versus

standing on two legs, back-weighted on the heels), as well as broader aesthetic matters of fact, such as the plausible range of stylistic choices that each partner can make (e.g., remaining upright or going off-axis, performing lifts or remaining on the ground, changing level through internal or external rotation of the limbs, etc.). Navigating among physical possibilities, implicitly or explicitly, involves prioritizing and privileging certain information. This is a matter of normative and ethical concern.

As facts, physical movements can be framed in propositional form such that they are true or false. There are also beliefs about these facts, which can also be true or false. For example, one partner may believe the other's weight is balanced between two legs, but the other is actually placing their weight on only their right foot. This would be a false belief about a physical matter of fact concerning balance. We can consider another example in which a dancer is executing a series of actions that form a kind of dance figure, for example, a *boleo*, a *tendue*, or a rock step. There are different schools of thought about what makes a figure right or wrong according to the rules and/or norms of a practice, such that one may have a false belief in terms of nomenclature (e.g., calling something by the wrong name) or trajectory (e.g., missing a key component in the sequence of actions that make the figure what it is). Given that dancing together involves continuous action, it is unlikely that these beliefs will be deliberative; in other words, it is through the shared action itself that partners form beliefs non-deliberatively.

When asked what makes a movement right or wrong, partners need to be clear about the standards by which they identify and evaluate correctness (e.g., physical facts vs. norms of a practice). The tension may then be concerned with the deontic and normative status of physical facts and norms. In other words, what (if anything) do partners owe to each other, what and how should they move together, where is the interaction taking place, and how do the collective histories reproduce or disrupt the norms of the culture(s) in which they are situated? While questions like these may provoke a desire to find contextually situated answers, I find value in considering the potential for overarching associated systems of thought and network of commitments that frame embodied evaluation in a generic sort of way.

Some matters of fact are tradition-dependent; emergent as products of epistemological standpoints which involve contingent evaluations. Given their dependence on context and tradition, these matters of fact are expressed as norms. Precision is one such term: what qualifies as *precise* in one form may not be valued or even relevant in another. For example, classical ballet has certain ideas around precision and control in that there are stringent ideas about bodily shapes and positions. When lifting a partner overhead in a *presage*, the lifter should extend their arms fully, with an erect and upright spine such that the shoulders are down, and the ribcage should be neither splayed in the front nor pinched in the back. The lifted partner should be in a toned position, with a similarly erect and upright posture, with arms and legs shaped in a recognizable position such as fourth arabesque, or *attitude croisée* (Serebrennikov 2000: 14–15). All of these tradition-dependent norms qualify the practice of classical balletic partnering. Contact improvisation, however, is no less stringent in the aesthetic concerns. Where ballet prioritizes toned effort and discrete shapes, contact improvisation prioritizes effortlessness and continuous

movement without an emphasis on line or shape (Novack 1990; Pallant 2006). Thus, an overhead lift should not maintain a fixed position, but should be in constant movement following the rolling point of contact. The bodies should be toned only insofar as they can maintain receptivity, with minimal effort to prioritize a conservation of momentum and inertia. All of these tradition-dependent matters of fact similarly qualify the practice of contact improvisation.

Some matters of fact are tradition-independent, like predicting the future location of a body. This includes physical markers, such as (at least) the direction of movement, distribution of weight, location of one's center of mass, strength and coordination of particular body parts, muscular tone and tension. These facts are tradition independent because they are structured by the immutable laws of physics. Tradition-independent matters of fact may be true or false, such that partners can be wrong about where they think their center of mass is or that of their partner(s). How partners attend to the information matters for being able to achieve certain qualities of interaction. I recognize, of course, that partners may have no particular goals in mind when dancing together. While a lack of goals is not inherently problematic, it may significantly limit what is possible because partners may not be attending to each other's movement in a way that is conducive to mutual attunement. This may lead to a number of harms, ranging from physical to psychological injury.

As someone who has practiced contact improvisation, contemporary dance, social partnering, and classical ballet, I recognize that the normative status of the 'should' claims mentioned above likely originate within the aesthetic domain. Nevertheless, they have epistemic and ethical textures. I see value in the different ideas of precision—as controlling one's body through effortful coordination of action, as well as the (near) effortless surrendering to the continuous ebb and flow of momentum, inertia, and gravity. I have found it interesting to move fluidly between communities of practice, where partners' attunement to each other is valued through different courses of action and attention. What I have found is that partners must orient themselves toward the relevant matters of fact and norms in order to execute the joint action *together*. This entails awareness of and focused attention to each other, as well as to the circumstances in which they are dancing. But awareness of the relevant matters is not enough to execute certain actions successfully (e.g., overhead lift, intricate footwork with off-axis balances). A high degree of sensitivity toward each other and the affordances of the partnership is required in order to understand what is and is not possible. Thus, sensitive partners recognize how certain beliefs play a role in the interaction.

Dancers form beliefs about what is appropriate and desirable, whether they are aware of it or not. Partners can adopt future-oriented beliefs, forming expectations about how things ought to go (normative) or how things will go (predictive), or past-oriented beliefs about how things should have gone (normative) or how they went (historical). However, certain matters of fact in dancing together only become available in the doing of the action. Partners can also adopt present-oriented beliefs through attunement to what is actually occurring rather than what they project onto the interaction. This is where things become interesting. Partners may believe that they are expressing the requisite amount of attention, perhaps even that they are attending well with sensitivity and care, but their beliefs may be incorrect. Thinking critically about the nature and role of evaluation enables a deeper consideration of what reckoning (if any) can be achieved through intersubjective

dance practices. Establishing a shared vocabulary and parsing out different textures of facts, norms, beliefs, and standards provides the avenue for this kind of deeper consideration.

An important factor to consider in negotiating matters of fact is that of unexpected circumstances. When something unexpected happens, should partners restructure everything? Can partners fit it into existing networks or should they reject it? How can partners effectively incorporate new things into their existing knowledge? There is an emergent question of maintaining the integrity of one's epistemological system. Framing a social imaginary as the landscape of one's epistemological system, partners may consider whether they are willing to alter their social imaginary when something comes along that doesn't quite fit. It is impossible to know exactly how an interaction will unfold in advance, just as it is impossible to know the (near) infinitude of possibilities. But this impossibility should not lead us to skepticism. Just because one cannot know how an interaction will unfold in advance of the action does not mean there aren't clues that portend situated possibilities.

Means of Knowing

The norms of dancing together that are determined and enacted by communities of practice establish the constraints on the qualities and kinds of interaction that will occur in practice. But just because certain actions are typically exemplified (or even expected) does not mean that everyone will act according to the norms. Receptivity will play a role in at least two ways—in the physical sense, in which certain actions are detectable by one's partner(s), and in the ethical sense, in which partners are willing to accommodate and negotiate change. The ethical and the physical overlap here, creating certain expectations and norms that inform practice.

In her writing on expectations and epistemic norms, epistemologist Catherine Elgin has suggested that,

> There are generic demands that creditable communities of inquiry must meet. Not only must the commitments be internally coherent and consistent, they must cohere with and be consistent with other things we have reason to believe. If the community inquires into empirical matters, its claims need to be backed by evidence. If it makes predictions, the predictions must (often enough) be borne out. These are entirely familiar requirements. Communities of inquiry make fine-grained commitments that, given their understanding of their topic and the effective ways of investigating it, are locally appropriate realizations of more generic coarse-grained commitments. The failure of their fine-grained commitments to satisfy (or at least approximate) coarse-grained requirements, unless backed by strong reasons to think that the fine-grained commitments need not satisfy them, is a reason to refuse to reflectively endorse their findings. (Elgin 2013, 148)

In dancing together, as in other shared enterprises, I believe partners form what can be called a *modest community of inquiry*. In order to maintain their joint enterprise through movement, partners must attend to possibilities of action in real-time as circumstances change and develop. For example, as a shared dance unfolds, physiological changes will affect the affordances of the

relationship. Sweaty palms may make counterbalance movements more precarious and fatigue or excitement may alter attentional resources (for better or worse).

Fine-grained commitments are those that are tradition-dependent and specific to a given form. While dancing a tango invites improvisation, it is notably more physically limited than the kind experienced in contact improvisation. The coarse-grained commitment in both forms will be something like "respond to your partner in the moment," while the fine-grained commitments will play out differently. Consider the fact that the tango is typically danced upright, with partners facing each other in a frame position. Given these constraints, it would be considered odd if a partner suddenly dropped to their knees during the dance. But this kind of spontaneous level change would be appropriate and even welcome in a contact improvisation setting. But Elgin's claim above goes even deeper: when fine-grained commitments fail to satisfy coarse-grained commitments, the epistemic demands reveal ethical textures.

The conceptual framework of epistemology enables a closer examination of checking-in as a practice of knowledge production. Reflecting on authority and credibility, much of the epistemic literature draws on the significance of trust in testimony. In order to engage in fruitful dialogue, there is a default mode of trust that each interlocutor must adopt to be fully receptive and responsive. But in the context of dancing together, default modes of trust may assign too much trust or misguide partners from attending to the right features. Because partnering often entails constant, continuous, and contiguous movement, we cannot know, nor can we be certain of, the ethically saturated relevant matters of fact (weight distribution, direction of movement, threshold of resistance, etc.) without checking.

Given that in dancing together partners form a modest community of inquiry, it is important to consider the means of knowing by which partners understand matters of fact in order to maintain their interaction. That things are always changing within interaction indicates that checking and testing the connection is more than simply a good thing to do; checking constitutes a requirement in order to achieve the kind of togetherness that is pertinent to the act of partnering. One distinction I find important is a difference between constant checking that is skeptical and constant checking that is curious. While both involve a certain level of calibrating to check and test the connection, I separate these two ways of checking as *tracking* and *monitoring*.

Both tracking and monitoring are comportments of assessment. The difference for me is about the orientation toward the other(s). Monitoring involves projecting a single epistemological system (one's own) and evaluating the interaction through the lens of that system. The associated attitude is one of caution and distance. At first glance, this may not be so problematic. After all, it is important to note that monitoring need not necessarily be born of pernicious intent. It may simply be the product of moving from a (learned) stringent rubric, bringing to bear a set of fixed expectations. In and through their movement, partners may internally be asking something like "are you moving the way you *ought* to move?" Yet the attitude of caution and distance will limit the available qualities of movement, such that opportunities to fully attune to one another are missed. Monitoring can thus be viewed as a kind of surveillance. Partners may monitor each other's actions

because they do not trust each other, or because one believes they cannot rely on the other(s). In practice, monitoring may be a pernicious sort of act that prevents partners from fully surrendering in a way that enables deeper relation. This is so only if the other partner is in fact trustworthy. If they are not, then surrendering is dangerous. Trust is unreasonable unless the partner is trustworthy, but sometimes we do not have enough information about whether others are trustworthy.

Tracking, on the other hand, is a continuous attunement that orients partners toward possibility. In tracking, partners acknowledge (in practice) that what one is doing will change the other's rubric of evaluating what they are doing. There is a kind of humility that one's rubric is incomplete without the other. This is essentially an argument for interdependence. I believe that what makes partnering unique is not that people must rely on each other, but that they choose to do something together which they could not do on their own. To be available for tracking requires a certain willing predisposition. We have to habituate to be ready, to accommodate both uncertainty and change. In contrast to monitoring, tracking can be understood as a kind of plurality, an openness to take on rubrics that are unfamiliar or previously unknown. To listen for another's rubric involves discerning the norms at play in their behavior as possibly interchangeable with one's own (or at least equally deserving). Straddling multiple spaces, and topographies and epistemic resources at once is also a kind of virtue—it is a form of care.

While both forms of calibration are comportments of assessment, they involve different forms of sensing relation. I view monitoring as actively attending to errors (and possibly even anticipating the worst possible scenarios), while tracking is actively attending to possibility. The case I find compelling to make is that monitoring can be done by one partner or more partners, while tracking emerges from within the partnership. One who monitors is preparing for trouble (only), while partners who track are preparing for anything. This is what I mean by maximizing the affordances of the partnership. Monitoring focuses more explicitly on individual affordances—what can *I* do? What do *I* need to do to achieve a certain action? How do *I* understand which matters of fact are relevant at this moment? The focus on individual affordances may push partners to attend in a way that is at the expense of the other(s), rather than in service of what is possible together, in relation. Looking at the politics of knowing in the modest community of inquiry established by partners surfaces the limits of viewing individuals independently. Tracking enables partners to move from a position of independence to an interdependence that opens aesthetic, epistemic, and ethical possibilities within interaction. Royona Mitra, in her recent work on "Unmaking Contact" raises an important point about the preconditions of dancing together (notably in contact improvisation), such that establishing relation (contact) may be unfeasible given the background histories of participants (Mitra 2021). This point is particularly relevant when considering how individuals approach encountering and maintaining their interaction in dancing together.

As comportments of assessment, both tracking and monitoring illuminate features of trust within physical interaction. That partners have a base level of trust seems necessary to the interaction. But default modes of trust complicate the matter of negotiating, particularly given the tendency to view trust as a kind of attitude that enables off-loading the necessity of checking. There are two

ideas that need to be refined here. One is that trust in dancing together seems to be a predicated form of trust, rather than trust *simpliciter.* The second idea regarding trust may be a semantic or conceptual one, regarding justifiable confidence. I will address each separately.

A standard paradigm in the philosophy of trust distinguishes between two- and three-place relations (Horsburgh 1960, 343; Baier 1986, 236). In a two-place relation, an agent broadly trusts another agent. This would follow a logic such as "I trust my partner." No other clauses or claims need to follow. This is juxtaposed with a three-place relation, in which an agent specifically *entrusts* another agent with some special task or belief. This would follow a logic such as "I trust my partner *to catch me if I fall*." The social imaginary associated with a three-place relation of trust is notably different from one associated with a two-place predicate, or unconditional, trust. It seems, given the way partnering involves the specific act of moving together, a three-place predicate fits best. There are certain things partners need not entrust to each other. For example, in partnering, I do not need to trust my partner broadly such that if my house caught fire, he would go save my cat from dying. The agreement partners make is such that each of their actions will support moving together for the duration of their dance. Thus, partnering likely involves a contextually constrained, three-place relation. The circumstances of dancing together will foster certain expectations, guided by the aesthetic constraints of the particular tradition.

In considering the relationship between expectations and trust, philosopher Katherine Hawley has suggested that, "as a rule, we try to ensure that our trust is mostly directed at trustworthy people" (Hawley 2019, 13). When conceived of as justifiable confidence, trust functions as a normative success term. In other words, trust is an achievement. We trust because we have reason to believe the other is trustworthy. But trust may also be conceived of as a positive expectation: given previous situations, I believe my partner will act the way they always do. Excess trust may lead partners to off-load some of their attention, such that they lose pertinent information. The social imaginary associated with positive expectation is notably different from the one associated with justifiable confidence. The embodied archive of gestures and habits will lead partners to adopt different orientations toward each other. Justifiable confidence requires that we gather evidence of just how receptive and responsive our partners are. Positive expectations, on the other hand, may lead to false presuppositions about the way an interaction will (or should) unfold (which may be based on previous or imagined circumstances).

There is a further distinction worth making between kinds of trust, namely *presumptive* and *tempered* trust (Laviers and Vidrin 2021, n.p.). In presumptive trust, the relation is taken for granted such that individuals assume things will go as expected. Less attention is devoted to certain features of the interaction. In tempered trust, there is greater attention to the relation. Individuals do not assume that things will be as expected, but rather attend to each moment of the interaction. In some cases, tempered trust may be born of suspicion, leading to monitoring. In other cases, tempered trust may be born of care, such that partners calibrate as a way of staying connected and attuned.

Presumptive trust brings us back to the idea of prediction. In some cases, this involves anticipating what will happen next and preparing for the prediction to play out. But this is a narrow conception of prediction, given that predictions need not be linear. As partners move together, affordances come in and out of play based on the choices partners make. The background assumptions and broader social imaginary of each partner will play a role in what kind of choices are available. Partners that monitor through presumptive trust may divide up the space of their interaction in a way that does not allow for alternatives. Partners that calibrate through a tempered trust may be in a better position to attend to opportunities as they arise. From a normative perspective, opportunities are aesthetically and ethically constrained by opening a range of plausible options, while excluding others. This is as true for pre-determined choreography as it is for improvisation. No matter how tightly partners constrain movement, there is space for choice. Even if partners have been dancing together for years and know each other well, they can still surprise each other, which is part of the magic of partnering. Responsible dancers have an appreciation of contextually appropriate yet unexpected ways to attune.

Every dancer has a normative idea about what a good dance is and could be like. These ideas likely change over time and are contingent on (at least) mood, context, and with whom they are partnering. Partners who continuously track demonstrate responsible agency, placing themselves in an epistemically laudable position compared to those who proceed without double-checking. This seems quite intuitive. Double-checking may be something partners do deliberately, on purpose, or something that is part of their nature. In either case, the disposition to double-check can be understood as a kind of humility, which may amount to a kind of epistemic virtue of dancing together. Even if you know, and you know that you know, even if you trust your partner, and your partner trusts you, there is always space to increase certainty and increase sensitivity to certain types of error. On the other hand, there is a threshold at which the degree of sensitivity, coupled with attentional resources, leads to a kind of hypervigilance such that interdependence melds into co-dependence—or even an excess of care (which itself could even be good-intentioned).[4]

While the qualifiers presumptive and tempered signal differences in kind, there may also be differences in quantity. Excess trust may lead to a deficit of care. One may come to think that the justifiable confidence absolves them from checking-in as things change. The underlying belief regarding trust influences the social imaginary in such a way that different facts become physically salient. Knowing which matters of fact and which norms are relevant is the responsibility of each partner. But attending to the right features presumes that those features are salient—that they actually stand out to the dancer in a way that is perceivable. This need not necessarily be a conscious awareness, but rather a kind of habit or even second nature such that partners do not have to actively think about what they are doing. It is likely not the case that every single minute movement and detail requires calibration; in fact, safely off-loading enhances freedom from thinking about those bodily movements that do not affect the partnership. For example, in lead-follow paradigms, the shape and position of hand and fingers on the non-touching side is a matter of aesthetic freedom within a range of stylistically fitting choices. That being said, different traditions will have their own associated social imaginaries regarding the range of stylistically appropriate choices—there are certain rules about the tango that may simply not apply to the

practice of contact improvisation or balletic *pas de deux.* Different traditions certainly have their own types of excellence, which naturally modify the range of choices that are salient and available to partners. But the transfer of weight, the direction of movement, the speed, pace, and rhythm of action—these will require continuous calibration.

The value system of partners plays into how movement is negotiated in practice, including how it relates to epistemic and ethical norms, as well as aesthetic conventions. Partners may ostensibly behave in ways other than what they intended because of a lack of awareness and/or competence. When individuals prioritize their own needs, they may miss opportunities to understand what is possible within an interaction. Partners may also behave in ways that are incongruous with the values they purport to have. Certain aesthetic values, such as feeling or looking good, may prioritize individual concerns in a way that overshadow ethical values, such as care and empathy. While aesthetic goals will likely take priority in dance, the overarching goal is to realize those values without compromising the ethical. Without the requisite competence, the attunement will not be achieved. Without attunement to the relevant, ethically-saturated matters of fact, partners might not be positioned to appreciate the depth of possibility within the affordances of the partnership.

When partners move together, they rely on each other to do the right movement at the right time, which sometimes requires more than the mere uptake of signals. Assuming that dancing together involves having a shared goal of cooperating, partnering requires relating in a continuous and attuned way such that partners are both receptive and responsive to feedback and affordances of their physical interaction and of their environment. In certain movements, signals need to be reciprocal such that *physical* attunement is established, which is likely the product of a habituated disposition. Philosopher Karen Jones suggests an expectation condition for trust, such that the truster expects the trusted agent will be "directly and favorably moved by the thought that someone is counting on her" (Jones 1996, 8). As a general point, this is probably false. The trusted person may be completely unaware of the trust or be indifferent to it.

I believe that partnering requires establishing a joint commitment to mutually attune and negotiate movement on account of each other, such that there is an expectation about the obligation itself. By merely going through the motions, partners fail to recognize that they are relying on the other to do more than merely execute the movements. This is as much true of choreographed partnering as it is of improvisation. Certain traditions may make the negotiation of interaction more salient by requiring an ongoing attunement, while others may leave open the possibility of perfunctory action precisely because the quality of interaction is unregulated. Going through the motions may mean missing particular signals to make the joint venture not only more pleasing, but more responsive and responsible—this is where the ethical dimensions come into a sharper focus. Partnering well is contingent on something more than merely avoiding negative consequences and going through the right motions at the right time.

Giving the visual appearance of real connection is an interesting challenge for dancing together, particularly given the kinesthetic dimensions of the medium. Verisimilitude occurs when partners give the impression of fruitful ethical partnering, but attunement is not actually happening. The

dancing interaction is merely an aesthetic veneer of togetherness. The challenge is that if things do not go wrong, partners are not likely to find themselves in a position where they have to truly negotiate. Perhaps we cannot know whether individuals are partnering (empirically, through observation), *until* they are in a situation where they have to negotiate features like direction, timing, effort, and so on. This introduces a counterfactual dimension, which may explain how time and effort alone do not guarantee ethical conduct. I know a fair number of long-term partners (dancing together for at least three years) who have refined patterns of relation that rely on a perfunctory paradigm of moving together. They are able to achieve a certain constrained level of togetherness, which breaks down whenever things do not go as planned. This is not to suggest that familiarity necessarily breeds perfunctoriness, but rather that time itself will not guarantee that negotiation will be fully operative.

Situating the concepts of verisimilitude and perfunctoriness in the practice of dancing together enables a closer examination of how people interact. That individuals can merely go through the motions or give the appearance of togetherness is important for discerning ways of relating. In this time of reckoning and reflection, I firmly believe that recognizing when people are merely going through motions to give merely the appearance of care is a vital step for the kind of critical evaluation necessary for building ethical and sustainable communities of practice.

The dancing situation offers opportunities for practice, but what is being practiced reflects a social imaginary that may be implicitly held. Adopting a default mode of trust may be dangerous in that partners miss opportunities to calibrate by off-loading attention because of a positive expectation. Withholding trust may lead to monitoring, which further erodes trust and the potential for deeper relation. In this way, dancing together can be understood as a site of intentional practice for practicing care and trust or a space of implicit reproduction of caution and surveillance.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, I have been reflecting on conditions of responsible knowing. My aim thus far has been to parse out some relevant concepts that support understanding the epistemic dimensions that structure ethical interaction in dancing together. How partners check-in with each other while dancing together reflects their operative social imaginaries, which in turn affects what is possible within their interaction. It may be prudent to ask what social imaginaries are relevant for dancing together. If I am familiar with you as a dancer, I likely know in what respects I can trust you. I can take certain risks that would be unreasonable with a stranger. Yet having shared background assumptions and orientations toward practice allows for strangers within the same form to interact in ways that support mutual understanding. When individuals dance with unfamiliar partners, their patterns of movement may become exposed, such that things they expect to work do not. While both monitoring and calibrating involve continuous checking, there is also the possibility of simply not checking (or checking in a very limited sort of way). Some people may believe they know all there is to know. But assuming knowledge places too many constraints on the interaction. When the overarching goal is achieving shared action *together,* it seems that

interdependence emerges as a recurrent virtue. There is a kind of responsibility realized through joint attentiveness.

Recognizing the conceptual frameworks through which partners understand and move through the world enables a richer account of practice—articulating the active ways partners negotiate matters of fact within the act of dancing together itself. There is a way to apply the conceptual apparatus to understand the ethical dimensions of dancing together in a way that draws partners closer to understanding the nuances of relationships more deeply. In establishing and maintaining interaction in unfamiliar spaces, calibrating can support moving between epistemological systems, integrally attuning, negotiating, and revising shared movement even as we operate within it. To calibrate is to consider and integrate multiple social imaginaries at once, and to habituate ways of moving fluidly between them.

That resources like gestures and habits become collectively shared encourages us to move beyond individual agency to consider the ways in which our actions reproduce broader values. Holding hands, negotiating pace, sharing weight, going off-balance—these are part of intimate social imaginaries that may be neglected in favor of caution and distance. Perhaps this is for good reason—when we do not know others well enough, why adopt a default mode of trust? Dancing together provides a space for questions like this to be posed explicitly. The shared physical space can render critical negotiation active and ongoing—to consider our social imaginaries through shared physical action and to hone virtues such as sensitivity and humility. When treated as a negotiation between critical reflexivity and shared imagining, we can physically experience abstract concepts such as trust, care, and empathy that are otherwise difficult to comprehend subjectively. While dancing together does not guarantee ethical discourse, it does provide a site where the subtle dynamics of interaction can serve as a fertile social soil for the cultivation of collective agency.

Notes

[1] I recognize that not all dance traditions value sustaining physical interaction. For my purposes here, I will consider cases in which partners have a desire to sustain dancing together for an extended period of time (upwards of a minute).

[2] I use the word 'know' here without qualification of whether the epistemic system is theoretical or physical (as in things one understands but cannot execute vs. things one can execute without being able to explain how it works).

[3] See my paper on "Conceptualizing Care in Partnering" (Vidrin 2023).

[4] I am grateful to Noah Lopez for suggesting this insightful comment.

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY

AN ART IN SHARING: REFLECTIONS ON SOMATIC ATTENTION AND QUEER CHOREOGRAPHIES

VICTORIA WYNNE-JONES UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

> It's a shared art.
> There is an art in sharing
> This art.
>
> Forest V. Kapo (2019a, 69)

Introduction

What is to be gained by considering dance-based performance artworks to be "shared art"? (Kapo 2019a, 69) And if there is an art to such sharing, how exactly might such sharing function?. These provocations come from Naarm Melbourne based artist Forest V. Kapo (Te Atiawa and Ngāti Raukawa) a practitioner whose work and philosophies I find to be particularly rich, generative and germane to ecologically-informed approaches to choreographed artworks. I first encountered Kapo's work when they performed *John Doe* at Experimental Dance Week 2019 at the Basement Theatre, in the mid-town area of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland in Aotearoa New Zealand (Kapo 2019b). I was struck by their use of eye contact and direct address to audience members: 'Suck my bones! [...] Breathe!', they commanded. Their mobilisation of imperative forms of speech together with a cunning use of props like sleeping bags and tent poles made their work stand apart from the plethora of performances in the week-long festival. I can still clearly recall them hugging a large blue Swiss ball, telling it 'I've got you...it's OK' as though attempting to soothe our broken planet. They then bore it upon their shoulder, kneeling like Atlas. The overall affect was commanding, intense and confrontational. During *John Doe,* Kapo's precision and strength meant they implicated audience members within unbearably painful personal accounts of witnessing state-sanctioned violence, before guiding them skilfully through to a sense of collective redemption.

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 8, NO 2 (2023):162–182
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2023.82498
ISSN 2057-7176

Throughout the composition of this paper, Kapo played the role of sounding board, discussant and conversation partner. Although currently based in Naarm, Kapo originally comes from Aotearoa New Zealand. An artist trained in contemporary dance, their emancipatory practice has a deep sense of materiality and craft. Approaching performance in an expanded sense, for the past two decades Kapo has facilitated and choreographed community activations, collaborations, improvisation, installations, solo performance and live sound work, with a particular emphasis on the climate emergency, Indigenous identities and gender politics.

Another question I continue to be pre-occupied with is the following: how might *queer* be performed, choreographed and received in contemporary art?[1] I will argue that this area of inquiry relates to the central concerns of this special issue, particularly that of the connection of dancing and dance reception or, as Kapo would say, that which is shared. What exactly is this connection, how might it actually work and how does this relate to the sharing and reception of queer choreographies? One suitable point of departure is my own prior research into *intersubjectivity*, which, according to social theory can most simply be defined as a "between world" that connects individual human subjectivities (Wynne-Jones 2021, 13). Conveniently, in the context of this special issue, this definition posits that intersubjectivity has a connective function.

Kapo together with their colleague and fellow artist val smith provide examples and provocations that act as engines for the overall thrust of my argument. In this paper, I turn my attention to the means by which temporal communities in dance might be formed. I argue that one kind of connective tissue between members of such communities, no matter how temporal or temporary they may be, is *somatic attention.* However, it is important to note that somatics is a normative system, an ideological construction that often generalises and promotes bodies that are homogenous, a-historical and so-called natural. According to dance and performance scholar Doran George, somatics employed a "conceit of naturalness" (2020, 1). As dance theorist Isabelle Ginot has pointed out, somatics is still structured according to the prejudices and beliefs of its twentieth century founders, the ways in which it operates are far from neutral and risk being heteronormative (2010, 20).

Exploring the concept of *kinaesthetic queerness* is central to this paper, particularly as it plays a significant role in de-naturalising somatics and somatic attention. Before elaborating on how somatic attention works, I first look at the history of the term somatics and how it emerged as a discourse in the 1970s. I give a brief history of how somatics came to the shores of Aotearoa New Zealand, specifically how it was taken up in dance schools in the upper North Island from the 1980s onwards and the important role it has played in tertiary dance education. Recalling the way in which the originally slurring expression *queer* was adopted and re-appropriated in the 1980s, I look at examples in which artists reclaim movements that have historically been used to frame and marginalize certain people, including acting swish, walking flamboyantly, embracing and harnessing lowness and shame. The next section is a first-person account of my own experience encountering the choreographic artwork *Moving Backwards* (2019) by Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz. Core concerns that emerge from the piece include moving backwards as a way to: physically perform resistance; challenge progress and encourage strange encounters that might

be points of departure from which the unexpected emerges. Moving in slow motion, which also occurs frequently in *Moving Backwards* is also read in terms of a temporal drag and feeling backwards as part of taking a specific approach to historical and contemporary forces of violence and oppression. In the final section of this paper I briefly outline aspects of dancing and dance reception that are *unchosen*, employing theories of encounter gleaned from the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995). As I explain in the final section of this paper, Levinas' account of the face-to-face encounter, when applied to an art encounter introduces the idea of a confrontation with an Other who expresses themselves with a wordless accusation so that a response is obligatory. This idea of appeal or call and response is an interesting model for the reception of dance. Kapo's reflections on the subject offer a range of alternatives from passivity and openness, a feigned ignorance through to critical support, which can often end in an "experience of multiple, tiny deaths" (Kapo 2019a, 69).

It is my belief that selected theories of alterity, otherness or "the Other" as described by philosophers like Levinas in response to the atrocities of World War II provide important levels of description for what goes on in-between subjects. I would argue that these philosophers' concepts of action, alterity, and sociality can help to construct a critical framework for understanding the structure, effects, and exchanges produced by choreographed works.

Another relevant theorist of intersubjectivity, contemporaneous with Levinas, is Hannah Arendt (1906–1975). When reflecting on the connectivity of subjectivities, I am drawn back to her 1958 publication *The Human Condition* in which she proposed "sheer human togetherness" as a situation where "people are *with* others and neither for nor against them" and where the "revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore" (Arendt 1958, 180). Pertinent to those concerned with dance, Arendt entangles her theory of intersubjectivity with that of action. For her, action always-already appeals to alterity or otherness, it "is never possible in isolation," and "needs the surrounding presence of others" (188). She argues that shared or common *inter-ests* lie "between people and therefore can relate and bind them together" (182). Action as well as speech are concerned with this binding in-between. Arendt discusses a *subjective in-between* that consists of deeds and words that originate from "men's acting and speaking directly *to* one another" (183) Such an in-between is intangible, yet according to Arendt, "We call this reality the 'web of human relationships'" (ibid.). For Arendt, action creates relationships and relationships originate from doing.

In an earlier issue of *Performance Philosophy,* theatre scholar Luke Matthews, also responding to Arendt, proposes "to turn one's attention to the structures of human relations and to try to find collective modes of interaction which could respect, rather than curtail, the self-determination of individuals and their potential development as whole persons" (2019, 113). I also feel there is much to glean from Arendt's proposition of respectful, collective modes of interaction, ones which enable rather than constrain self-determination. I would argue that this proposition could be a generative lens through which to consider instances of contemporary art and performance. As aesthetic theorist Cecilia Sjöholm points out, Arendt was interested in "events and phenomena" rather than the "occultation of outstanding works" (2015, 2). Yet in her writings, Arendt does offer a tantalising

proposition for performance studies when she posits theatre as "the political art par excellence," where the political sphere of human life might be transposed into art. Perhaps 'theatre' might be replaced with 'performance' or 'dance' so that they too might be theorised as places for social praxis, or as "art whose sole subject is man and his relationship to others" (Arendt 1958, 188).

Turning-toward and attending to: somatic attention

One possible conceptual tool with which to theorise the ways in which connection or collective modes of interaction in dancing and dance reception function is *somatic attention*. There has been much debate about the origins of the term *somatic*, as dance theorist Lindsey Drury has pointed out. When Thomas Hanna founded somatics in the 1970s, he was unwilling to acknowledge the complexities and disunities present in its Greek roots (Drury 2022, 7). Thus the problematic, modern or retrospective definition is that somatics is derived from the Greek word *soma* meaning "the living body in its wholeness" (Brodie and Lobel 2012, 6). Here the somatic refers to processes that are inclusive of one's entire being—body, mind and the environment in which one coexists. In the context of twenty-first century contemporary dance approaches, the soma is considered a changeable, fluid entity that responds to both external and internal stimuli. Somatics emphasises physical sensation and the fundamentally unique embodied experience of each person. Dance theorist Isabelle Ginot states that the goal of all somatic methods is, in any interaction, to generally aim to be conscious and considerate of a whole person (2010, 16).

It is important to recognise that *somatics* has a complex genealogy, since the 1970s it has achieved widespread recognition as a form of bodily knowledge within dance studies. Ginot has described it as a "conceptual apparatus that enhances our understanding of pedagogy, dancer's health, and corporeal and gestural aesthetics" (12). The dance-related practice is peripheral to dance itself, but nonetheless functions as a specific form of knowledge with its own methods and practices, producing a characteristic discourse. Somatics first found its way into dance as a means to limit accidents and prevent injuries, it is increasingly integrated into dancer training and dance pedagogy. A diverse field made up of multiple schools and approaches, the most prominent examples are the technique of Fredrick Matthias Alexander (1869–1955), the method of Moshé Feldenkrais (1904–1984) and the *Body-Mind Centring* (BMC) of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (b.1941).

In my prior research I have observed that in much of the literature there is a confusing entanglement of concepts of somatic awareness, empathy and attention (Wynne-Jones 2021, 182). Anthropologist Thomas J. Csordas has described somatic modes of attention, with an emphasis on the importance of attention and situation. At first blush, somatic attention seems like a good candidate for what Arendt would consider respectful, collective modes of interaction. Here, attention is "a consciously turning toward" someone or something (Csordas 1993, 138) that ideally involves consideration and anticipation of the characteristics of the object of attention. For Csordas, attention involves bodily phenomena which play a constitutive role in subjectivity/intersubjectivity. Any "turning toward" involves more than mere visual perception, it includes bodily and multisensory engagement (Csordas 1993, 138). Thus somatic attention towards oneself as well as performers, dancers or fellow participants within a choreographed work involves an attending-

to that is conscious and considerate of a whole person, a multisensory engagement and attending with and through one's entire body.

Somatic researcher Felicity Molloy has recorded a brief history of how somatic studies evolved from adjunct training to becoming integrated into institutionalised dance programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand (Molloy 2014, n.p.). According to Molloy, somatic studies played a crucial role in the development of tertiary dance, as this "educable form of human movement enquiry" has involved hours of thinking through the body in a community-of-practice. Molloy summarised: "Somatic processes eventuate from a deep curiosity about movement: refinement and efficiency, and experiential nuances of performance expressivity." As Molloy explains, somatics is an "eclectically derived pedagogy of movement." She elaborates:

> Within its distinctive models of anatomical clarification, injury prevention and postural habit awareness, I think of somatics as essential to learning dance: each individual in dialogue with how and why their bodies dance in relation to environment; internal and external. (Ibid.)

Molloy tells a story of how somatic practices were disseminated to these shores: travels overseas lead to subsequent extensive resources for dance methods, and somatics was introduced by teachers as well as workshop educators from abroad. Somatics found a home at Auckland Performing Arts School's (PAS) Contemporary Dance Diploma, a future-focused programme that taught dance through experimental, contemporary methods. PAS became the first undergraduate degree in dance (Unitec, 1989) and it was here that Kapo studied. In Molloy's account of somatic studies, there are echoes of Arendt's proposition of *being-with*, a sort of human togetherness in which people are with each other, rather than for or against. A web of human relationships is woven between dancers who are in dialogue with how bodies might dance in relation to internal and external environments. There is room for revelatory action to come to the fore because such action has the surrounding presence of others it requires.

For Kapo, somatic principles "were embraced as a way to complement formal training" (Kapo 2022, n.p.). Kapo notes that during their training, somatics was never considered a disruptive influence or a replacement for conservatory-model formal dance training. Within their dance education, somatic principles were employed during the teaching of dance technique, contemporary dance and contact improvisation. As part of their training, Kapo was exposed to BMC, Feldenkrais, Alexander technique and Joan Skinner's releasing technique (SRT). Kapo observed that their exposure to a broad range of somatic approaches has lengthened their career and delayed their retirement. As an older dancer and performer, Kapo reflects that colleagues with similar training are still dancing, well into their mid-40s, as access to "regenerative re-patterning and preventative practices" (ibid.) has reduced injury, particularly when used in tandem with sports medicine. For Kapo, training in somatic practices provides dancers and performers with "a sensory language" one "that articulates a deeper physical sensitivity and connection to the body, rewarding the practitioner with ways to inhabit the body more consciously" (ibid.). Somatic attunement, indirectly embodied, is something carried into performance. Additionally, somatic instructions are often

used to direct movement qualities and vocabularies. Somatic practices and principles can also be used in dance composition, devising or choreography.

Sourcing nature and the natural in order to overhaul: critiques of somatics

As seen in the earlier section, writing on somatic practices whilst located in Tāmaki Makaruau Auckland means that the term *somatic* is inflected in particular ways and enjoys a specific genealogy, one that can be traced through certain dance schools, educators, visitors and practitioners. Therefore one cannot take the term *somatic* for granted, and this has an impact on the significance of *somatic attention*. Similarly, Ginot has argued that somatics is a *counter power,* one that acts as an "antidote to dominant dance practices" (2010, 12). Both Alexander Technique and the Feldenkrais Method work on how gestures are initiated before deconstructing and re-organising gestural *habitus.* However, Ginot also cautions that somatic models serve as paradigms and that there is a tendency for these models to become ideology (2010, 20). The methods of both Alexander and Feldenkrais aim towards the improvement of coordination and certain movement qualities necessary to this end. Attention is given to self-awareness, the improvement of coordination and certain movement qualities so that movement is reversible and mild. This is reinforced by Kapo's experience of somatic training as a way "to find and increase the ease of function, line and form" (Kapo 2022, n.p.). Indeed a foundational principle is that of alteration or the virtue of variation. There are, however, risks associated with transposing the strategies of somatic practice into social norms of so-called good movement and good sensing. Ginot points out:

> Too often, it seems to me, these three conditions are interpreted as the norms of movement in general; detached from the context of the session of somatic practice, *they pass for the definition of 'good movement,' indeed of good living.* (2010, 21)

Ginot argues that somatics is a normative system, therefore it is essential to analyse its ideological construction. Although somatic practices insist on the singularity of each corporeality, most "have as a backdrop a homogenous, universal, ahistorical, and occidental body" (23). An essentialist ideal of the body brings with it illusions of the natural and organic, a political and social conscience is replaced by a so-called somatic conscience, one that views the subject as closed and autonomous. Although somatic practices have been utilised by dancers with increasing frequency since the last quarter of the twentieth century, for Ginot they have become limited by concepts of body and culture current at the specific times and places of their advent, that is the US and western Europe from the early- to late-twentieth century. The concept of a so-called natural body is never neutral; it may in fact be heteronormative, colonising as well as white supremacist. As George points out, with somatics "dancers conceived of and sourced nature and the natural to overhaul" their prior training (2020, 1). George summarises that by the end of the twentieth century, "Somatics continued to cultivate and promote the idea of a natural body as an invisible yet essential category of nature, one that, while appearing to be inclusive, nonetheless marked difference and enacted exclusion from its supposedly universal purview" (2).

In George's case, their somatic training promoted conservative and exclusionary values, particularly around so-called natural ideas about gender:

> this same education also largely excluded non-Western dance aesthetics and configured transgender expression as artificial. My effeminate movement and pronounced assibilation of words containing "s" sounds seemed not to be culturally neutral because they challenged prevailing beliefs about natural gender. So when I was told my voice was unnaturally high and was encouraged to work with male teachers to connect with my masculinity, I believed my femininity resulted from my bodily nature somehow having been thwarted. (3)

George's account provides an example of how practices that are meant to be emancipatory and rebel against prior, restrictive forms of movement training end up serving trans-exclusionary ideas about gender. Closer to home, in discussion with val smith, an artist who trained with Kapo and frequently collaborates with them, they reflected on their own somatic training, beginning with the observation:

> I'm able to recognize now that, all our teachers are white ciswomen who have held a lot of privilege. So the perspectives and ways of attending to the body come through that lens. And of course that comes with their own histories of having their bodies colonized. (smith 2023, n.p.)

In reflecting on their own experience of somatics, smith also discussed a cultural dimension, posing that "it's definitely a white lineage, a lot of those teachings don't acknowledge or invite into the space different cultural perspectives and that's still going on now." (Ibid.). According to smith, in their experience, often those running somatic workshops elide "somatics as any kind of cultural way of attending" when, in fact, "The delicate attention to sensations or relationships between the bodies and environments and stuff is deeply inbuilt in Indigenous ways of being" (Ibid.). This corresponds to Kapo's observation: "Yet cultural paradigms, indigenous, aging, female, are internally (infernally) difficult to alter in real life" (Kapo 2019a, 68).

The lived experiences and observations of both Kapo and smith chime with Ginot's call to action: "we must inquire whether the values dear to somatics should not be reconsidered, given that they ring strangely with the overshadowing ideological phobias of the powers that be" (Ginot 2010, 26). As Ginot points out, sensations are in no way exempt from ideology, exclusions, or disenfranchisement. Too often somatics champions an original, natural body or a body that is "more natural" than another, it embarks on a project of "naive meliorism" that can be normative, ableist and even ethnicised, trans-exclusionary and classist (24). Somatic practices can be widely appropriative of Indigenous embodied and healing practices and are often entangled with dated theories of cultural evolutionism that have informed colonial contexts and harmed Indigenous peoples. Additionally, Kapo has indicated that in their experience, BMC training inadvertently highlights "cultural prejudices which cannot and do not (without rigorous introspection) authentically support at this time an Indigenous queer working-class body" (Kapo 2022, n.p.). Too often opportunities to develop somatic training is limited by access to financial resources and a lack of cultural diversity.

An open mesh of possibilities: questioning and de-naturalising somatic attention

With regard to the connection or collective modes of interaction in dancing and dance reception, I would argue that somatics is an approach often applied by the discipline of dance studies to interpersonal encounters, or what Arendt would call the "web of human relationships" (Arendt 1958, 183). Accounts of intersubjectivity taken from dance studies often emphasise somatic attention, a concept used to analyse encounters between and amongst performers/dancers and spectators/beholders. The trouble is that such bodily based attention can also obscure class structures, colonial domination as well as heteronormativity, or "the set of norms that make heterosexuality seem natural or right and that organise homosexuality as its binary opposite" (Corber and Valocchi 2003, 4). As gender theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has pointed out, in general Western culture is "epistemologically cloven," or structured around a series of binary oppositions (2008. 12). In the case of homo/heterosexual categorisation, the opposition is a "pseudo-symmetrical" one in which the sanctity and dominance of the first term are "kept inviolate" (ibid., 67, 82). For example, the idea of the natural body crucial to processes of colonisation and somatics is entangled within these histories. Within epistemologically cloven post-Enlightenment thought, Indigenous embodiment was named 'natural' and un-civilised and such concepts of savage embodiment have often been employed by somatic language. As Australian philosopher Rosi Braidotti explains: "there are the sexualised, racialized and naturalized others, women, indigenous peoples and animals who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies (2013, 26.)

Deliberately confusing these cloven structures, in the field of queer studies the term: "'queer' names or describes identities and practices that foreground the instability inherent in the supposedly stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender and sexual desire" (Corber and Valocchi 2003, 1). Accordingly, the category of queerness takes up otherness or strangeness, deliberately and wilfully appropriating the appellation queer and its position. Queer studies scholars undermine binary logic by foregrounding the provisional and contingent—rather than fixed and coherent—antecedents identified through the terms lesbian, gay, etc. Kosofsky Sedgwick proposes: "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (1993, 8).

The issue here is that somatic attention is always-already culturally and politically inflected and is therefore at risk of operating with an unconscious bias, and it is highly likely that somatic attention is heteronormative, racialised and it may re-enact relations of dominance and authority. Australian dance theorist Philipa Rothfield points out that bodily acts of perception, described as forms of *somatic attention*, involve firstly an attending with or through the body, with the caveat that each body's mode of attention is culturally, socially and intersubjectively formed (2010, 311). Inter-corporeal understandings and kinaesthetic sensibilities are embedded in forms of practice; there are links between the embodied rituals of everyday life, ethics and aesthetics (315). Similarly for Csordas, sensory engagement to and with the body in the immediacy of an intersubjective milieu might be culturally elaborated. Attending to aspects of others' bodily forms, positions, or

movements can be visceral and might involve erotic, moral, or aesthetic sensibilities (Csordas 1993, 139–140). Crucially Csordas holds that there is a cultural patterning of bodily experience and an intersubjective constitution of meaning through that experience, attending to and with a given body involves "culturally constituted somatic modes of attention" (140–141).

Sharing Rothfield's concerns about somatic modes of attention being culturally constituted, Ginot points out that somatics are based on an ideological construction that demands conformity and as such must be examined critically. Pulling out what is relevant to the possibility of queer choreography, Ginot encourages a de-naturalisation of somatics so that it might take into account the complexity engaged each time something changes in the relation of a subject to its physical, symbolic, social, economic and political environment. Ginot asks whether somatics might deal with processes of decolonisation, prosthetics or cyborg bodies, queer practices, as well as politico-pharmaceutical or hormonal experiments. Kapo hints at similar developments, as they have observed somatic practices such as those of body-centered therapist Tadaaki Hozumi that pair somatics with social analysis in order to move "beyond individual embodied attunement," in order to adapt and develop "to include cultural and generative interventions" (Kapo 2022, n.p.).

Attention to and with a body, as well as the aim of conscious consideration of a whole person, is thereby complicated and problematized. As argued by Rothfield, bodily experience is culturally patterned, embedded in forms of practice and embodied rituals of everyday life, ethics and aesthetics (Rothfield 2010). If one perceives and understands the world in a culturally specific manner then this will affect somatic attention as the manner by which one engages with another. After Ginot, one must be critical of somatic practices as they are always-already ideologically constructed and often champion normativity (Ginot 2010). Therefore any concepts of bodily based attention must be interrogated so that the complexity of various physical, symbolic, social, economic and political environments can be taken into consideration, and somatic modes of attending to and with queer bodies can be found (Wynne-Jones 2021, 184). Therefore, one way of considering how connection operates in dancing and dance reception is by critically examining attention, which is, as argued above, always-already situated and culturally constituted whether by habits and predilections, or prejudices and power relations. Attention that is culturally-constituted is something that must be taken into consideration when thinking about dancing and kinaesthetically responsive bodies. After Rothfield and Ginot, co-presence is never neutral or straightforward and will be pre-patterned by existing biases, inclinations and orientations.

De-naturalizing somatics: moving backwards

Included in Ginot's reflections is the following proposition: "Somatics itself is a technique of fabricating the body" (Ginot 2010, 24). She supposes that if such a technique is one among many processes of physical and sexual transformation, then perhaps there is the possibility for somatic methods to be thought of as queer practices. How might such a proposal be expanded and developed? If somatic practices tend to champion the idea of "a natural body, or a body that is 'more natural' than another" (ibid.), then how might somatics be de-naturalized? It is difficult to tell; however, perhaps certain artworks and approaches taken by contemporary artists, ones that, as I

argue, enact a kind of kinaesthetic queerness, can be considered as responses to such a provocation.

Various tactics might be adopted to champion non-normative forms of identity. One is to emphasise contingency or instability in reference to Sedgwick's point about 'the queer' operating in terms of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, lapses and excess. In response to a culture that is "epistemologically cloven," another tactic is to align oneself to the second, subordinate or so-called lesser terms (Sedgwick 2008, 12). For example, where somatic practices stress the whole, natural and organic, one could deliberately become scattered, fragmented or exaggeratedly un-natural. One might wilfully appropriate difference rather than sameness, the contingent rather than the fixed, so-called low art rather than high, bodies that are untrained rather than trained or the nightclub rather than the concert hall.

Dissonance can be found in the very usage of the term *queer.* As Philadelphia-based gender scholar Heather Love points out, the word has been a slur: "When queer was adopted in the late 1980s it was chosen because it evoked a long history of insult and abuse—you could hear the hurt in it" (2007, 2). The term is confrontational and stigmatizing, it is "forcibly bittersweet" (ibid.) Love argues that its very adoption demonstrates a "taking advantage of the reversibility of power" (ibid.). Its kinaesthetic equivalent, the limp wrist, has been taken up by various artists and performers and deliberately accentuated. US-based artist Andy Warhol (1928–1987) often performed in a feminine or dandified manner that he referred to as "acting swish" (Jones 1998, 68). Similar phenomena "act as coded moments of communication" and "elaborate on facets of queerness that are unwritten" have been described by Naarm Melbourne-based artist and writer Jeremy Eaton in his reading of contemporary drag performers:

> reclamations of movements that have derogatorily been used to frame and marginalize certain men and women as attributable to sexuality; limp-wristedness as a sign of weakness being one such movement. (Eaton 2018, n.p.)

It is this "limp-wristedness" that Warhol evoked in his account of acting swish, in contrast to the strident, hyper-masculine grip of minimalist sculptors and the brushstroke of the abstract expressionist painters. Returning to what Sedgwick has described as pseudo-symmetrical oppositions; swish, weakness, daintiness, the sissy and the queer are opposed to the strident, firm grip of the cis-heterosexual, white male painter.

Another kinaesthetic iteration of the *swish* can be seen in Mark Bradford's 2005 film *Niagara* in which the camera follows a young, African American man with a particular swish or bounce in his step as he saunters down a dilapidated pavement in South Central Los Angeles (Lord and Meyer 2013, 226–227). Bradford has described his film as a protest piece involving the swishing and sashaying (away) of a particular kind of man taking-up public space, "owning it for himself, using it as a runway" (Bradford 2008, n.p.). For this work, Bradford was inspired by a "walker" in his own neighbourhood, one known "for his fearless embodiment of flamboyance within an especially tough public sphere" (Ibid.). Bradford's film depicts an instance of walking and behaving that is queer. In *Niagara*, walking, perambulation, moving from one point in space to another, is

appropriated and then literally mobilised. Walking is thereby liberated from its latent heteronormativity. This is in contrast with the "embodied dispositions" of predominantly Somali teenagers that sociologist Will Mason observed in Northern England, understood as a performance of stylized masculinity labelled "swagger" (Mason 2018, 1117). Obviously, Mason's examples come from a very different context to Bradford's walker. Nonetheless, they chime with studies into how body shape and motion affect perceived sexual orientation. In a 2007 paper, American psychologists Johnson et al. observed the ways in which the body's motion, or *gait* plays a crucial role in judgements of sex and gender, and that the "gender typicality of body cues affects perceptions of sexual orientation" (Johnson et al. 2007, 323).

Bradford's video work indicates a kinaesthetic queerness that is spatialised, echoing Sara Ahmed's arguments about the "spatiality of sexual desire" (2006, 543) and its importance to 'orientations' and the subject-intersubjectivity relation. Recalling Bradford's walker, for Ahmed, orientation is a matter of "how one inhabits spaces and who or what one inhabits spaces with" (Ibid.). Orientations are "the effects of what we tend toward" (554). To be oriented sexually, according to Ahmed, is to dwell on something, to linger. Orientations take time. An atmosphere of compulsory or dominant heterosexuality necessitates an orientation around. For Ahmed, a queer subject within straight culture has no choice but to deviate. From this point of view, the queer body is a "failed orientation" (560). For Ahmed, to be queer is to challenge the normative line or axis. Heteronormativity is a straightening device, one that encourages a very specific trajectory. To be out of line is to destabilise these normative axes, to be oblique or slanted. Bradford's fearless walker traverses the city, walking from A to B in an idiosyncratic way. Ahmed posits "queer moments" as "moments of dis-orientation." When things come out of line the effect is "wonky," and Ahmed embraces these queer or wonky moments (562).

Due to the way in which the dominant structures of the world, including heteronormativity, are forcibly in place, queer moments occur when things "come out of line," or are "fleeting" (565). According to Ahmed, "the 'what' that flees is the very point of disorientation" (Ibid.). Ahmed emphasizes her use of the term *queer* to describe non-straight sexual practices. According to Ahmed, the root of the word queer comes from the Greek for cross, oblique or adverse and extended to mean odd, bent or twisted. Ahmed highlights how the queer potential of the oblique to make things queer is "certainly [intended] to disturb the order of things" (Ibid.). In summary, a queer politics for Ahmed involves a commitment to a certain way of inhabiting the world "at the point at which things flee" (566). Ahmed's concepts of queerness as disorientation, the oblique, slanted, wonky and fleeting have the possibility of contributing to a conception of *queer choreography.* Such concepts are echoed in theories of US-based writer Jack Halberstam, particularly those around embracing *failure* as a way to challenge the correlation of heterosexuality with wholeness and success (2011); and *wildness* as a way of resisting the orderly and heteronormative impulses of modernity (2020).

Returning to smith, their performance artworks are site-oriented, often encouraging collaboration. Ahmed's proposition of wonky, queer moments of dis-orientation can be applied to many of smith's recent performances. For example, *Gutter Matters* (2014) begins with the artist lying face

down in the gutter outside of an art gallery, "as a kind of dance practice" (smith 2015, n.p.). A helper stood above the artist with a sign that says "Gay Shame Parade," inviting passers-by to respond by lying on the footpath with smith, so as to examine the sculptural qualities of what is in the drain below with the aid of a torch. smith's horizontal placement of themselves and their participants in the gutter challenges the normative vertical axis, recalling Ahmed's conception of the queer as disorientation and a disturbance in the usual order of things.

Connection or relationality is often inflected in specific ways for those who are part of queer communities, particularly in terms of spatiality, for example taking up civic spaces with parades during certain festivals like Pride and Mardi Gras. smith has written of their interest in "mapping a politics of queer pride and shame" (2016b) and, indeed, the binary opposition of pride and shame tends to characterise and form queer identities, as stated by gender theorist Sally R. Munt. (2000, 533). Shame is also deeply relational, according to US-based psychologist Silvan Tomkins (Nathanson 1997, 107–138). For Munt, shame is internally violent and contagious:

> we are ashamed of our shame, and then those around us catch it they flush and blush in awkward sympathy, vacillating, they turn their gaze upon another. (Munt 2000, 541)

Shame can refer to feelings of inferiority and discouragement. Relevant to the deliberate position of lowness adopted by smith in *Gutter Matters*, Tomkins cites physical indicators of shame such as: the lowering or tilting of one's head in defeat, lowering the eyelids as well as decreased activity in facial and neck muscles. I would argue that *Gutter Matters* produces an affect of shame so that shame may be overcome and neutralised. So although shame might be something shared by those persecuted within an intersubjective environment of heteronormativity, it can also be used as a methodology for creating choreographies. Note that Munt describes a "choreography of shame," one that involves the delivering of a gaze that deflects or cuts so that the subject is forced to turn away from the source of shame in the hope that one might be "*lost from view*" (Ibid.).

If shame is embodied primarily in the face and gaze, then a transformative moment can involve turning back and looking at the other right back in the eyes. Indeed, as smith explains in their performance reflections, the aim is to increase visibility of this state and "make friends with shame" in order to take the power out of it (2016, n.p.). Even those who do not join smith by lying in the gutter beside them bear witness to their gay shame parade. Shame is a kind of "social abjection," a result of rejection and repudiation, an operation that attempts to separate and put people into their place (Munt 2000, 536). Yet abjection and shame can both be re-worked: in Munt's writing she notes that previously much homosexual discourse has repressed shame when really its ambivalent effects need to be revisited so that potential alliances can be explored and greater agency can be gained. For Munt shame is contradictory in nature. On the one hand, it functions to produce conformity, but, on the other, it can "liberate new grammars of gender" (Ibid.). Shame has destabilising properties. Thus its performance, invocation and citation can produce a "confrontational momentum" so that shame "becomes a statement of being" until, paradoxically, "the shame is shifted off" (538). The idea is that an intervention occurs in Tomkins' cycle of

"stimulus-affect-response" (Nathanson 1997, 131) so that, via performance, responses to the affect of shame can be creatively altered and even co-created.

Returning to a queer tactic of appropriating so-called low art rather than high, and the venue of the nightclub rather than the concert hall, dance historian Clare Croft has stated that one of the broader goals of queer dance is "that social dance and concert dance hold equal import" (Croft 2017, 4). Such ideas have been extended by performance theorist Fiona Buckland who argued: "Improvised social dancing involved the incorporation and embodiment of self-knowledge, self-presentation, sociality, and self-transformation. It could embody and rehearse a powerful political imagination, which, while not always Utopian or even complete, had agency in queer world-making" (Buckland 2002, 65) In a similar vein, in a recent edited journal issue titled *Black Rave*, editors madison moore and McKenzie Wark looked at the confluence of "techno, transness, queerness and Blackness" (2022, n.p.). A similar strategy of exploring the implications of social dance was taken up recently in *Moving Backwards* by artists Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz at the Swiss Pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 2019. This exhibition saw the pavilion transformed into a nightclub that audience members entered so that they emerged backstage, upon a slick-black stage decked with tinsel curtains. As Boudry explained, the work was set in a nightclub as "a space that allows us to experiment with different forms of desire." (Boudry and Lorenz 2019a, n.p.) The video element of *Moving Backwards* involves dancers moving in slow motion and walking forwards whilst wearing their shoes backwards, undermining the backwards/forwards opposition, and the impetus for progression as advancement and improvement.

Moving around and thinking through *Moving Backwards*

In the spirit of responsiveness, what follows is an account of my own encounter with *Moving Backwards,* which was included in the 2022 exhibition *QUEER: Stories from the NGV Collection* at the National Gallery of Australia in Naarm, Melbourne. I heard the artwork before I could see it, the contagious pulse of a deep house track beckoned me through various gallery rooms, I followed the sound of analogue and digital synths, classic drum machine rhythms and grooves, meandering bassline and Latin percussion elements. The music was already making me move. As I got even closer to the source of the music, the high, pale-painted walls of the gallery gave way to the dark, black-box space of a night club. One of the first things I noticed was the ramp leading into the space, meaning that it was accessible to those of different mobilities. The generous empty space before the projection provided an ample dance-floor. The installation included long benches to sit upon, shiny plastic floor covering, a turquoise blue-green tinsel curtain on a pulley system and the video projected upon the back wall. At strategic points throughout the screening the tinsel came to life, moving backwards and forwards, passing in between the screen and viewers, interrupting the projection and acting as a kind of sparkling theatre curtain. Sometimes it hesitated, before continuing, eliciting laughs from the gathered audience.

The twenty-minute video *Moving Backwards* is made up of ten scenes, each involves either a solo, duet or group dance. All are united by the theme of "moving backwards" which is explained in an accompanying text, a letter by the artists to visitors:

> Women of the Kurdish guerrillas wore their shoes the wrong way round to walk from one place in the snowy mountains to the other. This tactic saved their lives. It seems as if you are walking backwards, but actually you are walking forwards. Or the other way around. (Boudry and Lorenz 2019b, 13)

According to Boudry and Lorenz, "collectively moving backwards" is a strategy for dealing with a feeling of "massively being forced to move backwards" (Ibid.). A way to come together, re-organise desires, exercise freedoms, they ponder "Can its feigned backwardness even fight the notion of progress' inevitability?" (Ibid.). There is a possibility that "strange encounters might be a pleasant starting point for something unforeseen to happen" (Ibid.).

One habit I have picked up over the years is to make an effort to watch video artworks in their entirety. This is due to the fact that my partner is a video artist. When we visit exhibitions together he will refrain from moving on until he has seen an entire work from start to finish (or from mid-point, to end, to start and back to mid-point which is often the case). Therefore I often enact a sort of co-presence, staying with a video work for its full length, in a small way acknowledging the labour of those who made it. In a temporal sense there is recursivity, the looping of a video work that is screened over and over again, each day the gallery is open, so that it can always be watched by those who visit. A loop also means there is no way of knowing when the video starts and ends. In *Moving Backwards*, at one point a clapper-board snaps before the camera. Although customarily this action takes place at the start of shooting and is later removed in the editing process, by self-reflexively keeping this in the video, the artists scramble ideas of before and after, preparation and execution and the mechanics of film-making are laid bare.

When I first encountered the video, I entered sometime just before its end, already enacting a small intervention. Sitting on the long, continuous bench with other viewers I was struck by the way the film constantly traverses or crosses. Choreographer and artist Marbles Jumbo Radio slowly walks across the frame from left to right, shod in shoes facing backwards, yet defiantly looking forwards. I witnessed dancers moving from left to right and right to left and this was accentuated by the camera's tracking shots, sliding back and forth. This ambulation harks back to the walker in Bradford's *Niagara.* All of the dancers move in such a way that one suspects footage is being played back in reverse. In fact, sometimes it is but mostly it is not. The ways of moving are deceptive, as though they are re-enacting reversed footage of certain movements. Perhaps the dancers are moving in what Elizabeth Freeman referred to as a "temporal drag" as though affected by a "stubborn identification with a set of social co-ordinates that exceeds [their] own historical moment" (Freeman 2000, 728).

What kind of historical force might be causing the dancers to move as though in slow motion? Perhaps it could be any one of scores of events and homophobic attacks that have taken place and continue to take place in night clubs which have historical significance for queer communities. Just two specific examples would be the shootings at Pulse nightclub in Orlando in 2016 or the police raids and subsequent riots initiated at the Stone Wall Inn of Greenwich Village in 1969 or the very many clubs and social spaces where LGBTQIA+ communities have sheltered, inhabited. There is a hint of what Heather Love would call "queer suffering" which is part of her theory of *feeling*

backward, a particular tradition of queer experience and representation that resists the "affirmative turn" (Love 2007, 3). For Love, an emphasis on damage in queer studies co-exists in a state of tension "with the need to resist damage and to affirm queer existence." After all, "texts that insist on social negativity underline the gap between aspiration and the actual" (Ibid.). Although there is no doubt that there are complex histories involved in gay nightclubs and queer spaces, it is important to remember that such milieux can also be celebratory and transformational.

The curtain too slid before me, its metallic strands catching the light and reflecting starbursts and sparkles like a vertical body of water. There was a sense of to and fro, of exchange, of call and response. Dancers entered, joined each other, watching, responding, moving together and separately just as one does in social dancing, in the club. Dancing alone, dancing with another, dancing all together. There is a particular moment when Latifa Laâbissi holds her arms akimbo and slowly turns her head to one side and it appears like a reversed or reversible movement. Additionally the harnesses trimmed with long wigs sported by some of the dances, are whipped around backwards and forwards. This kind of whipping movement recalls what writer and curator Legacy Russell refers to as a *glitch* or disruption:

> Here, in that disruption, with our collective congregation at that trippy and trip-wired crossroad of gender, race, and sexuality, one finds the power of the glitch. (Russell 2020, 7)

For Russell, the glitch is a way to "create space through rupture" (Ibid.), it temporarily jams the machinery of gender, society and culture. Russell's glitch harks back to Sedgwick's dissonance or Ahmed's wonkiness, it might be one way to manifest a kinaesthetic queer.

Rather than a community, what is created by *Moving Backwards* is something more provisional, temporal, or temporary. The artwork initially extends itself outwards through sound, beckoning and enticing, drawing audience members in. There is then the direct address of the letters, all of the accompanying texts are letters beginning 'Dear visitor.' There are the benches on which to sit and watch the video and there is the dance-floor, which acts as an invitation to dance. Each of these components make an offer, one that might be responded to by gallery visitors. One might choose to read the letters, watch the video and possibly move in the space of the gallery in a different way, to dance! In a way one is invited to a club, a kind of a-temporal zone, one without windows, painted all black and artificially lit. In some ways the co-presence created by the video installation is temporary, lasting only the time one spends with it, or maybe it gets deferred in some way, persisting through time in reflection and memory. Curator Charlotte Laubard refers to artworks as "technologies of enchantment" (Boudry and Lorenz 2019b, 51):

> A work of art isn't merely a passive vehicle of symbolic communication for us to decode or interpret, it is a social actor, an agent, that articulates and engages in relations with the world. It acts as a catalyst on a collective. (Ibid.)

Just as the video loops, playing again and again, I return to the installation, watching it over and over, mesmerised. This idea of recursivity is in fact central to Māori philosophy, as novelist Witi Ihimarea ponders whilst looking at the rotary dial of a telephone:

> The dial reminds me, however, that Māori have a concept of spiralling time: at the same moment as the spiral goes forward it is returning, at the same time as it goes ahead it is coming back. (Ihimaera 1973/2023, 19–20)

The very idea of moving backwards challenges the idea of progress, of perpetually moving forwards, getting somewhere, making it from A to B. Dance theorist (and *Moving Backwards* respondent) André Lepecki argues "that modernity's project is fundamentally kinetic [...] ontologically, modernity is pure being-toward-movement" (Lepecki 2006, 7). Therefore by moving backwards one is challenging a central tenet of modernity, destabilising or deterritorialising it, with all of its attending histories of expansion, destruction, exploitation and extraction. Lepecki points out that the "first temporal consequence of the double movement in *Moving Backwards*" is "a total questioning of the accepted axiomatic that time is a one-way street" (Lepecki 2019, 83).

> Two simultaneous movements then, from the start: backward motions as a way out of the straight arrow of time and history, and strange encounters as starting points for the unforeseen to happen. All bundled up by a backwards motion. But backward in relation to what exactly? What exactly gives the 'proper' direction, the 'right' direction, the 'correct' or normative way, so that one can say then that the current movement is not actually a forward one? (Ibid., 83)

Returning to Ahmed's conception of queer, to move backwards is to "come out of line" (2006, 565) to dis-orient, disturb the order of things, be oblique, slanted, wonky and fleeting. This flicker or shimmer back and forth is repeated in the twinkle of sequinned costumes and the way light winks off strands of tinsel curtains.

> The final say of how well the processes above have gone goes to the wilful fickle minds of the audience and their dance writers. (Kapo 2019a, 69)

Boudry and Lorenz' *Moving Backwards* makes manifest a particular co-presence of dancing and kinaesthetically responding bodies as well as temporal communities that in moving backwards, might also be *feeling backwards*, transcending the present or recorded moment of dancing in disrupting, glitching, moving back and forth. Looping and recursivity make time an uncoiled spiral rather than a normative thrust onwards. However, there is some sense of ever-moving outwards, of futurity, as Love argues:

> Although many queer critics take exception to the idea of a linear, triumphalist view of history, we are in practice deeply committed to the notion of a better life for queer people. (Love 2007, 3)

On responsibility, passing and deathliness

The dancers in *Moving Backwards,* as well as those who attend the choregraphed artwork, attend to each other or answer in some way, practicing responses or response-ability as gleaned from the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. I would argue that a performance philosophy has much to gain from Levinas' theories of alterity, otherness or the Other, and that these can provide important levels of description for what goes on in-between subjects, including performer and observer.

Concepts of action, alterity and sociality from thinkers like Levinas and Arendt can help to construct a critical framework for understanding the structure, effects, and exchanges produced by choreographed works. Judith Butler concurs stating that Arendt and Levinas "take issue with the classically liberal conception of individualism" that one is only responsible for relations that have been entered into knowingly and willingly (Butler 2015, 111). For Arendt, the very condition of existence as ethical and political beings is "the unchosen character of earthly cohabitation" (Ibid.).

For Levinas, the face-to-face encounter is the ethical encounter par excellence, one that has important implications for art as encounter. As outlined in his 1961 work *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* the face of the Other opens up a confrontation with someone who is absolutely other, so that discourse begins. Once the face has spoken or expressed itself, a response or response-ability is obligatory (Levinas 1969). In his 1968 essay "Substitution," Levinas posited subjectivity as "being hostage" so that any "presence" is "undone by the other" and a subject is confounded by a wordless accusation for which one cannot decline responsibility (1989, 88, 110). Thus Levinas furnishes performance art history with an account of obligatory responsibility. As argued in the previous section, there are many ways in which an artwork might also beg response-ability, appeals are made in a variety of different ways: through music, space to rest, to dance and to re-consider dominant concepts of history and progression.

Kapo has also reflected on this notion of response-ability in those who behold dance, is it a passive openness? Must one completely suspend disbelief and criticality?

> As a dance witness I have become curious about the job of the audience member. Is it to be; if possible an open, aware receptacle? (and just watch…) If this is all the job description contains, then I've come to believe that re-education is required. Wilful ignorance may be the best approach. As a critical supporter you are often, unapologetically, put through a fucking mill. Left alone to experience multiple tiny deaths. #movement is the language of the individuated soul. (what is movement in captivity)? (Kapo 2019a, 69)

As part of our ongoing discussion, Kapo and I teased out the prejudices of a certain kind of responsibility, that of somatic attention. We reflected on how somatics is gendered and heteronormative as well as how it could be otherwise. Kapo suggested one approach could be that of cultural somatics innovator Tadaaki Hozumi, one that harks back to Rothfield's concerns about the cultural constitution of bodily-based attention. Hozumi's approach involves political analysis and an acknowledgement of the ways inequality and distributions of power affect the social conditions in which we live. (Though it is important to note that Hozumi too has some questionable ideas relating to race). Additionally an eco-somatics is required to reposition communities within their environment and upon a planet that is in the midst of a climate emergency.

In terms of temporality, Kapo themselves has a special relationship to futurity as they are employed as a nurse working in palliative care, with those at the end of their lives. Thus their response-ability is shaped by working with those who have a limited amount of time left to live. In their personal communication to the author Kapo ponders: "Somatic practice in the world of dying isn't a thing, it could be but it isn't. Much would have to change in the world before somatics could

become a daily component of clinical care, particularly within the public health system" (Kapo 2022, n.p.). Such changes would involve greater access to those of limited financial means, a re-orientation away from a capitalist model of care, decolonization and importantly, consideration of the agency and will of patients.

On Kapo's point about the relationship between somatic practices and dying, as well as their description of a critical supporter of dance often experiencing "multiple little deaths," it is worth noting that in Drury's counter-reading of somatics she creates an account taken from multiple scholars who make the argument that over many centuries the meaning of *soma* has transformed from a Homeric corpse denied burial rites after battle to a Hesiodic description of living bodies in states of subjection, until in Koine Greek it came to mean slave (Drury 2022, 22). Tying into Kapo's concerns, as well as her occupation as a care-giver, a common thread throughout these permutations in the ancient use of this term is a concern with the care taken with bodies.

Perhaps somatic training, as Kapo conceives of it, provides one method of caring as responding and practicing response-ability:

> The work is impactful in how it provides the body agency. It advances the relationship we can have and with our bodies, allowing us to perceive ourselves as highly intelligent and generative systems with symbiotic relationships that respond wholesomely to our environments. With somatics we remove the propaganda of the body as machinery and begin the work of honouring it as a cooperative within a collective and with the expansion of somatic principles into community and collective agency it appears it is no longer resistive to its own cultural habitat. (Kapo 2022, n.p.)

Thus Kapo gleans from their somatic practices important insight into ecological registers of human subjectivity, social relations and the environment, so that bodies operate with agency in a co-operative way within broader collectivities. Perhaps such agency is also what is being exercised by the dancers in *Moving Backwards*. As Kapo writes, attending to choreographed artworks is "a shared art, there is an art in sharing, this art." An openness and willingness to be moved to respond:

> As theatre ally I go to experience a passing. Witness my own death. My boring self hopes to be moved into different sensations, a more spacious body, bewitched into an alchemy. This lamb opens up to the altar, in the sacrificial space it feigns innocence. Looking forward with anticipation to complete seduction. When lights do go low, it is the dreamer who eagerly submits to the womb/tomb and hands in all. Longing for a resurrection that inwardly will bring bittersweet enlightenment. Pulling myself and my people up, to knowing feet. This multiplicitous purveyor knows the world of performance holds the key to bringing close the final exaltation. (Kapo 2019a, 69)

Notes

[1] This essay builds on my earlier chapter "Articulating Alternatives: val smith's Queer Choreographies" as part of my 2021 monograph (Wynne-Jones 2021).

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY

ECHOES IN THE BONE: NELISIWE XABA'S *SAKHOZI SAYS "NON" TO THE VENUS* AND THE CAPTURE OF PERFORMANCE'S IMMATERIAL REMAINS

MLONDOLOZI ZONDI UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

> Does the captive's dance allay grief or articulate the fraught, compromised, and impossible character of agency? Or does it exemplify the use of the body as an instrument against itself?
>
> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (1997, 22)

There is a vexed icon whose re-production in contemporary performance, visual culture, and theory eclipses the subject position buried beneath the sign. We call her by another name. The coded pseudonym we ascribe to this sign coheres through a matrix of infinite distortions, effacements, and mutilations (psychic, somatic, and otherwise), which unfolded over time, and have been relegated to the past, even as they flourish in the present. "The Hottentot Venus"— an alias of dishonor—bears overdetermined resemblance to its referent, Sara "Saartjie" Baartman, even as Baartman and all those presumed-to-be Black women endure the violence of alignment with this iconography (see Jackson 2018, 3; Spillers [1987] 2003, 203). To state the matter with minimal opacity, the moniker "Hottentot Venus" *dis*-names South African indigenous woman Sara Baartman (1790–1815). In Afrikaans, the diminutive "-tjie" in "Saartjie" can be deployed as a term of endearment or affection towards a younger person. But in the case of Baartman, and in its nineteenth-century usage, this diminutive serves an infantilizing function to belittle and cut someone down to size, marking one as an inferior and a slave (see Strother 1999, 48; Vasquez 2013, 6). I would proceed to inquire whether attempts to either circumvent this nomenclative annihilation or reclaim it as (subversive) monstrous *potential* would amount to the same

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 8, NO 2 (2023):183–205
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2023.82496
ISSN 2057-7176

inescapable gesture. As Fred Moten has asked in his work on the cut/rupture of Black performance, does the "illusory" repression of this "scene of objection" (the scene of diminutive effacement in our inquiry) occasion an unavoidable return to or restoration of the scene, since reference to it, even if to announce a "critical suppression," inescapably re(-)presents it (Moten 2003, 1–6)? The surface of what we know about Baartman's life is that she was transported from South Africa, displayed, and coerced to perform as an ethnographic curiosity in England and France. In death, her body was dissected for science and some of her physical remains were exhibited in jars for public consumption at the Muséum des Sciences Naturelles d'Angers, and later transferred to the Musée de l'Homme in Paris in the 1970s. In the late 1990s, the South African government and its president Nelson Mandela facilitated the repatriation and burial of Baartman's remains in Vergaderingskop, a hill overlooking the Gamtoos Valley in the Eastern Cape, South Africa in 2002. The remains were buried in a gated but relatively unremarkable (which is to say un-/anti-monumental) grave consisting of a modest and flat pile of stones and cement. Dignitaries attended the burial ceremony. Indigenous Griqua rituals were performed to lay the remains to rest, and Nelson Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki, delivered a speech.[1]

Despite indigenous African ritual's promise to facilitate closure, Baartman, "the Hottentot Venus" still has not found rest. She is incessantly conjured up in theory and aesthetics, for a number of purposes ranging from evidence, reparation, catharsis, absolution, and redemption. To varying degrees, "The Hottentot Venus" functions as an "afrotrope" in the work of African and African-diaspora artists such as Suzan-Lori Parks, Mawande ka Zenzile, Tracey Rose, Lyle Ashton Harris and Renee Cox, Kara Walker, Wangechi Mutu, Shoshanna Weinberger, and others.[2] Using figural and/or non-representational depictions, they put forth critiques related to picturing the voided personality concealed beneath the repeating icon.[3] In addition to "the Venus" icon appearing in popular culture, there exists a body of work in performance and film created by non-Black (particularly white) artists, where the icon serves several rhetorical, pedagogical, and reparative functions. When mobilized in this manner, the fragments of the icon generate what Black critical theorist Selamawit Terrefe identifies as the simultaneous "muteness and ideological purchase of the Black female imago" (Terrefe 2018, 127). As sociologist Zine Magubane has shown, "the Hottentot Venus" has been theorized to exhaustion in academic articles, books, anthologies, and lectures (Magubane 2001). All these re-productions revisit (and oftentimes re-perform) the many scenes that en-/un-gendered this particular African *life* to a status of malleable "marked woman," a designation that, as Hortense Spillers has observed about the transatlantic slave, bears "markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean" (Spillers [1987] 2003, 203). If there is no easy way of stripping down the layers of "attenuated meanings" (Ibid.) embedded in this coded nomenclature, what can be said that has not already been rehearsed about "the Venus"? What observations can be made, and which lessons can be learned from turning to those Black artistic practices which attempt this act of stripping down overdetermined meanings ascribed to "the Black woman"? Which (un)intended rhetorical and aesthetic devices unflinchingly reveal what cannot and should not be recuperated in Baartman's and Black people's status of ontological/existential negation? What are the limits of performance for the Black?

South African choreographer and performance artist Nelisiwe Xaba's performance contemplations on "the Venus" are an exemplary attempt at "stripping down the layers of attenuated meanings" (Ibid.) associated with "the Venus Hottentot". Xaba's approach involves a stripped down ('minimalist') performance language that draws attention to the limits of figural articulation, as well as the critical stakes of (not) representing the *void*. My attention to Xaba's work aims to situate the practice of "tending-toward blackness" in Black artmaking, which refers to leaning into methods of moving, visualizing, or discussing Black captive personality that eschew problematic representational modes that remain in denial of blackness's suspended status between objecthood and personhood (see Copeland 2013, 143). Instead of monumentalizing "Venus" and incorporating her as a denied but proper Subject of history, Xaba's "Venus" performances draw attention to the Black female body's degraded and absented labor as modern culture's maternal/material inheritance (Moten 2003). (Black) physical remains, as Coco Fusco (1994) argued, endowed modern art/performance with its conceptual and formal aesthetic features, and as Zamansele Nsele echoes, "to rejuvenate modern art, a common ritual for European artists was to visit ethnographic museums, where they would spend time scrutinizing artefacts from imperialistic plunder" (Nsele 2016, 97). Our modern and postmodern aesthetic categories, tools of scientific knowledge, theories of aesthetic judgment, and modalities of curating hierarchies of difference are unimaginable without the Black (female) body as the "principal point of passage" (Spillers [1984] 2003, 155) whose labors continue to be accumulated by and disavowed within those categories.

Xaba's dance work entitled *Sakhozi Says "Non" to the Venus* (2010) hones in on the limits of restitution and elaborates upon the plasticity (*pace* Jackson 2020) of Black corporeal, archival, and performance remains. I draw attention to contemporary tendencies in art institutions where African performers are commissioned to labor for the rehabilitation of Western colonial guilt and white psychic redemption under the guise of "decolonizing the museum." I specifically consider what the dissection and institutional ownership of Sara Baartman's remains yielded for French culture, Western science and aesthetics, and collective white psychic life. I argue that while European institutions are beginning to consider repatriating material objects accumulated during colonialism, the new mode of salvaging ownership of African things invites African artists to act as "surrogates" for those remains/materials that are being repatriated (see Roach 1996). Staged performances, for the museum, perform the same functions as those repatriated materials. I ask: what do these performative engagements with the colonial archive enact for Africans and African-derived persons? Do they usher in symbolic reparations, "perhaps the only kind we will ever receive?" (Hartman 2008, 4). In performing all the "Venuses" again and again, to what degree are African performers relegated back to their colonial a/object status? I posit that these African performances in the West (*Sakhozi Says "Non"* included), no matter how critical or self-aware, are not only received in a manner that buttresses enduring (pre-)Enlightenment racialized modes of looking/feeling/knowing, but also serve a liberal function of rehabilitating the white psyche. *Sakhozi Says "Non"* approaches both issues by invoking the contemporary Black African domestic servant's plasticized and cyborg subjectivity.[4] In doing so, the performance reveals connections between contemporary capitalist accumulation and Black women's transnational labor.

Performance's Immaterial Remains

Remains are generally understood as material things that can be experienced mainly through touch or visual observation. Visual Studies scholars such as David Marriott (2000) and Leigh Raiford (2003) have expanded upon the economic and libidinal currency of the remains of brutalized Black *bodies*. The currency of these remains is not only predicated upon their "aesthetic value," but also as possessions, things to be gazed upon, and commodities given up for haptic engagement by non-Blacks. The remains, as surrogate objects, undergo the same violence by circulating as commodities sold in a different marketplace, as well as objects gratifying their owners' libidinal phantasies. Black bodily remains (hair, tissue, cells, bones, limbs, mugshots, photographs of their final moments as breath leaves their bodies, etc.) circulate between individuals as well as institutions such as museums, medical research centers, galleries, and libraries. I focus on dance performance to present a broader understanding of what counts as remains in performance theory and archival studies. What does it mean to think of performance, in its ephemerality as (leaving) remains or performance remains? Can performance direct our attention to what bones (the archive) cannot tell us, as well as to performance's own limitations linked to its investments in narrative closure and its hypervalution and recuperation of the Enlightenment subject's attributes such as agency and will?

I locate non-physical traces of performance, those degraded "immaterial remains" (see Kalibani 2021; Phelan 1993; Jenny Sharpe 2020) that linger during or beyond the moment of performance. José Muñoz calls these "ephemera," defined as "things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. [...] This involves structures of feelings, as they are material without necessarily being "solid"' (Muñoz 1996, 10). For Rebecca Schneider, this residue includes "orature, storytelling, visitation, improvisation, or embodied ritual practice as *history*" (Schneider 2011, 100). African aesthetic theorists such as Pitika Ntuli (1988) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2010) draw upon and expand Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu's notion of orature as going beyond the fusion of art forms or the destabilization of the bifurcation between orality and literature sustained in the concept "oral literature." These theorists conceptualize orature as encompassing performance/immaterial evidence. For them, orature undermines systems of valuation that create hierarchies between thought and practice, the artistic and the political, spirituality and materiality, as well as nature or nurture and the supernatural. These ephemeral ontoepistemes have long been repudiated or discredited as antithetical to rigor, as rigor is "owned, made, and deployed through institutional ideology" (Muñoz 1996, 7).

According to these performance theorists, serious engagement with this immaterial archive, then, requires a refusal of the hegemonic conventions and rubrics of defining rigor. It requires a deliberate circumvention of the "academy's officiating structures" (Ibid., 6). Drawing upon Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*, Schneider notes how "the privileging of site-able remains in the archive is linked, as is the [Greek] root of the word archive, to the prerogatives of the archon, the head of state [...] the archon's *house* and, by extension, the architecture of a social memory linked to the law" (Schneider 2011, 99). The archon's internment of immaterial modes of evidence is put in service to endow official forms of documentation their superiorized evidentiary integrity. Rather

than acquiescing to the terms of those officiating structures, these immaterial archives gain clarity by leaning into unreliability and elusiveness and asserting those properties as modes of producing *history*. In this view, performance's fleeting status encourages it to evade the veneration of the traditional archive's exclusive evidentiary gravitas. In performance, the archive's unreliability, taken as a given, is open to interpretation and other modes of fabulation that double down on unreliability instead of amending it with an authorial vision/version of the truth. It is less a process of strict memorialization than an intentional process of selective layering and substitution. This is the simultaneous enactment of memory and forgetting, a narration of history through performance. Joseph Roach, drawing from Jamaican dramatist Dennis Scott, refers to this strategy as "echoes in the bone," which encompasses raising the spirits of the dead to "empower the living through the performance of memory" (Roach 1996, 34). In this argument, conjuring the dead/spirits becomes as effective and (un)reliable a tool of performing memory as the solid archive's narration of History.

Peggy Phelan made an insightful observation about performance (theory) as "the attempt to value that which is nonreproductive, nonmetaphorical [...], to learn the value of what cannot be reproduced or seen (again)" (Phelan 1993, 152). She and other performance theorists such as André Lepecki find in disappearance a radical anti-capitalist and anti-capture attribute of these non-reproductive immaterial remains. Schneider's response to Phelan challenges the latter's tethering of the immaterial to disappearance or nonreproducability (Schneider 2011, 91). In this way, she follows Moten's astute characterization of Black performance's (non)ontology and its mode of production as "the *conjunction* of reproduction and disappearance," as simultaneous forgetting and *invention* (Moten 2003, 5). If it is true that performance remains, what do we make of these remains when they are subsumed in the house of culture? My argument, rather than reiterating the storied debates about the ontology of performance as (either) disappearing and/or remaining, maintains that the machinations of antiblack capitalism co-opt all sides of the debate. That is, while those non-reproductive and immaterial aspects of performance may have provided a way out of capture, it is precisely that refusal that becomes attractive for institutional accumulation and co-optation. Both the non-reproductive and reproductive accounts of performance's ontology are susceptible to capture. As I show in the Musée du Quai Branly's invitation to Nelisiwe Xaba to create a performance about Sara Baartman, valuing that which is nonreproductive is exactly how art museums absorb performance's purported ontological refusal and employ it as labor for the museum's endowment.

In the prescriptive ending of Phelan's essay directed at "museums whose collections include objects taken/purchased/obtained from cultures who are now asking (and expecting) their return" (Phelan 1993, 166), Phelan rejects a logic of preservation as that which should catalyze the museum's repatriation of objects. However, it is precisely this logic of preservation that has prevailed in the repatriation process, not in the way she critiqued, but, rather, the preservation of immaterial remains in the form of performances brought in as substitutes replacing repatriated objects. These officiating structures have absorbed the radical potential that may have lied in ephemeral proof. They have arrested and domesticated the very modalities that critique the museum for self-refurbishment and durability in capital. The argument I am making here is that

institution-facing critique is the raw material ready to be repurposed to endow the institution's fruition. Every critique of the museum gets co-opted as an improvement manual for the museum and other officiating structures. If the ontology of performance is defined by its resistance of easy capture (see Ibid., Lepecki 2007) then the museum's domestication of performance becomes a way of capturing that resistance. Black performance, as Fumi Okiji asserts, cannot help but be critical (Okiji 2018), and it is constrained to do so within institutional parameters in ways that fortify the institutional structure and its foundation. Museums ultimately co-opt, restrain, manage, and commodify Black fugitivity and Black critique.

Redemption in Creative and Academic Works about Baartman

The general impulse in artistic representation has been to visually approximate Sara Baartman's anatomy by abstractly re-producing "the Venus" as anatomically freakish. In 2015, at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown (Makhanda), director Sylvaine Strike presented a performance titled *CARGO: Precious* in collaboration with producer Georgina Thompson, choreographer P.J. Sabbagha, musician Concord Nkabinde, and the Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative's Nosiphiwo Samente danced the role of Baartman alongside a cast of male characters, most of whom presented as Black. The aim was "to explore the untold part of Saartjie's extraordinary story, especially the journey between the two continents of Africa and Europe" (Fortune Cookie Theatre Company 2018). In an interview, Thompson posits, "so basically the story is a fantasy. It reflects on Saartjie Baartman and what she might have gone through on that trip from South Africa to Europe" (Africa Is a Country 2014). Thompson's statement about *CARGO: Precious'* intention to "fantasize" about what Baartman "might have gone through" (Ibid.) relies on an underlying assumption about empathy among a presumed community of women that recurs in narratives by white feminist artists. A few years prior, choreographer Robyn Orlin also worked with a cast of Black women to produce a piece titled … *have you hugged, kissed and respected your brown Venus today?* which premiered at the Grand Theatre of Luxembourg on November 16, 2011. The intention was to expose the "scandal" of Baartman which, as Orlin wrote in the synopsis, was not known to most Europeans. Orlin also provocatively used an image from Candice Breitz's *Rainbow Series* (1996) for publicity, artworks that deploy a technique of pasting and suppressing image cut-outs of white woman's faces upon images of Black women dressed in traditional Ndebele garb. The suppressed image recalls ethnographic portraiture exemplified by figurations of Africans in *their natural habitat* circulated around the world in the form of postcards. One of the cut-outs is what appears to be a white woman figure originally figured in Early Renaissance Italian painter Sandro Botticelli's painting titled *The Birth of Venus*. Breitz's gesture in the collage, and by extension Orlin's, attempts to collapse all women under the brush of relational universal femininity. While the formal assembly of these fragments and contexts in her collages is remarkable for its dense staging of "the Venus" trope's multiple signifying functions in art and aesthetics, it also gestures toward acts of eclipsing and symbolic mutilation through cut-and–paste techniques. It arrives at a parasitic substitution and problematic analogizing that repeats in contemporary representations of Baartman. While these pieces were received warmly due to their innovative staging and edgy fine art techniques, many questions linger concerning their intentions in staging "Venus" as a mode of galvanizing

simultaneous memory and absenting, proving, as Athinangamso Nkopo asserts, that Black women "are called into solidarity coalitions in order to vivify the action and clarify the urgency of cause; they are less agents and more fodder, prop and evidence of violence" (Nkopo 2022, 99). In that vein, white-authored performances about Baartman have demonstrated the pitfalls of the analogizing gestures of allyship.

Zine Magubane advances a critique of Baartman's "theoretical fetishization" (Magubane 2001, 818). This "theoretical odyssey" (Ibid., 831) moves from using Baartman's biological features as evidence to critique her capture, to positioning her as an antithesis of European aesthetic standards, and some arguments are geared towards proving the African as an essential non-voluntary foil for European juridico-politico-philosophical reflection about freedom, consent, rights to property etc. In her supremely optimistic reading of Willie Bester's *Sarah Baartman* sculpture, Katherine McKittrick notes "the creatively scientific possibilities with which Sarah Baartman has posthumously provided us" (McKittrick 2010, 114) and venerates Bester's act of "put[ting] Baartman back together" (Ibid., 126). She treks an alternative path from ones that understand Baartman as scientifically condemned. Creative works about Baartman, for McKittrick, enhance what she calls "the promise of science" (Ibid., 125), which purportedly "bring[s] forth a less adversarial and less oppositional relationship with science" (Ibid., 123). She insists that it is not an effort to deny the violence inflicted upon Baartman but a different way of reading the violence through "a framework that honours a commensurately scientific and creative space" (Ibid.). This framework of reading colonial violence (informed by a particular interpretation of theorist Sylvia Wynter) reserves curiosity for what science can do *through* Baartman as well as what Baartman does *for* both creative works and science. Silence ensues, however, when we consider how Baartman's endowment of scientific reflection may recapitulate rather than eschew the violence. McKittrick calls for a "peer[ing]outside" of the violence against Baartman that endows science and that we consider instead how creative works about Baartman "intervene in, and nourish, our understandings of science" (Ibid., 114). In other words, Baartman and creative works about Baartman must continue to labor as such labor demonstrates the alternate possibilities of science. In this formulation, Baartman must labor yet again, differently, and pedagogically, but labor nonetheless, for scientific reflection and refurbishment. This approach requires the highlighting of science's potential by compelling Baartman to remain a poetico-theoretical *middle passage* bridging the gulf imposed between science and art.

Refusing to confront Baartman's position in abyssal negation, scholars inject power/agency where it was structurally denied. McKittrick's recuperative reading above finds an interlocutor in Mbongeni Mtshali's engagement with Nelisiwe Xaba's "Venus" diptych. For Mtshali, reading Xaba's "Venus" dance works for "humor and pleasure" may allow us to "envision a more capacious and resistant vision of black women's historical power and agency" (Mtshali 2020, 36). Here, there is a positivist revision of historical archival voids enabled by structural violence, turning them into narratives of capacity and pleasure. This invention of agency or pleasure in the archival tomb also anchors Pumla Gqola's discussion of Baartman. The writers whose work Gqola analyzes in relation to Baartman "move beyond writing back to older traditions. Instead, uncover and discover the textures of crafting "epicentres of our agency", the vast possibilities available to imagining historic

subjects as human without focusing on their bodies as their sole point of reference" (Gqola 2012, 102). The emphasis on agency here is geared towards participation in the humanist soirée despite being uninvited and unwelcome. The goal is to fashion a historic subject out of the historically condemned, as opposed to blowing the lid off history. This restless, but also exhausted, drive to avoid confronting the ambivalences and irrecuperable negations of history also moves in the pages of Jennifer Nash's critique of "archives of pain." Reading Renee Cox's self-portrait titled *Hot-En-Tot*, an artwork referring to Baartman, Nash takes issue with "the Black feminist theoretical archive's "deep investment" [...] in the Black female body's woundedness which comes at the expense of capturing the possibilities of Black women's pleasure" (Nash 2014, 31). Her careful effort to create an alternative archive of Black women's pleasure, which she admits is fraught with contradictions, comes close to reinforcing the historical revisionism and exculpation she aptly critiques. Coming from a slightly different angle, Hershini Bhana Young takes issue with "the historical and present-day limits of liberal, capitalist notions of individual agency" (Young 2017, 1). Her notion of "illegible will" refrains from locating "will" in legible individual agency but reads Baartman's bodily gestures "to conjure the ghostly possibilities of her agency within the close confines of free and unfree labor" (Ibid., 31). In this instance, even as agency is irreducible to the individual, it remains a ghostly possibility. That is, the scholar must strain (or limit) the imagination by alchemizing the terror of impossibility into ghostly possibility.

The transubstantiation efforts chronicled above arrive too hastily at the soothing counternarratives of pleasure and agency. I concur with Saidiya Hartman's argument that such mobilizations of the imagination as an instrument of closure are too impatient to "respect what we cannot know" in the archive (Hartman 2008, 3). The only certainty about Venus we can have, according to Hartman, is that she will remain uncontainable, elusive, and impossible to suture to perfect closure (Ibid., 6). This sentiment is echoed by Nelisiwe Xaba's statement on the first piece of the "Venus" diptych where she draws attention to "the impossible task of understanding or accessing the thoughts of the dead [...] the rigidity of the archive open[ing] itself up to the interpretations of the living" (Xaba 2013, 169). In the wake of Christina Sharpe's critique of redemption in *Monstrous Intimacies* (the tendency to assuage shame as the interminable inheritance), I wonder why neutralizing readings that recuperate pleasure, humanism, possibility, and agency "despite" colonial violence persist as necessity? Frank B. Wilderson (in conversation with Jaye Austin Williams) also critiques compulsory redemption by stating, "So here you are [...] as a black person, liv[ing] a life for which there is no redemption. And yet you are forced to *make* redemption in everything you do; to show them a world unlike your own—to spare them the "indignity" of having to encounter you" (Wilderson and Williams 2016, n.p.). My own itinerary follows these thinkers' rejection of a redeeming (counter-)narrative about/for Baartman, which is echoed by Nelisiwe Xaba's dance work. Redemption is a compromised political strategy because in its latent or overt religious articulation, it "replaces a real reckoning with history (state brutality, colonialism, slavery, apartheid, ethnocentrism, truth and reconciliation) and its consequences with a symbolic sacrifice; it demands that some atrocities remain unspoken and unspeakable" (Sharpe 2010, 73). The redemptive posture, in attempting to move beyond and peer outside of murderous colonial violence, subdues Black suffering and bolsters agency and pleasure as anachronistic replacements. Redemption hypervaluates the "evidence" of pleasure in domination (as if to say

"domination is not that bad" if it licenses slivers of pleasure) while remaining strategically silent about the brutal scene's endowment of the economy of pleasure. The Black suffers *in* pleasure. Both Black wounding and pleasure endow the Other's pleasure. Pleasure is neither antiblack violence's antidote nor its sliver of respite in the pits of suffering. There is not yet a peering outside of the violent *scene of* Baartman's *subjection*, despite attempts to bracket it for more heroic and restorative narratives. As Yvette Abrahams, writing about Baartman, has argued, it remains crucial to emphasize the ongoing nature of the brutality since, "nowadays the whip may be less physical and more mental" (Abrahams 1997, 35).

Sakhozi Says "Non" to the Venus

Sakhozi Says "Non" to the Venus is a 25-minute-long performance in collaboration with other artists. It was originally commissioned by the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac in 2009. The museum, named after France's former head of state, which houses more than 1,000,000 art objects and artefacts from Africa, the Americas, and Asia accumulated during colonial conquest, mission, and trade. They approached Nelisiwe Xaba and other artists to each produce a performance as part of *Body in Motion*, the last program of the museum's season dedicated to the body (Verdon 2008). In my writing about the piece, I demonstrate how it has become customary for European and North American museums that house colonial collections to excavate those collections and exhibit them anew with an intended critical and self-reflexive approach. These museums and other arts/cultural institutions commission contemporary artists to critically engage with their colonial archival materials and pose questions about a range of topics such as memory, reparation, repatriation, and reconciliation etc. (see Copeland 2013, 25–64). However, these invitations to decolonize museum collections are drafted against the contemporary African artist's interests and towards European rehabilitation.

Originally titled *After all home is not rosy*, the piece's title changed during the creation process as a result of France's former minister of Interior, Overseas, and Territorial collectivities, Brice Hortefeux, and former President Nicolas Sarkozy's harsh anti-immigration laws. In 2007, Sarkozy succeeded Jacques Chiraq as President of France. Prior to the presidency, he served as Minister of Interior in Chiraq's administration. As a minister in 2003, he oversaw an exponential increase in immigrant deportations and a reduction in the number of asylum-seekers (see Marthaler 2008, 387). Upon becoming president, he inaugurated a Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development. The title *Sakhozi Says "Non" to the Venus* is a reference to President Sarkozy saying no to (African) migrants, and Xaba spells his last name in isiZulu as "Sakhozi." *Sakhozi Says "Non"* is a meditation on the journeys of ordinary African women who are forced to travel to Europe in pursuit of work. Xaba began meditating on the optimism of African migrants who leave their homes, some forced to seek asylum due to war or other socio-political upheaval and destabilizations (often enforced by Western imperialism), who arrive in France and suffer because of antiblack racism and xenophobia. Most of these Africans end up in domestic servitude positions like cleaning, cooking, and taking care of European children and senior citizens. She considered African migrant laborers' (and her own) difficulties in attaining immigration documents, as well as

their constant subjection to strict border scrutiny at European ports of entry. She also connected Baartman's experience and the plight of contemporary African cultural workers who are expected to appease the variant modes of exotic voyeurism by European audiences.

In *Sakhozi Says "Non" to the Venus* the audience walks in while Nelisiwe Xaba forms a rectangular enclosure on the floor by lining up white paper cut-outs shaped like humerus bones. In the beginning, Xaba wears a pair of black heels, a black fishnet body suit, a sleeveless zip-up coat with spikes, and a black pleated skirt. The black pleated skirt resembles isidwaba (a leather pleated skirt traditionally worn by married Zulu women) and she carries a white travel hat box. She walks around within the rectangle with wandering eyes, a seeming sense of wonder, curiosity, and intrigue—like a traveler arriving in an unfamiliar foreign place, uncertain about how she is going to be received. She looks up and down, side to side, places the bag on the floor, and folds out the white inner lining of the skirt she is wearing. Thereafter, she kneels and gnaws one of the life-size paper bones before lying on one side, resting on the right hip, bone in mouth, while her eyeballs move in an automated staccato pace from side to side. There is a sound of dogs barking as she crawls across the enclosure in a manner that resembles a canine. At a later stage in the piece, she disrobes and wears a short tassel skirt. She also puts on a maid's outfit—a white apron with images of a passport's visa pages printed on it. As she removes the spikes on her vest in mechanical arm motion, the face remains expressionless. The face's passive affective grammar counteracts the vitality of the rest of the body. This is a break of flow between what the lower part of the body is expressing and the face's indifference to expressivity. She then removes the vest to reveal a black tight-fitting fishnet body suit while executing spinal undulations, a recognizable movement trope in African diasporic theatrical dance works by artists such as Vincent Mantsoe, Katherine Dunham, Asadata Dafora, and Germaine Acogny. These movements tropes are attached to African folklore and ritual and have circulated beyond that realm and entered the various venues of Black modern and popular culture. Their repetition over time has granted them a reputation where they are expected to appear in African-derived dance.

The soundtrack has switched to a string composition, which is followed by a gospel song, as she lays out what appears to be white cloth with a visa passport page printed on it. She also pulls out a pillowcase and white powder, which she sprinkles all over the white cloth, before rubbing the powder on her skin, imprinting three vertical lines from her forehead down to her chin, donning these white lines as a kind of white mask. When she sprinkles the white powder, it falls lightly and levitates in front of her face, threatening to overshadow her dark face. A recording of Dorothy Masuka singing "Kulomhlaba Siyahlupheka, Abamnyama basosizini," which translates to "In this world we are suffering. Black people are draped in sorrow" plays in the background. There is emphasis on references to other Black women artists who had to travel and work in Paris, such as Sara Baartman, Nina Simone, and Josephine Baker. Nina Simone's recording of *I Put a Spell on You*, is included in the piece, and Xaba re-performs iconic Josephine Baker movements, particularly the wide smile and virtuosic gesture of crossing eyes, which has become one of the prime signifiers for recognizing Baker's *danse sauvage* performances in Paris. This is one of the primary moments where she makes obvious connections to Baker, drawing on familiar iconic gestures and tropes from Baker's performances in France. Xaba's analogizing gesture with antecedent performances

by Simone and Baker risks blurring the particularities of their historical conditions of emergence/un-making. The transatlantic slave trade cuts Simone and Baker in particular and enduring ways that foreclose any claims to sovereignty and citizenship in the anti-Black and imperialist USA, forcing them to turn to equally anti-Black and imperialist France because of its meagre promises for Black (American) artists to thrive within that negrophilic economy. Xaba, as a South African Black woman, cannot lay direct claim to that history while colonialism, slavery, and apartheid cut Black South Africans in entangled and ever-lasting ways. The decision to conflate her condition with that of Baartman's, Baker's, and Simone's, is revelatory insofar as it draws attention to the crisis of the amalgamation of will and coercion such that they become indistinguishable instruments for the Black's effacement. In other words, Xaba's decision to conflate these performers occurs with an awareness of each performer's geo-historical specificity, while creating awareness about a structure that requires Black female subjectivity to remain ambiguously positioned in relation to the Human, irrespective of the name-place from which they emanate.

Moving away from a desire for neat representation or attempts at endowing the void of Black subjectivity with wholeness, Xaba turns to stripped down or abstract minimalist movement that straddles the space between the figural and the non-representational. Mundane movements such as cleaning, crawling, swinging a suitcase, and blinking her eyes form part of the piece's central movement vocabulary. These movements, sometimes executed with a deadpan facial expression while facing the audience, are sometimes juxtaposed with suspended elongated movements and poses. The general movement vocabulary is comprised of small quotidian movements as well as contrasting extended limbs in a manner that is consistent with ballet and modern/contemporary dance forms. A video of an eye is projected on the floor, inside the rectangle, at times, and this corresponds with the piece's investigation of voyeurism. As she kneels and crawls on the floor, she balances a large-sized animal bone between her teeth, blinking and crossing her eyes.[5] The soundscape is cacophonous, string instruments superimposed over sounds of barking dogs. The movement choices in *Sakhozi Says "Non" to the Venus* confront a problem that haunts Black choreographers in the global contemporary dance scene; namely, the primitivist interpretations of their work, even as they produce highly complex conceptual dance innovations. As Xaba has stated, her work cannot escape this reception, as the formal interventions of her work described above are sometimes ignored (see Ramalapa and Xaba 2012, n.p.). This is also the norm for African and African Diasporic performances in the West, which are often publicized, consumed, and reviewed as highly energetic, pulsey, sexy etc., thereby erasing their formal modernist/contemporary interventions. When African choreographers refrain from producing a joyful affective register and exuberant kinetic quality (as is evident in Xaba's practice), critics and scholars dismiss their work as derivative and mimetic of European/North American conceptual dance originals. African dancers are often construed as natural performers, or natural entertainers when they foreground Africanist elements, and this erases the labor of complicating and intervening on those forms deemed traditional or indigenous.

Xaba also encompasses elements of Zulu dancing, especially *ukusina*, a movement encompassing high kicks typically performed with an articulate spine (and in the French context, this movement resonates stylistically with the can-can). By contrast, her execution of the Zulu dance leg extensions

is performed with a vertical spine and rigid torso. She performs these aspects of Zulu dancing without the "exuberance" and "high energy" typically associated with these dances. In an artist statement she avers, "In slowing down these movements—in performing them out of context—I also look at the exotic expectation of the black body" (Sichel 2009, n.p.). She refrains from surrendering to these expectations, but she is aware of the exotic expectations which impose those tropes even if they are not present. The slowing down and out-of-context presentation of traditional Zulu dance, for example, are neither a total embrace nor a rejection of European exotic expectations. This is a position of neither resistance nor resignation/giving up, but the position often taken by the "indifferent native" (Macharia 2016, 188). In the performance, Xaba's position is an inevitable one, she "cannot not perform" the position of the native (informant) (Ibid.).

In the small rectangular performance space, the interspersion of post-modern/contemporary dance and traditional Zulu dance is less a seamless syncretism characteristic of some Afro-fusion dance; rather, the interspersion amplifies the entanglements and irreconcilable dissonances between the forms. Xaba also demonstrates technical proficiency in ballet. This technical proficiency is not carried out to exalt (her own practice through) classical ballet. Her eclectic sampling of techniques is not about elevating (herself through) technique.[6] Xaba's anti-colonial stance is enacted through this deliberate detachment from a demonstration of technical prowess in Modern dance and Ballet as the primary intention of the performance. The treatment of these dance forms in *Sakhozi Says "Non" to the Venus* is not reducible to a reaction and response to Europe (European funding notwithstanding). The slowing down of the Zulu dance is a process of enacting heresy on Zulu tradition as well, disrupting those elements deemed sacred within it.[7] It also pays homage to Zulu dance as a complex knowledge system and practice transmitted from dancing body to dancing body across multi-directional generations. Dissociating the dance from its usual context and familiar affective state creates a space for an alternative deciphering protocol, one that foregrounds indeterminacy. This disruption is a process of repetition with revision, invention, and erasure.

The breaking of line and flow in the movement vocabulary of *Sakhozi Says "Non"* goes beyond a critical skewing of the straight line in a similar fashion championed by white Euro-American (post-)modern dance "pioneers." Instead, it demonstrates the complexities of line itself. It directs attention to the Black (dancing) body as the paradigmatically non-linear, slant, and out-of-line antithesis to form, which whiteness has continuously defined itself against, while paradoxically appropriating it (see Gottschild 2003). For this reason, there is no precolonial state of purity prior to entanglement. This impurity is often only read at the level of culture, but it is an ontological question for the Black. Frantz Fanon's explanation arrives more precisely at this point when he states, "In the *Weltanschauung* of a colonized people, there is an impurity or a flaw that prohibits any ontological explanation" (Fanon [1952] 2008, 89). That impurity is not merely a cultural crisis for the Black that can be easily remedied through claims to cultural mixing or the preservation of cultural origins. For the Black, as Fanon posits, impurity points to the Black's ontological negation, or a condemned status where the Black exists as "not." Xaba traces that negation through her own dancing body, as well as Baartman's encounter with discourses of science, aesthetics, philosophy, and medicine which produced her as the "Hottentot Venus." These discourses concocted the idea

of the Black female body as "paradigmatically dis-aesthetic or a monstrous irregularity" (Jackson 2018, 620). This idea also describes an ontological incapacity for elevated sensation. If Joseph Roach defines the eighteenth-century meaning of "aesthetic" as "the vitality and sensuous presence of material forms" (Roach 1996, xiii), then to be condemned as paradigmatically dis-aesthetic, for the Black woman in this *Weltanschauung*, is to inhabit a *de*form or an ontological impurity. It is to be devoid, *a priori*, of the capacity for vitality and sensuous presence. It marks the Black (female) body's incapacity for and indispensability to Enlightenment sublimity.

Echoes in the Bone

There is currently a lively debate in the arts, humanities, and social sciences about the repatriation of African cultural objects back to countries from where they were transferred or from where they were plundered during the colonial period. Economist and writer Felwine Sarr and art historian Bénédicte Savoy received a commission from French President Emmanuel Macron in 2017 to prepare a report that called for France to re-evaluate its policy on repatriating artefacts housed in French museums. In 2017, Macron delivered a speech in Ouagadougou announcing a five-year plan for the "temporary or definitive restitution of African cultural heritage returned to Africa" (Sarr and Savoy 2018, 27). This is a resurgence of a restitution conversation that took place in the late 1970s which was "forgotten, or rather, successfully repressed" (Savoy 2022, 1). Macron's campaign also includes acknowledgment of France's active involvement in colonization, war, and genocide in the continent. However, in an Afropessimist reading, these grand gestures only seek to insert Macron into history as the true protagonist of decolonial restitution in order to create a feel-good image of a selfless and benevolent French government. The gestures are political publicity maneuvers aimed at acknowledging past catastrophes while suppressing France's ongoing pillaging of African materials and exploitation of natural resources. This is why scholars such as Manthia Diawara respond to the restitution process as "yet another ruse created by the west to distract Africans from the true problems that they face" (quoted in Strother 2020, 928). Other critics see Macron's move, staged with strategic dramaturgy on African soil in Ouagadougou, as a public relations ploy to deflect attention from France's increasingly hostile immigration policies as well as the shady presence of French military troops in West Africa (Strother 2019, 5).

The Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac alone holds 70,000 of the 80,000 African artefacts currently in France. In my view, African (descended) artists are called in to perform in the West as *substitutes* for repatriated objects. These performance interventions meant to decolonize European institutions and offer Europe an opportunity to confront, reflect, and heal from their enduring colonial practices enact the opposite. Under the guise of redress and as an active re-imagining of colonial legacies, I observe that contemporary African performance is mobilized to redeem Europe's collective psyche to a state of re-equilibrium and cathartic resolution (see Wilderson 2010). African performers are required to do the work of healing and re-dressing their own colonial dispossession. Europeans reflecting on their historical atrocities require Africans to stage again that brutality for Western consumption and pedagogy. Redemption takes the form of European institutions licensing spiritual and cleansing ritual practices from Africa (what I am

understanding as immaterial heritage) now neatly and strategically packaged as performance art. This cleanup job, or spiritual domestic servitude, is the culmination of a perverse absolution that masquerades as (symbolic) reparation or justice. Given the representational economy's synecdochical penchant—the thirst for ones that (are rewarded to) stand for the whole—these artists' individual performances and their ideological stances are often burdened to represent the desires of the entire continent. In my view, Nelisiwe Xaba's choices in form, content, and concept reject and expose these appetites.

Despite the recent and growing debate on repatriating African artefacts, in most cases, colonial museums are still reluctant to relinquish the plundered artefacts from their possession. They either obfuscate or refuse to acknowledge colonial theft as theft. With regard to the repatriation of human remains not much has changed since 2007, when Séverine Le Guével, then head of the international relations at the Musée du Quai Branly, was asked about the museum's position on the repatriation of human remains and other artefacts. Le Guével remarked:

> First, the bodies have never functioned as human remains. Secondly, they were (for the most part) given to the explorers who brought them back, not stolen or taken without permission. Plus, they're not identified. We don't know who they belong to. Thus, they've become art objects; ethnographic objects. That makes a difference. Therefore, they should be preserved like art objects and cannot be destroyed [...] And it's also important to consider all objects that contain human remains. If we were to honour the claims for everything that contain human remains, it would mean giving away the entire collection of the Musée du Quai Branly, anything that contains a bit of bone, anything that contains a skull. (Quoted from Price 2007, 5)

This paternalistic relationship to African objects (human and non-human) extends to the colonial museum's assumption about African nation states' supposed natural incapability and dependence, in need of European institutions as stewards and saving graces. This is not simply a game of economics. It raises question about the political ontology of things. The being of these artefacts is malleably defined and determined by the whims of European museum directors, despite some of their significance as sacred objects with spiritual reverence. Masks and severed human bones transmogrify to become either art or ethnographic objects when it is convenient for those things to signify as such for the museum. This is an incessant historical problem identified by philosopher Nkiru Nzegwu who posited, in the context of an exhibition of African art curated by Mary Nooter, where African objects with sacred value were exhibited as art objects, "In unison, all the objects 'chant,' as they have been orchestrated to sing, that any interpretation is permissible and acceptable because cultural representation is never an objective presentation of facts" (Nzegwu 1994, 227–229). Le Guével's statement, despite its semantic-taxonomical hair-splitting, fails to demonstrate that any serious thought has been put behind the cataloguing of "artefacts" into the different categories she mentions.

The repatriation movement's emphasis on cross-continental dialogue conceals the impossibility of such dialogue in the event of Europe's continued incapacity and unwillingness to confront what Le Guével fears as "giving away the entire collection of the Musée du Quai Branly" (Price 2007, 5).

Some French art dealers and collectors have responded to Macron's nebulous call for temporary or definitive restitution by initiating definitive restitution in their own hands without recourse to public officiating structures (Saar and Savoy 25). As commendable a gesture as that is, Le Guével's fear of letting go of the museum's collection can still be traced in recent utterances by certain other museum directors. Kwame Opoku, in response to Tristram Hunt, Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, has aptly characterized this fear of disappearance as a "fiction of the troubled imagination of a Western Museum director, who dreams one night and hallucinates that he will get up and find his museum empty" (Opoku 2023, n.p.). Opoku also criticizes Hunt's prescriptions for the repatriation process to occur only through a vaguely defined and "evil" universalism as well as the circumvention (if not excision) of politics by concentrating solely on the objects themselves. This demonstrates that the very being and becoming of the European museum is constituted by the perennial possession of African objects (animate or inanimate, material or immaterial), where the violence of (dis)possession is softened by crude universalisms and the deployment of words such as preservation.

The linear movement from dispossession to re-dress in the museum's commissioning of African performances obfuscates how these performances are a form of, rather than anathema to, African dispossession. From the African artist's perspective, these performances are meant to provide symbolic reparation, to speak back to European domination, and to repatriate irreplaceable dispossession that spans beyond the theft of cultural artifacts. As Spillers notes, this void, for Africans in the New World is irreversible due to what she calls the incalculable "*theft of the body*—a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire" (Spillers [1987] 2003, 206). Loss, then, is not a fitting grammar for this irreparable and unmournable void, this non-recuperable "severing of the captive body from its motive will" (Ibid.). That theft of the body is what Michele Wallace insists on discussing alongside these objects, the human bodies as cargo that circulated within the same imperial economy of pillaging, kidnapping, and destruction. She argues that "the fate of these objects was not unrelated to the fate of the human bodies also removed from Africa under less-than-ideal circumstances—some of them sold or just handed over and some of them kidnapped" (Wallace 2004, 467). As Peju Layiwola has also stated, when British soldiers invaded the empire of Benin in February 1897, not only did they pillage (sacred)objects/artefacts, but they also desecrated memorial shrines, set villages on fire, and "mow[ed] down hundreds of Benin soldiers" (Layiwola 2014, 87). This is what Sarr and Savoy refer to when they posit, "destruction and collection are the two sides of the same coin" (Sarr and Savoy 2018, 14). Their statement attests to the fact that these objects were not merely found, but Europeans murdered and enslaved African people, and destroyed villages, to accumulate the objects they chose not to destroy. Colonial violence flattened out the difference between the objects and the creators of those objects and rendered them fungible. African stolen lives (reduced to objecthood) through murder, maiming, and slavery cannot be repatriated. These are the lives that the repatriation movement has yet to fully conceptualize. Repatriation cannot repair a certain colonial irreversible theft. My focus on this theft of African people is less an anthropocentric fixation than an attempt to expose the fissures of the object-orientation logic espoused by prominent voices in the restitution debate. It drives my point home about the impossibility of restitution for the dead, as well as the contemporary museum's capture of African performance as another iteration of the theft of the body.

When engaging with the Musée du Quai Branly archive during the research phase, Xaba was struck by what she calls "the discord between the extensive documentation of her (Sara Baartman's) body and the physicality of her being, and the absence of any idea of her mental state or thoughts during her lifetime" (Xaba 2013, 169). This discord is unsurprising, as absence and excess are typical of the archive which tells little of Black subjects, except, as Saidiya Hartman puts it, "stories that exist [that] are not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses" (Hartman 2008, 2). Xaba's recognition of the discord provides a crisis where she can either surrender to the fantasy of recovering interiority and narrative closure for "Venus," or ask different questions about representational form, speculation, and the ends of narrative closure. The Musée du Quai Branly commission throws her in at the deep end, forcing her to confront some of the following questions: What is narrative recuperation for the "narratively condemned" (Sharpe 2016, 17). Are there underlying desires, other than those laid out on the surface, for her invitation to create a performance intervention on one of the most controversial instances of anti-Black terror? Whose rehabilitation is occasioned by this performance? In the bottomless shaft where she has been thrown, she must account for what the remains can tell us and what they have been structurally conditioned *not* to narrate. If (her) performance *remains*, as performance studies scholars have argued convincingly, then what do the remains of her performance endow to the museum? If performance remains, then, like other remains, does it enter the domain of capitalist property relations? If what remains possesses value and potential to participate in capitalist property relations, then performance as remains can also be owned, captured. This is because contemporary capitalism operates beyond the exchange of material goods (such as fossils, aesthetic objects, and bodily remains) and includes immaterial value. To put it differently, if her performance *remains*, that signals that it enters a system of value, of property relations, where aspects of it are open to being owned by the museum, in a similar way that the museum possessed Baartman's physical remains. If the museum understands what has become performance studies' mantra of "performance remains," then Baartman's repatriated physical remains can be exchanged for a different set of remains—performance remains. Decolonial performance, in this instance, is not the complete refusal it promises to be for the Black. In performing the "Venus" in perpetuity, African performers cannot help but be condemned back to their colonial a/object status, and their performances prototypes of contemporary immaterial theft.

Because some of Xaba's research for the "Venus" diptych took place in Paris, she also meditates on Black American performer and icon Josephine Baker who gained fame by performing *danse sauvage* which encompassed primitivist tropes that have contributed majorly to Modernist aesthetics. While Baker and "The Venus Hottentot" are not collapsible, both provide a noteworthy precedent for those performers who became iconic (and relatively wealthy in some cases) for performing versions of *danse sauvage*. "The Venus Hottentot', as African feminist Ayo Coly posits, had little control and knowledge of the intentions of her captors, or the larger ideological implications and pre-established notions that her "*les sauvages*" construction signified which preceded her arrival (Coly 2008, 259). Coly continues, "Unlike Baartman, Baker possessed the foresight into and an astute awareness of the ideological repercussions of her staging of racial difference" (Ibid.). However, Baker's foresight neither ceased nor reduced the violence of European

structures of fantasy. Baker's subversion of the stereotype repeated as much as it subverted the fetish (see Cheng 2011, 42). Nelisiwe Xaba confirms Coly's argument about foresight, since for her in *Sakhozi Says "Non" to the Venus*, "This [is] a choice. It's not like Sara Baartman who had no choice, a contract or costume [...] My challenge is how do I use my body in a way that exhibiting it does not degrade it" (Ramalapa and Xaba, 2012, n.p.). Xaba, as a performance artist creating work 200 years after Baartman's physical death, has the foresight to tease out the continuities and breaks between Baartman's condition and contemporary conditions.

The figure of the collaborator-as-implement haunts both Baker's and Xaba's performances. What do we make of Baker performing African stereotypes, or Xaba accepting the invitation to perform at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris? The aim of these questions is not to be accusatory or disproportionately direct heat towards the implement, but to examine the concept of collaboration in its myriad and contradictory permutations. Knowingly collaborating with a museum that had liberal but essentially un-transformative politics, or willingly recycling anti-African stereotypes with the self-belief that they are being subverted are questions that ought to be brought up alongside celebratory thick description of these artist's tact and innovation. Baker became Fatou, who in the show went down a tree like a monkey (with the monkey's favorite treat, bananas around her hips). According to Françoise Verges in "BANANAS: Racism, Sex, and Capitalism," Baker was aware of critic Fernard Devoire's praise of her performance, which stated, "'In the eyes of Paris, you are the virgin forest. You bring to us a savage rejuvenation'" (quoted in Verges 2016, n.p.). It is worth noting that the savage rejuvenation mentioned by Devoire happened alongside the development of the Negritude Movement in Paris, which called for retentions of (strategically) essentialized notions of African rhythm, modes of philosophizing, and a revival of other visual-artistic accoutrements. Negritude was also rubbing up against the long-existent frenzy of European negrophilia, which Baker was aware of and capitalized upon. Baker's performance at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées also drew from the US minstrel tradition. *Sakhozi Says "Non" to the Venus*, then, cites Baker to trace a maternal/material *heritage* of avant-garde performance's ties to racial capitalism, fetishism, aesthetic judgment, and the coeval interplay of desire and disgust (see Verges 2016). Her "Venus" performances emerge out of the knowledge of and foresight about the condition and position of these Black performance predecessors in relation to capture often constru(ct)ed as entertainment. It is this foresight, I argue, that raises the stakes even more for both Baker and Xaba.

Baker's and Xaba's astute awareness of the ideological repercussions of staging racial difference raise the stakes for what their authorial conceptualizations challenge, as well as what they recapitulate. They are both inevitably entangled and complicit by virtue of intentionally citing the primal scene. When they both enter the drama of re(-)presentation, they are haunted by the figure of Baartman and structures of fetishism and fantasy attached to her, their knowing or lack thereof notwithstanding. The knowledge and foresight are not powerful enough to either suspend or stall the haunting. The staging of "self" and primitivism in "their own terms" with this knowledge of the lucrative benefits of what poet Lesego Rampokoleng calls "ethnic prancing" (Oliphant 2010, 23) implicates the artists in a form of *self*-commoditization that contradicts their foresight-driven subversive exercises. It becomes clear that Blacks may have no terms of their own in this (neo-)colonial order, despite their deployment of foresight as an attempt to re-fashion *scenes of*

subjection in their own terms. The racial stereotype stubbornly sticks to the surface, indistinguishable from the subversive or counter-hegemonic gesture (see Cheng 2011, 42). This is why in Xaba's work the Black female body is approached through a somewhat tentative/non-spectacular back-and-forth dance, toward and away from the promises and traps of figuration, legibility, and visibility. Recognizing or retroactively endowing Baartman with the gift of subjectivity assumes that subjectivation is antithetical to captivity, when subjectivation for the Black is a form of captivity. It remains unclear why Baartman's subjectivity, agency, and pleasure must be recognized in the political present. Nelisiwe Xaba's project seems less concerned with recognition or reclamation of subjectivity in this manner. Rather, the piece draws attention to the anti-Black historico-political apparatuses of the "not-yet-past Enlightenment" (Jackson 2018, 621) that calibrate(d) the coherence of subjectivity in the first place. It appears to be less concerned with re-assembling or gnawing at the scraps of a subjectivity long denied to Black people.

Exit

The performance theory argument about performance's ephemerality/immateriality being a form of rigorous evidence has been absorbed as a how-to guide for the extraction of that evidence, the capitalist churning of the (deliberately) anti-/ante-rigorous but unreliable ephemera into a coagulated value form, arresting performance to become one of the ornaments populating what Michele Wallace calls the prison house of culture, the archival house of the head of state (e.g., Jacques Chirac). Few contortionists are as supple and adaptable as anti-Black capitalism (tied to the state). The argument that "performance saves" (Schneider 2011, 99) sets up those savings' availability as wealth, as investable capital. "Performance saves" elaborates performance's alt-archival capacities, it is an argument for performance's similarity to the logic of the archive, only now appearing as a minoritized archive endowing performance theory with its reputation of avant-gardism and radicality.

If we return to the epigraph of this essay, the captive's dance, with its complex riddles and transient refusals is also characteristic of the *self*-betraying uses of agency. What Hartman describes in the epigraph as the use of the body as an instrument against itself bespeaks a wish for a form of transcendence whose success hinges on failure or incapacity to transcend. The captive's dance is a fleeting enigma where memories of enduring battle, the perennial resistance of the object (Moten 2003), and compromised coalition meet and commiserate. It must stage (and thus re-produce) *self*-devoration while criticizing devoration as a force that conditions both its fruition and evisceration. For recognition, it must slit its own throat, so to speak, and jive compliantly to the spell-binding beat of "Shut up and dance!" It is required to "corpse" (Marriott 2016) itself by parading itself as the emblem of human vitality, something it is simultaneously defined against. It must execute its duty of misrecognizing itself in human figuration, in motion, and (over-)identify with the phantasmic shape or misshapen phantasm that it is not. It can only exist and be embraced (which is to say situate itself appropriately to be effortlessly managed) if it betrays the knowledge of its own location in the gaping mouth of social death and opt to chant a heroic tune of agency, pleasure, and will.

Notes

[1] This brief description is paradoxically the kind of perfect summing up this essay is critiquing. Discreet acts of harm such as dissection and exhibiting constitute, but do not exhaust, the anti-black violence I am describing, which is ultimately unknowable and unrepresentable. However, the re-counting of these details is intended for the reader who is unfamiliar with Baartman. I include the incomplete summing up of Baartman's life to draw attention to how any critique of how Baartman's life is narrated also falls into the trap of relying on narration to critique narrative. This is the impasse of narrative. In this case, narration is critiqued for its unavoidable re-presentation of violence. However, the critique happens by way of re-producing the very pitfalls of narration. Ultimately, the narration of violent acts against Baartman can only scratch the surface and cannot pin down the vast gap of what we cannot know about Baartman's circumstances. For more on the dangers of re-producing the primal scene of violence through narrative, see Hartman (1997).

[2] Huey Copeland and Krista Thompson define afrotropes as "those motifs that continue to structure the afterlives of slavery—as a shorthand way of referring to the recurrent visual forms that have emerged within and become central to the formation of African-diasporic culture and identity" (Copeland and Thompson 2017, 3). The details of the artists I mention are as follows: Suzan-Lori Parks, *Venus* (1996); Lyle Ashton Harris, *Venus Hottentot* (2000) [in collaboration with Renee Cox]; Tracey Rose, *Venus Baartman* (2001); Mawande ka Zenzile, *Letter for Sarah batman to Josephine Baker* (2011); Shoshanna Weinberger, *Buffed Under Ozone Rain* (2012); Kara Walker, *Camptown Ladies* (1998); Wangechi Mutu*, Le Noble Savage* (2006); Wangechi Mutu, *Chorus Line* (2008).

[3] If non-representationalist aesthetics derives its political efficacy from how much is not said or figured literally, then what does the constant return to charged iconography of the "Hottentot Venus" (especially the enlarged buttocks) in visual representation make possible or obscure? What are the lessons provided by non-representationalist Black feminist theory and aesthetic praxis? Through Zakiyyah I. Jackson's theorization, we glean how "the Black female," rather than being an empirical sign, is a material metaphor made to cohere through figuration and projection in aesthetic, literary, and scientific representation (Jackson 2018, 619–620.) As signifier, "the Hottentot Venus," bears no stable resemblance to the referent since "the Black female body" is neither equivalent to its iconography nor its fleshly representationalist doubles (Ibid., 621). The intention here is to understand how an icon produced from different directions, and through contrasting motives and power maneuvers coalesced into a materialdiscursive metaphor masquerading as empirical.

[4] Saidiya Hartman (1997) theorizes this as accumulation and fungibility. For a discussion of blackness and plasticity, see Jackson (2020). For a discussion of plasticity that focuses on possibility, see McMillan (2015).

[5] Dogs, although treasured in popular culture as "man's best friend," invoke a different meaning in the piece. The sound of dogs barking also conjures up memories of terror, in particular, apartheid violence where dogs were trained by police to terrorize Black people. As a result, dogs are still understood as an extension of this anti-Black prerogative. Attempts at inter-species relationality are difficult in this context, where dogs and other animals are still positioned higher than the Black, rather than as "humanimal" companions. This companionship between the dog and the Black is only established in racist thought when both are signs of debasement. Xaba's crawl references this debasement as a meeting point between the Black and the dog, where the dog also has capacity to move up the chain and be Man's companion. Black people's tense relationship with dogs is not a result of an onto-epistemological order where they see themselves as inherently positioned higher than dogs in a hierarchy of species. The tension, rather, has been produced through racial terror, using dogs as conduits for the policing and brutalization of Black people. (See Bennett 2020; Ndebele, 2006.)

[6] Here I invoke Stefano Harney's and Fred Moten's discussion of technique and black aesthetics (Harney and Moten 2013, 48).

[7] I am using "heresy" in a way that Sylvia Wynter uses it in "Sambo and Minstrels" (1979). In this essay, Wynter argues that those elements of cultural expression deemed heretic and outside of the Norm inevitably get co-opted into the Norm. In other words, the Norm absorbs these heresies such that they continue to exist, but their existence is licensed and managed by the custodians of the Norm. As "licensed heresies," they are repurposed to carry out the work of the Norm (Ibid., 149).

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
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QUESTIONING 'MAN' IN JOANA TISCHKAU'S *COLONASTICS*: BLACK FEMINIST IDENTITY POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN THEATER

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Introduction

In my contribution to this volume on *Responsive Bodies* I want to take a closer look at recent Black feminist identity politics in German theater in order to think about what the Caribbean philosopher Sylvia Wynter calls 'Man.' In this regard later in this text I will focus on the video clip series *Colonastics* (2020) by Joana Tischkau. I will do so in relation to the colonial roots of post-war racism in Germany, more precisely the time after its reunification in 1989. In front of this background my claim is that Afro-German feminist theater makers in the last couple of years have been responding to a certain *white* dominant culture (see Rommelspacher 1995) in the country I am living in as a *white* German, where right-wing political parties like the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) are getting stronger again right now, unfortunately. The responsiveness corresponding with the aesthetic practices of the theater makers being discussed here questions, I am claiming with Wynter, 'Man' as a dominant *genre* of being human and thereby brings forth a true pluralization of German society. Joana Tischkau, like her colleagues Anta Helena Recke and Magda Korsinsky, presents a counter-narrative distinctly formulated in opposition to regimes of whiteness and the *white* gaze as institutionalized forms of colonialist patriarchy in German society. The works by Korsinsky, Recke, and Tischkau—besides their problematization of European colonialism—carry another history that connects German to US-American contexts and—via Audre Lorde and May

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 8, NO 2 (2023):206–222
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2023.82489
ISSN 2057-7176

Ayim—can be traced back to the American Black feminist *Combahee River Collective* and even further.

> This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough. (Combahee River Collective 1977)

Prominently stated by the Combahee River Collective, this text alludes to a public speech originally directed at *white* feminists in the US in 1851 by the early Black feminist Soujorner Truth. Today, the Statement (1977) by the Combahee River Collective is an important reference point also in Germany. It is even canonical here for differently positioned writers in the field of left-wing identity politics, from Natasha A. Kelly to Fatma Aydemir, and from Hengameh Yaghoobifarah to Max Czollek. Left-wing identity politics in Germany, as in the USA, can be understood as the politics of marginalized groups emerging from their oppressed identity in order to reconfigure societal structures and the respective subject positions related to these (see Kastner and Susemichel 2018). As such, it responds to existing power relationships and attempts to direct them towards an openly democratic transformation.

Following the historical legacy of Black feminism in the US, recent left-wing German identity political actors assume an intersectional perspective. Performed along the axes of race, class, and gender, for them identity is not just individually chosen and does not solely emerge from self-attributions, but is first of all sociogenetically co-determined through violent external attributions. Drawing from his experience as a practicing psychiatrist in colonial contexts, Frantz Fanon, an important reference point for Wynter´s critique of 'Man' as well, wrote about sociogenesis half a century ago in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952):

> What emerges then is a need for combined action on the individual and the group. As a psychoanalyst I must help my patient to 'consciousnessize' his unconscious, to no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification, but also to act along the lines of a change in social structure. In other words, the black man should no longer have to be faced with the dilemma 'whiten or perish' but must become aware of the possibility of existence; in still other words, if society creates difficulties for him because of his color, if I see in his dreams the expression of an unconscious desire to change color, my objective will not be to dissuade him by advising him to 'keep his distance'; on the contrary, once his motives have been identified, my objective will be to enable him to choose action (or passivity) with respect to the real source of the conflict, i.e., the social structure. (Fanon 1961, 80)

Similarly, some activists of left-wing identity politics make their own intersectional position in the German dominant culture the departure point for political interventions. They thereby complicate the existing racist structures of the Federal Republic of Germany, which is supposedly 'reunified' for more than three decades now, from its margins.

Germany in the 1990s, before and after

Unlike the USA, Germany's examination of its participation in Europe's colonial history and critical reflection on its racist policies regarding the exploitation and oppression of so-called 'guest workers' after the Second World War has only just begun. This became even more important in 2015, when the civil war in Syria and the respective migration movements resulted in an increasingly racist public discourse and in the first rise of the, by then still emerging, new right-wing political party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). The atmosphere here is comparable to the atmosphere back in the 1990s. At that time, shortly after the end of the Cold War and the fall of the iron curtain, a new 'German' identity emerged, resulting in exclusion, threats, and violent attacks on non-*white* Germans and other people living—and working and paying taxes—in the Federal Republic.

Against this background I would like to examine the historical resonance between varying Black feminist identity politics on both sides of the Atlantic and put these in conjunction with the practices of the three contemporary Afro-German feminist theater makers Korsinsky, Recke, and ultimately Tischkau, whose video clip series *Colonastics* (2020) I will analyze in detail towards the end of this essay. I will do so by putting their practices in contrast to right-wing identity politics, since their concern is to conceptualize identity beyond essentialism. Inspired by Black feminism, actors oriented within identity politics reveal complicated power relations and thereby advance a concrete pluralization of German society in a time when in many places all around the world nationalism and racism are growing stronger again. My aim is to reconstruct the historical genesis of the urgent Black feminist institutional critique that currently takes place in German theater. By exposing dominant practices of gazing and marking bodies in a *white* gaze regime, this critique empowers hitherto underrepresented subjectivities and establishes new encounters with one another.

Since the publication of the anthology *Your Homeland Is Our Nightmare* (Aydemir and Yaghoobifarah 2018), a debate about left-wing identity politics has been raging in Germany. The dispute was escalated primarily by *white* men like Bernd Stegemann, a dramaturge, essayist, and professor in Berlin, who blames the political engagement of marginalized groups in Germany for the decay of its bourgeois public sphere and sees in their growing visibility a kind of 'moral trap' (see Stegemann 2018 and 2021a). Stegemann also intervened in the racist scandal at the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus in early 2021 in which Ron Iyamu, an Afro-German actor and then member of the ensemble, had personally been called 'slave' by some of his colleagues. During the rehearsal of a staging of Georg Büchner's piece *Danton's Death* the same colleagues also had used the N-word against Iyamu. Instead of understanding the deeply racist dimension of this scandal, Stegemann published a text in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* in which he denied the lived

experience of the Black actor (Stegemann 2021b). According to Stegemann, Iyamu should not feel threatened by comments that refer to his Blackness if he wants to be taken seriously as a professional actor.

Decidedly against positions like Stegemann's, I read artistic practices in contemporary German theater inspired by Black feminist identity politics as *political* precisely because they insist on the specificity of modes of experience, social positions, and speaker positions for the purpose of problematizing real-existing power relations. By problematizing the relations of gazing and the marking of bodies on stage these theater makers respond to the world surrounding them—a world which is inscribed by both colonial history in general and the history of pre- and post-war racism in Germany more specifically. Theater in Germany was and still is a state-subsidized, bourgeois, and predominantly *white* institution, a place of gazing, marking, and thereby of representing bodies along the axes of race, class, and gender. Yet, with the negotiation of practices of visibility, society as a whole is transformed, even if only on a microscale. Therefore, I am consistently positive about the micropolitics of left-wing identity politics, but would prefer to differentiate historically between different facets of identity political practice.

The first collective critique of *white* post-war German dominant culture was formulated by a coalition of cultural workers mainly with labor migration family backgrounds which called itself Kanak Attak, raising its voice both in the field of literature and in theater venues. The aesthetic stance of Kanak Attak between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s consisted of appropriating violent foreign markers against the backdrop of racist discourses about former so-called 'guest workers' in Germany. It turned those into self-markers in order to politicize intra-European racialized relations of exploitation in a supposedly reunified Germany. Different to this approach, more recent cultural criticism formulated by Black feminist artists in German theater digs deeper into history. The works of artists such as Korsinsky, Recke, and Tischkau are characterized by the consideration of colonial-historical contexts that go far beyond twentieth-century inter-European relations of oppression. Through a more complex aesthetics, whose language is shaped by digital media, they affirm intersectional insights into the gazing and marking of bodies more clearly than the stylistic device of critical affirmation coined by Kanak Attak nearly twenty years ago.

Nowadays some former members of Kanak Attak, such as Massimo Perinelli (2019), claim that the belated reception of Critical Whiteness Studies in Germany has put an end to the anti-racist movement.[1] Yet, they focus on Germany's situation in the 1990s solely from the perspective of those labelled as children of Turkish or Southern or Eastern European 'guest workers' by Germany's *white* dominant culture. Unfortunately, this leaves out discourses that in US contexts already have been spreading further for decades, especially in the wake of Black Studies, such as Wynter´s critique of a *white* concept of the human as 'Man'. At least Critical Whiteness Studies in Germany has finally in the last few years also rightfully provoked an expansion of the anti-racist gaze in regard to European colonial history.

Both terms 'guest worker' and 'slave' carry a racist burden, but they do so very differently and not really on comparable scales. Only a critical perspective on European colonial history can enable a

deeper analysis of those differences and quite differently situated subjects. In this regard, Black feminism in Germany goes further than Kanak Attak did back in its time.

The three Afro-German theater makers I am referring to here produce their pieces in the wake of Black feminist thought as it has been developing in Germany in dialogue with US discourses. Since the 1980s, in the Federal Republic, Black feminists like Lorde and Ayim in West Berlin have demanded a minimum degree of public visibility which until then had been reserved solely for *white* people, namely for *white* heterosexual cis-men. Already before the fall of the wall and the following German reunification, Black feminism existed in Germany, but only recently has it regained relevance, also in the field of artistic practices. Helmut Schmidt, Germany's chancellor from 1974 till 1982, had claimed in the early 1990s that the fall of the wall made growing together what belonged together, yet without addressing non-*white* Germans. Those non-*white* Germans—and people living and working in Germany without German passports—had been an almost politically invisible part of society on both sides of the iron curtain, being racialized and marginalized both in the West and in the East of Germany. While the *white* part of the nation felt rejuvenated, at least on television, due to the fantasy of a sudden marriage of former West and former East, Black feminists criticized Germany's new self-representations as *exclusive* representations of a closed society.[2] It was primarily through the political agenda of Lorde and Ayim in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as through new alternative publication houses such as the Orlanda Frauenverlag, that Black and queer milieus emerged and became more visible than ever before. These milieus were sensible in regard to all kinds of oppression in German society and the mechanisms of exclusion connecting them, thus facilitating translations between US and German Black thought. Already before the fall of the wall and the discourse by Kanak Attak in the later 1990s, debates emerged that luckily enough in recent years are returning in the work of Afro-German feminist theater makers.

Figure 1: Photo of Audre Lorde and May Ayim, Berlin 1991.
From the film Audre Lorde – The Berlin Years 1984 to 1992. *Copyright Dagmar Schultz.*

This is particularly relevant for theater and performance productions like Korsinsky's *Patterns* (2019), Recke's *The Mortifications of Humanity* (2019), and Tischkau's *Playblack* (2019), all of which were created shortly before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. While Korsinsky's *Patterns* (2019) deals with questions of self-empowerment, Recke's *The Mortifications of Humanity* (2019) pluralizes a *white* understanding of identity by diversifying modes of experience. Tischkau's *Playblack* (2019) uses Michel Jackson's self-representations to address colorblindness in pop music for the gaze of a *white* middle-class audience by staging Black performers parodying the TV format of the *Mini Playback Show*, an entertainment show broadcast on German TV from 1990 to 1998 in which children imitated well-known artists and their hits.

In a sophisticated way, these works deal with the arguments presented by Lorde and Ayim aesthetically and on the level of representation. They apply theatrical means to critically reflect on hegemonic practices of representation and visibility, respectively the gazing and marking of bodies. They taught me, from my subjective perspective as a *white* German, that the deployment of Black feminist identity politics in contemporary German theater can be understood as a response to and as an urgent *marking back* of the violations caused by the complex entanglements of subjectivity and power in Germany's dominant culture. By means of this *marking back* that Wynter names 'Man'—and in my context here the assumption of a unified, *white*-German, allegedly universal experiential space and a bourgeois public sphere—is problematized on the level of its power structures. This reflects what Ayim had noted already in 1994, four years before the founding of Kanak Attak in 1998:

> For me, writing from the margins means finding words for things and situations that don't seem to exist when you take on the experiences and perspectives of those who have/possess privilege and power. As a Black writer in 'wannabe white Germany,' it's important to me to articulate and change perspectives on racism, sexism, and identity. (Ayim 2021, 279)

Figure 2: May Ayim in front of the Berlin Wall at the beginning of the 1990s. Still from the film Hoffnung im Herbst *(*Hope in Autumn*, 1997) by Maria Binder.*

In *Patterns* (2019), a production by Ballhaus Naunynstraße, Magda Korsinsky stages a ten-member group of young Black women, alluding to self-empowerment practices brought forth by Lorde and Ayim in the 1980s and 1990s Berlin as well as to US contexts already of the 1960s and 1970s. In Korsinsky's piece, in addition to self-attributions and the accompanying empowerment of a group of ten young Afro-German women, the focus lies on external attributions directed at Black female subject positions by male and, above all, *white* (male) subject positions. By reappropriating images related to the violent history of representation of Black women, she raises the question of how subjectivity and power are inscribed in representation. Her production critiques the *white* German gaze regime through a transformative use of representational techniques and the opening of shared perspectives in regard to the interplay of intersectionality and subjectivity.

In many scenes of the group choreography the performers are gazing back at the spectators, switching a fundamental power structure in theater: Who looks at whom and how? In a very sophisticated way Korsinski plays with the intersectional complexities of a regime which, through the *white* gaze, positions people and subjectivities in Germany rather differently. Besides what is represented and made visible on stage publicly in the form of the piece itself, during the rehearsal process she gathers a bigger group of young Afro-German women, initiating a collective process of self-empowerment and thereby bringing back on stage what also Lorde strived for when she was living in Berlin during the 1980s and 1990s, encountering Ayim and many other new friends to focus on their identity as Black German women. These processes of self-identification, both as

Figure 1: Patterns *(2019) by Magda Korsinsky. Copyright Ballhaus Naunynstraße. Photo: Wagner Carvalho.*

individuals and as a group subject, also take place in Korsinsky´s production, e.g. when single women talk about their specific experience in contemporary German society or when they exchange about the similarities between their racist experiences in this country.

Recke's *The Mortifications of Humanity* (2019) reveals another facet of Black feminist identity politics in contemporary German theater. It consists of complicating identity by staging subject positions in a way that they can be experienced in their ambivalently performative aspects. The center of the stage is occupied by a group of mostly *white* viewers of the painting *Monkeys as Art Judges* (1889) by Gabriel Cornelius von Max (1840–1915). Von Max was Darwinist in his views, professor at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and mainly into historical painting, though many of his works contain spiritual and mystic aspects as well. What the audience of Recke's piece witnesses at its core scene is that a group of mainly *white* people speculate in a white cube at the center of the stage about what is depicted in the painting and to whose gaze it might be dedicated. But the piece opens with Black performers moving around it, imitating monkey-like movements and apparently being afraid of what might be hidden inside the white cube. The scene connotes both the opening sequence of the famous movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) by Stanley Kubrick and racist stereotypes of Black bodies from the many documents which have been produced in the frame of European colonial history.

Figure 2: The Mortifications of Humanity *(2019) by Anta Helena Recke.*

With core references to Wynter's critique of 'Man', Zakiyyah Iman Jackson analyses these racist implications and colonial-historical traces in an understanding of the human as 'Man' as follows:

> Universal humanity, a specific 'genre of the human,' is produced by the constitutive abjection of black humanity; nevertheless, the very constitutive function of this inverted recognition reveals that this black abjection is transposing recognition, and inclusion that masks itself as an exclusion. (Jackson 2020, 23)

Recke orients speaker positions towards questions of a gaze marked by a dominantly *white* and bourgeois culture. She questions the dominant politics of representation by 'Man' through the particularity of subject positions both crossed and produced by race, class, and gender. In the first half of her piece, the white cube is still the place where pictorial descriptions are confronted with each other. In the second half, the stage set transforms into an opaque cube that rotates in space while a diverse crowd of bodies enters and circles around its empty center. The performers wear costumes from multiple historical and geographical contexts, unfolding a *tableau vivant* in different colors and spiraling around the very place where all the descriptions have been formulated so far, anchored in *whiteness* as their unmarked point of departure. Recke's production pluralizes identity by expanding, beyond this *whiteness*, into many others: those who have been excluded, suppressed, and dehumanized in the course of European colonial history. Thus, a *white* experiential space which misconceives itself as universally centered frays at its margins.

Figure 3: Playblack *(2019) by Joana Tischkau.*

Tischkau's *Playblack* (2019) is a production based on her final piece in the frame of the MA Study program Choreography and Performance at the Institute for Applied Theater Studies at Justus Liebig University Giessen. It had its premiere at Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Frankfurt am Main and is not only a complex mesh between *white* clichés of Blackness and a Black gaze on *white* ways of looking, but also the transformation of subjectivity by means of translating specific modes of experience into one another.[3] Tischkau parodies stereotypical images. By contrasting forms of representation typical for Michael Jackson's famous appropriations of *whiteness* with a Black feminist view on *white* European TV formats such as the *Mini Playback Show* or *Wetten, dass…?*, she

shows how race and class positions are produced. The 1990s in Germany were characterized by racist uprisings and a new nationalism in the public sphere as well as in the private spheres of living rooms with new mass media entertainment, formatted for TV and being imported mainly from the US. These represented German society as a coherent entity, leaving aside the multiple intersectional conflicts dividing it. In reference to these predominantly *white* representational formats, Tischkau further complicates power relations on the level of gender. She stages three women, two of them Black and one *white*, who embody the role of male and stereotypically masculine TV hosts. Later on in the performance, she stages two women: a Black woman impersonating Michael Jackson and a *white* woman performing as Thomas Gottschalk, the blonde and blue-eyed *white* German host of the *Wetten, dass...?* show. Sitting wide-legged, mansplaining, and appeasing a crowd of youngsters, the Gottschalk-persona explicitly shifts the constitution of an otherwise rather unmarked gaze regime established by *white*, cis-male, heterosexual, and bourgeois people and shifts the very components constituting its structure.

Korsinsky's, Tischkau's, and Recke's three productions from 2019 do not only make Black (female) subjectivity visible in contemporary German theater. They also transform *white* subjectivity by clearly defining it as dominant in relation to their specific Afro-German positions. At the same time, by problematizing 'Man,' they deconstruct the cultural and political efficacy of representation in predominant self-conceptions of Germany as a nation. The three pieces are not only a critique of *white* ascriptions to others, but also a critique of practices that are connected to *white* self-ascriptions. They examine subjectivity along the axes of race and gender, encouraging further analysis of power relations along the axis of class.

The colonial matrix of power

To further develop my argument, I now want to take a closer look at Tischkau's video clip series *Colonastics* (2020). This work sheds a critical light on Europe as both a geographical region and a politically violent entity. Although it originated as an unintended response to the pandemic restrictions to live events in the field of performing arts, in this digital trilogy Tischkau developed her analysis of *whiteness* further. Commissioned by the Goethe Institute for the online festival Latitude in June 2020, her three clips refer to the TV format of home workout and gymnastics videos from the 1980s (see her interview with Ommen 2020). Since that time and following the early VHS tapes produced by the *white* US-American actress Jane Fonda,[4] many celebrities have brought the gym home; mainly to *white* women striving to be part of the growing middle-class, teaching them how to stay fit and healthy with the help of often culturally appropriated practices such as aerobics, yoga, and other 'exotic' techniques of the body and self. In the meantime, the *dispositif* of those training instructions has evolved through media from VHS to digital formats. Now circulating through the Internet, the unmarked center around is a talking head, one individual, often a well-known *white* VIP in their respective fields of expertise, who represents a role model for others to follow. This individual then initiates repetitive actions and new habits others are encouraged to repeat as a physical exercise and for the optimization of an all-too often *white* body and subjectivity.

Rehearsing gymnastics in front of a TV or computer screen is in direct correlation to what Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo would call the *colonial matrix of power*: a disciplining and normalization of bodies, subjectivities, and their interaction with each other for the sake of *white* notions of experience. In contrast to a one-sided understanding of interaction, where one instructs and the other follows, as is clearly stated in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, "[w]e need to move from universality to pluriversality; to decolonize the imperial concept of the Human and to build decolonial notions of Humanity" (Mignolo 2011, 242). Long before the rise of the global middle-class in the booming economy of the 1980s and 1990s, early modern European colonial history since the fifteenth-century taught techniques and protocols akin to and preceding contemporary gymnastics. They were used by *white* men to adapt racialized, gendered, and colonized bodies to further the demands of their plantation system. The Black visual artist and thinker Grada Kilomba has analyzed in detail how far European colonialism, which violently marked other bodies, is still inscribed in ongoing practices of gazing and looking.

> Another fantasy is that if one makes enough effort to explain, one will be accepted and will thus escape the violence of everyday racism. I am therefore talking about the fantasy of perfectionism toward the white audience and how this again imprisons the Black subject in a colonial order. (Kilomba 2016, 142)

The structures determining how bodies are located and from where they speak in historically segmented relationships of oppression are rather complex but centered in what Wynter calls 'Man.' They inhabit language and other kinds of social structures as well, even choreography. In this context, the idea of the self-possessed bourgeois individual has been from the beginning bound to the violent denial of responsiveness, the displacement of others, and—in the case of slavery and its many dehumanizing aspects—the expulsion of everything about bodies, subjectivities, and their reciprocal interaction which does not fit to the idea of a disciplined, normalized, and *white* male experience as the center of the world.

Figure 4: Still from the video clip Techno Drill *(2020) by Joana Tischkau.* https://vimeo.com/432107626

Under the overarching title *Colonastics* (2020), Tischkau published three video clips on her Vimeo channel, entitled *Bavarian Warmup*, *Rockout*, and *Techno Drill*. In these clips, she parodies the elements of discipline and normalization which accumulate in the format of the home workout video and explicates its elements as colonial layers in relation to a globally dominant *white* male concept of subjectivity becoming dominant and going global as what Wynter calls 'Man'. Not only does she demonstrate training videos as dominated by *whiteness* and masculinity but even more so the different styles of pop music and culture she refers to—including German folklore, hard rock, and hipster-style techno. Particularly remarkable is the clip *Techno Drill* (2020), where Tischkau mimics a *white* male coach who, during the lockdown, misses nights out at Berlin's famous techno club Berghain. Feeling trapped in his large apartment in Berlin-Mitte, the coach introduces the viewer to simple dance steps. With this persiflage, Tischkau questions 'Man' as a specific *white* genre falsely over-representing other genres of the human.

Wynter's 'Man' and the heteronormative matrix of power

Tischkau's work reflects a distinction made by Wynter. For Wynter, 'Man', who in her view is deeply inscribed by colonial modernity, must be repetitively performed and continuously reenacted in the *colonial matrix of power*—just as were gender roles in the *heteronormative matrix of power* as explicated by Judith Butler in the late 1990s. In her essay *The Ceremony Found* (2015), she describes the emergence of 'Man' in the course of modern European colonial history in two steps, which in their chronological order she connects with the terms *Man*(1) and *Man*(2). She proposes a first step at the end of the fifteenth-century, when in the frame of the Western Renaissance a 'degodding' of the originally religious idea of the self-possessed individual took place.

> These *Lay*-humanist intellectuals had therefore initiated nothing less than [...] a new *secular* (i.e., *degodded*, *desupernaturalized*) cosmogonically *ratio-centric* [...] rather than *theocentric* answer to the question of who-we-are. Nevertheless, this new *secular* answer was one that *Lay*-humanist intellectuals had dialectically projected over and against, and thereby in specific response to, the extreme fourteenth-century, High Scholastic version of medieval Latin-Christian Europe's order-instituting and order-legitimating, *theologically absolute* answer to the same question. (Wynter 2015, 190–191)

What Wynter calls *Man*(1) is a form of subjectivity which replaces the monotheistic understanding of god with the idea of a *white* subjectivity as its new deity, pushing away the rest of the world to his margins. Although *Man*(1) is only a *particular* genre of the human, he over-represents being human in general while conquering and subjecting the whole world and other genres of being human under his own *unmarked* subjectivity, claiming to represent an almost magical kind of *universal* space and time.

While *Man*(1) considers himself a secular, rational, and self-possessed version of the divine individual, *Man*(2) enters the stage in the Eighteenth Century. Imagining himself as a solely surviving biological organism in an externalized 'nature' and a biocentric *homo oeconomicus*, *Man*(2) is still a model to which others adjust their bodies, subjectivities, and interaction by entering

various forms of training and exercise. Contrasting *Man*(2) and responding to the present situation of colonial modernity, Wynter hopes for a

> [...] human response to the question of who-we-are [which] would effect such a mutation through its separation of the being of being human (in its hitherto innumerable genre-specific particularities) from being human in the purely biocentric terms of our present globally hegemonic, monohumanist and secular Western, yet no less genre-specific, now (neo)Liberal conception as Man(2). In so doing, this new answer necessarily elucidates and disenchants the rhetorico-discursive strategies by means of which the lexical concepts of Man and Human, because of their similarity of sound, are made to imply that their referent populations are also the same. (Wynter 2015, 193)

Neither is Man *the* human nor is he more human than Woman, although in the course of colonial history specifically *white* men subjected other genres of the human under their rather narrow understanding of humanity. Against this understanding, its "rhetorico-discursive strategies" (Ibid.), and its still dominant position, not only but also in Germany, the three Black feminist theater makers being discussed here are working.

Colonial history in Tischkau's video clip series

How far does Tischkau with her video clip series *Colonastics* elucidate and disenchant these "rhetoric-discursive strategies" (Wynter 2015, 193)? Besides the phonetic similarity between *woman* and human, one might find answers to this question by remembering the history of Black feminism since Combahee River Collective's *Statement* (1977) and by taking a closer look at *Techno Drill* (2020). The authors of the *Statement* (1977) made their own specific subject position as Black women visible by differentiating themselves from other, less marginalized and more dominant subject positions such as those of *white* women and Black men. In doing so, they insisted on their specifically oppressed identity as the very place from where they wrote their statement and from where they spoke. Also, Tischkau is very aware of her own position as an Afro-German in relations of power. From that explicitly positioned identity she implicitly addresses the *white* (male) viewers of her video clip series differently than non-Black (and male) subjects could do. "Get the rationality of a straight white man with the corporeality of a black woman!!!" (Tischkau 2020), one can read for example after the credits and title in the ticker line running through the lower horizontal end of the image.

Wearing a white wig, white sport shoes, short leopard print leggings, and a leopard print top, all well-known from late twentieth-century, the choreographer establishes herself as a rather masculine trainer by mansplaining and proudly striking single fitness poses. In contrast to her *white* male tone, her outfit responds to the exoticizing elements in the format of the home workout video as well as to its sexist qualities. With this, Tischkau exposes a gap between her subjectivity as a Black woman and that of the white *female* biocentric body that the parody of the equally *white male* coach aims at. This is at least my reading as the *white*, cis-male, heterosexual author of this text: Jane Fonda's aerobics, as part of a certain US cultural imperialism and as a fitness activity for mainly

white middle-class women in Germany during the 1980s, can hardly be separated from the male gaze that is already at work in the practice and promotion of aerobics. Although *Colonastics* (2020) is more reflective of male than of female (cis, *white*, colonialist, bourgeois) subjects, it also criticizes the latter´s participation in a dominant gaze regime, respectively its submissive support of the former.

Partly contrasted by the more emancipatory or subversive reception of Fonda in both *white* and non-*white* gay communities, aerobics in Tischkau's work seems to support an implicitly *white* and heterosexual gaze regime dedicated to and reproducing the hegemony of 'Man.' Further complicating and explicating historically interwoven power relations, Tischkau problematizes this gaze regime in a both funny and smart way.

Figure 5: Still from the video clip Techno Drill (2020) by Joana Tischkau. https://vimeo.com/432107626

Formatting subjectivity

With Wynter one could say that at least in Germany since the 1980s mainly *white* women have been rehearsing the biocentrism of *Man*(2) with Fonda as the norm, making themselves fit into the *white* male desire of a healthy and sporty body. This does not mean that *white* women do not have any agency (including economic) both in the *colonial and in the heteronormative matrix of power* or that they were not responsible for their active engagement in discourses and practices of colonialism, classism, sexism, and homophobia. But, like Wynter, Tischkau puts 'Man' center stage. In the course of the introduction into *Techno Drill* (2020) the choreographer makes clear there is nothing 'natural' about the biocentric idea of the body put forward by *Man*(2), although in modern European colonial history it has been very intimately connected to the fantasy of a nature to be conquered, normalized, and made productive by externalization, marginalization, and extraction. From the

beginning the biocentric body had to be produced by modes of discipline and normalization, both on the plantation and later in factories and private living rooms around the world, also those of the middle-class in Germany.

With her series of video clips entitled *Colonastics* (2020), Tischkau not only parodies the format of the home workout video. She explicates it as a historically ambivalent formatting of human subjectivity. By relating this subjectivity to the *whiteness* being inscribed into different styles of contemporary pop music and culture, she also transforms their means and ends into more ambiguous directions. While training instructions were very much about a physical workout for one's (*white* and female) self since 1980s, *Colonastics* (2020) is rather about the sociogenetic working through *white* and male concepts of the body being racialized and rendered female. It is the examination of the subjectivity of self-determined colonizers disciplining and normalizing their marginalized others. It is about the difference between 'Man' as a homogenous over-representation of the human and the *plurality* of human subjectivities. In her essay "The Ceremony Found" (2015), Wynter claims:

> In our contemporary, planetarily extended, intra-human situation, our *being human* in the now globally homogenized, monohumanist terms of the secular West's *Man*—specifically in the *biologically absolute* terms of the Western and westernized bourgeoisie's (neo)Liberal-humanist, *homo oeconomicus* conception—is now itself a [...] cosmogonically chartered and encoded and, thereby, fictively constructed and performatively enacted *genre of being* [...] *human*. (196)

According to Wynter, 'Man' could establish himself as a 'universal' subjectivity and as a role model for others on a global scale by 'genre-specific practices' (199) which, as techniques of the body and self, have been replacing other practices and genres of being human by training and exercising specifically a *white* subjectivity and mode of experience.

These colonizing practices of visibility and representation and the violence of the marking gaze being inscribed therein are even shaping recent techno culture, as one can see in the main part of Tischkau's *Techno Drill* (2020). Although techno music has Black origins in Detroit in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Tischkau, wearing sunglasses and a white net dress, problematizes its contemporary appropriation by self-possessed *white* hipster-subjects and describes their dancing as "arrhythmic, monotone, and stiff". The main motif of the workout she presents in *Techno Drill* (2020) is called *step touch* and consists of a simple movement loop where one stamps one's feet on the ground without changing place—'all *white* people love it, they do it all the time, to whatever music, you can do it to any music', one can hear her saying, being mediated by a voice-over. At some point she even attaches bricks with tape to her shoes to make *Techno Drill* (2020) harder to execute. The 5-minute-34-second clip is about individuals mainly interacting with and circulating around themselves. 'If you don't get the rhythm, it doesn't matter—you *are* the rhythm', she instructs her followers. 'You're still *white*, that's right', Tischkau says bluntly.

Conclusion

Tischkau's *marking back* and rendering explicit of the colonial-historical violence imposed by *white* European dominant culture coincides on a micropolitical scale with the current social transformation of Germany´s public sphere more generally and with the belated confrontation of Germany with its colonial history. Beyond the ideology of the bourgeois individual and Germany's supposed immutable *white* identity (which people like Stegemann try to protect), there are multiple facets of Black feminist identity politics in contemporary German theater. My historical analysis, combined with short readings of three different German theater productions by Korsinsky, Recke, and Tischkau from 2019 and my longer reading of the latter's *Colonastics* (2020) series, brings me to the following conclusion: By recalling the transatlantic history of Black feminism, the three German theater makers I have been briefly presenting here contribute important impulses to the real, concrete pluralization of Germany as both an experiential space inscribed by history and a democratic public sphere. As an ethical response to the racism which still exists in Germany´s contemporary dominant culture they translate Fanon's concept of sociogenesis into the social patriarchy of the Federal Republic. On this level they bring forth aesthetically more complex self-descriptions of a nation-state called Germany, more so at least than its former chancellor Helmut Schmidt was able to formulate when he talked about people 'naturally' growing together shortly after the fall of the wall, a wall that was built after a longer history of violence caused by the subjectivity of 'Man' as a still dominant *genre* of being human, not only but also in Germany.

Notes

[1] Perinelli's polemic does not do justice to the recent state of affairs of research in Critical Whiteness Studies in Germany. See also Arndt (2017a; 2017b).

[2] In regard to the imaginative aspects of such a nation state see Balibar (1990).

[3] For the complexity of the aesthetic approach Tischkau is following see hooks (1992).

[4] See for example "1970s: Jane Fonda Workout" (Decades TV Network, 2018) and "Jane Fonda - Original Workout (Trailer)" (Music on TV1, 2016).

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY

LOVE AND THEFT IN DANCE ECONOMIES

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Introduction: When Short-Form Dances Leave Their Creators

Loving to dance is a relationship founded on the theft of others' labor. This reality was highlighted by the controversy surrounding White dancer Charli D'Amelio's rise to fame through the viral fifteen-second TikTok dance, *Renegade*, in 2019. Having found notoriety, D'Amelio crossed the broadcasting divide between generations and appeared on the Jimmy Fallon late night show in March 2020.[1] A year later, D'Amelio and her family released the *D'Amelio Show*. While D'Amelio's dance moves brought her attention and over one hundred million followers on TikTok, it was revealed that she had not given credit to Jalaiah Harmon, a Black teenager from Fayetteville, Georgia, who had originally created the dance on the Funimate platform and then uploaded it to Instagram (Lorenz 2020). Harmon's version included two parts and was twenty-nine seconds long. After public outcry, D'Amelio eventually credited Harmon in person, but many pointed out that this was an empty gesture. Although Harmon received some financial compensation in the televised show *Ellen*—as I describe in detail below—the gesture exudes a feeling of condescension. The situation has prompted discussions about the lack of avenues for accountability and acknowledgement in the world of short-form dance videos, and the need for greater financial compensation for Black creators' dances.

Black choreographers are responding in novel ways to curb what Trevor Boffone (2022) calls "The D'Amelio Effect" and its accompanying abuses. They are protecting their contemporary dance creations through copyright registration and the advent of digital dance non-fungible tokens (NFTs). The symbolic credit given to Black choreographers on social media platforms is not enough.

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 8, NO 2 (2023):223–248
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2023.82485.
ISSN 2057-7176

By claiming ownership of their creations through copyright and dance NFTs, Black choreographers can assert their control and reap the financial rewards of their labor while simultaneously highlighting the cultural and political significance of their art. Unlike copyright registration, I contend that dance NFTs by Black choreographers are crypto-choreographies that reclaim one's property, authorship, and labor as unalienable from oneself regardless of a dance's length. I conceptualize crypto-choreographies as the digital organization and monitoring of Black movement against expropriation and dispossession across media. They avow the economic, cultural, and political effects of Black dance and authorship. Crypto-choreographies are a new way for Black choreographers to protect their creations, and they contribute to a complex racial and economic relationship of authorship and ownership in dance economies in the twenty-first century.

The exploitation carried out by White Eurodescended performers in popular entertainment are not new phenomena. US dance studies scholars (Desmond 1999; Banes and Szwed 2002; Manning 2004; D. Robinson 2015; and Boffone 2021/2022) have demonstrated how White dance communities benefit whether they cite or fail to engage in citational practices for dances created by non-White artists. Building on this work, I suggest a continuum emerges from the Jim Crow era minstrel shows to today's social media short-form dances and dance challenges. I maintain that while the former explicitly adopts blackface, the latter equally expresses the desire for and donning of 'Blackness' through short-form dance moves but has shed the burnt cork. The desire to access Black culture has driven these spectacles, but White performers and audiences do not or cannot establish a connection with Black life. This phenomenon is what US cultural historian Eric Lott (1992) describes as the love and theft of Black popular culture, which began with minstrelsy. White working-class audiences' desire for, but equal aversion to, Black life results in the expropriation of aesthetic forms and the theft of others' property for the benefit of self without acknowledging the Black people that make those aesthetic practices real. This racial unconscious subtends from a felt precariousness of their own Whiteness. It is beyond the reach of speech, but nonetheless embodied, structured, and expressed. Racialized anxiety and thievery, today running across class, is nowadays mediated by technologies like TikTok. They enable expediated exploitation of Black dancers' authorship, labor, and time. TikTok, according to Cienna Davis, is a "dark mine of commercial and social profit for white influencers" who sustain and exploit the fungibility of young Black women through digital blackface (2022, 29). TikTok sharpens symbolic, structural, and embodied violence by severing ties between the Black creator and her work. Authorial and financial exploitation and spoils manifest from racial unease.

Short-form dance videos like the *Renegade* inherit a supposed de-racialized value, unmoored from the Black author and owner who created the dance. Trevor Boffone is right to point out that non-Black choreographers on TikTok erase the authorship and ownership of Black dances as the app is primarily a White space that benefits from Black creators on Dubsmash (2021, 20). I propose that this thievery and erasure is mediated by a facile technological platform like TikTok that contributes to the deracialization of dances. Although not addressing TikTok directly, US sociologist and African American studies scholar Ruha Benjamin has defined technological processes in digital applications as the "New Jim Code." The New Jim Code is the "subtle but no less hostile form of

systemic bias" that unequally organizes society along racial lines by what is coded, consciously or unconsciously, into digital technologies (Benjamin 2019, n.p.). Similarly examining racialized economies in relationship to technology, Colleen Dunagan argues that "dance *fuels* advertising" [emphasis original] on television because it evokes liveness and intimacy, as well as serves as a "vehicle for the amplification of consumption-as-spectacle" (2018, 4–7). Dance in commercials, according to Dunagan, breaks down the divide between life and spectacle, as well as social relations and simulacra (2022, 8–10). Dance in advertisements equates cultural practices with consumer products. Extending Benjamin's and Dunagan's respective assessments of digital dance economies, I observe that TikTok's algorithms and advertisement model are assumed to be neutral but are influenced by a neoliberal impetus and colonial enslavement logic reliant on Black movement as commercials. Dance on TikTok is intimately linked with advertisements. In the dance app, to use Sarah Wilbur's words, "money motivates movement" (2021, 4). The platform's Creator Fund and its users have adopted and promoted dance as a marketing vehicle for the influencers who are sanctioned to do cultural borrowing for offline benefits. While dancing in commercials on broadcast television networks allowed companies to advertise their products through dance, the White dancing body on TikTok is not a stand-in for a product; it is the racialized and gendered body up for sale. The platform erases the racialized labor behind the work and social origins, but not the racialized work produced through that labor and social sphere. This leads to a representational economy that allows for the unequal transfer of short-form dances and shapes racial transmission. This logic negatively impacts Black dance makers, and especially Black female choreographers.

I examine crypto-choreographies as an extension of Thomas F. DeFrantz's concept of Black dance in digital spaces. DeFrantz (2019) asserts that Black dance encompasses various forms and practices. It is an embodied and oratorial orientation and transmission towards the reclamation of Black life that has been repeatedly disavowed in the wake of slavery and capitalism. Crypto-choreographies bridge the gap between Black creative labor, authorship, and ownership as they address the expropriation of Black cultural production. Claims of racial violations by White persons for using Black dances does not mean that only racially marked Black persons are entitled to do them. The violation is not about who is entitled to perform Black dances, but rather the disavowal of Black life, authorship, and ownership. Crypto-choreographies close the chasm between what was created and what circulates in the disavowal. A double movement characterizes crypto-choreographies: first in arranging steps in the dances and then organizing the circulation of those dances beyond the Black creator's immediate control. This analytical frame allows us to attend to the simultaneous dispersal of representational and infrastructural love and theft practices in dance economies.

Black choreographers have been calling attention to the love and theft of Black aesthetic practices on social media platforms. Dancer Erick Louis initiated the #BlackTikTokStrike on TikTok in June 2021, calling for creators to avoid choreographing dances to Megan Thee Stallion's *Thot Shit* after watching White creators gain millions of viewers without giving proper attribution. He said, "This app would be nothing without [Black] people" (Pruitt-Young 2021). His comment highlights the recurring systemic expropriation of Black dance, as seen in the quick rise of White female TikTok content despite Black choreographers having viral videos. Rather than only holding the White

dancers accountable, I argue for scrutinizing the embodied, discursive, and technological elements leading to the quick ascension of White choreographers on social media. This exposes the regularity with which White female TikTok content dominates and Black creators are left with a dearth of dollars. Black creators' dances are often short-lived, while White creators' dances and names circulate wider and last longer, and cross media platforms. Borrowing and advancing Dunagan's words on dance in commercials, I perceive TikTok as encouraging "the appropriateness of appropriation as a tactic for living in a neoliberal capitalist society" (2018, 120). TikTok aids and abets sanctioned love and theft.

Despite TikTok implementing the "Dance Credit" tag on its choreographed videos in 2020, Black artists are using copyright registration to curb the criminal practices rampant in the contemporary dance economy. Black choreographer JaQuel Knight, known for his choreography in Beyoncé's 2008 *Single Ladies (Put a Ring On It)*, became the first choreographer to copyright non-ballet and non-dramatic dances through the US Copyright Office in 2020.[2] Knight observed the devaluing of dance as property belonging to choreographers and sought to change this belief by copyrighting his dances, and using his foundation to protect Black content creators in particular (Fuhrer 2022). His efforts were further motivated by the Black TikTok strike (Chan 2021).

Additionally, Black choreographers are using dance NFTs to link the laborer back to the work, and these digital blockchain assets are distributed for purchase for in-game celebrations in video games, augmented reality, and the metaverse.[3] Black choreographers' reclamations are not just monetary but also a reclamation of time, offering temporal benefits that copyright registration cannot provide. My argument is that Black dance makers are using crypto-choreographies to stake ownership and control over their work. They do this by connecting their labor to the work itself, regardless of its length. This is because copyright registration does not protect simple dance routines and gestures, which are still highly valuable. Crypto-choreographies are Black dances in the dark mine of digital blackface and the disavowal created by copyright.

This article is the first to explore the ethical implications of dance NFTs and their impact on racial economies. After describing the dispersed aspects of blockchain technologies and comparing its benefits for Black artists using copyright registration, I recount how Jalaiah Harmon worked with Jadu media company to create a hologram version of her viral dance *Renegade* and converted it to an NFT. Considering the growing interest in copyright registration, a focus on dance NFTs created by Black choreographers alters our understanding of the appreciation and appropriation of dance. My concerns are an "affair of dollars and desire, theft and love" (Lott 1992, 27). I offer the concept of crypto-choreographies as a framework to examine the unequal circulation of movement.

Blockchain Aesthetic Practices: Art Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)

Blockchain, known for its use in cryptocurrencies like bitcoin and Ethereum, is also changing the art world with non-fungible tokens (NFTs). NFTs are digital assets built on blockchain technology that verify the uniqueness and ownership of an object. They can be used for any digital asset and are available for purchase with cryptocurrencies on platforms like OpenSea (Clark 2022). The

openness of this digital technology is changing election security, health care, music, and art (Lee 2021). This new technology is transforming the art world by making the ownership and circulation of digital art more secure and transparent. NFTs exploded in the art world in 2021, with digital artist Beeple's NFT compilation *Everydays—First 5,000 Days* selling for over $69 million at Christie's. After the sale, Beeple said, "I do view this as the next chapter of art history" (Kastrenakes 2021, n.p.). While this sale received significant media attention, other NFT artists are also part of the multimillion-dollar NFT art market. The website Cryptoart.io tracks the top-selling artists and galleries promoting their work, with pak at the top with over $330 million in total art sales as of 15 March, 2024.[4]

NFTs are changing the art market and the cultural landscape. The Museum of Crypto Art (MOCA), founded by Pablo Rodriguez-Fraile, is a space for those who value decentralized cultural institutions.[5] A statement on the landing page declares that it is a space for those who "prioritized sovereignty, market access, and freedom of expression in the arts" (Museum of Crypto Art, n.d.). MOCA stages permanent and temporary exhibits featuring NFTs, and it represents a new way of production and distribution in the arts. These developments suggest that NFTs have altered art's circulation, valuation, and transactions, making them a part of established institutions.[6]

NFTs are slowly entering the dance world, with dancers and choreographers adopting them and auction houses selling them. Ballerina Natalia Osipova sold a dance NFT triptych for £59,424 (Noel-Smith 2021). *Dance Magazine*'s Sydney Skybetter outlines the creative and transactional promises and concerns of dance NFTs for choreographers, noting that while they offer some compensatory possibility for artists, monetization may only happen for renowned choreographers like Osipova (2022). While these NFTs offer some compensation for artists, there is little discussion of how they respond to issues of race and cultural production.

In 2022, the 'crypto crash' had a disproportionately negative impact on Black Americans, who were more likely to have invested in cryptocurrencies at one of its highest points (Cardoza 2022). Black Americans' quick, and possibly late, investments could have been motivated by a desire to move away from centralized, discriminatory financial institutions (Lowrey 2022).[7] Despite concerns about the negative impacts on communities of color and the environment, I find it important to consider the possibilities blockchain technologies offer for Black artists who have been excluded from the means of production and distribution in the arts industry.[8] My focus is on the creation of digital assets by Black artists, rather than the purchase of digital currencies by Black investors. Although they may be linked within the same ecosystem, these are distinct processes.

Black dancers' NFTs do not seek to simply control production and distribution. The practice of cryptography in the form of NFTs involves hashing information and using an identifiable and incorruptible tracking key to replace the original content when ownership is transferred from the seller to the buyer. Legal scholar Stacey M. Lantagne (2022) argues that NFTs depart from copyright in two important ways when valuing creativity. First, NFTs value the object and the subject of the object. Second, they encourage viral behavior to increase the underlying value (Lantagne 2022, 265). This viewpoint is different from the scarcity mindset promoted by copyright law that limits

the spread of ideas under protection. These changes also apply to short-form dances. When buyers and sellers engage in the exchange of screen dances, they are exchanging labor for a unique instantiation of that dance. However, complete ownership of the dancer's movement is not transferred. Instead, the dance NFT buyer acquires a unique version of the work created by the dancer while acknowledging the creative labor that was deployed to choreograph the dance, both socially and financially. The object created is not a separate outcome of the work in the form of a reproducible product. However, it is also not wholly linked to the work. This binding perpetually links the dance with the creator, even if it is downloaded by users on other mobile applications or projected in homes.[9]

Crypto-choreographies—Black dance NFTs—are limited, but they challenge what I perceive to be a hegemonic perspective that dance is ephemeral and that its practices are deracialized upon transfer from one body to another. These perspectives are not adequate for current discussions of the circulation and protection of contemporary dance in digital representational economies. Contemporary dance is a postcolonial visibility—to borrow Rey Chow's words in complicating the Foucauldian idea of capture (2012, 151-168). Being seen, rather than evading capture, is the modus operandi of expressive practices for non-White persons. Chow is discussing video art, but her perspective has relevance for short-form dance practices and popular culture. JaQuel Knight maintains that audiences no longer only ask each other if they have heard a song (Fuhrer 2022). They inquire if they have seen the song. Seeing the execution of dances in songs is a prized experience in popular culture regardless of the dances' length. The desire to be visually captured goes hand in hand with a desire to control the dances after they have been generated. Create, capture, and control is the axiom of contemporary dance.

In contrast to the process of copyrighting a dance, crypto-choreographies possess a unique discursive, structural, and embodied potential to trace the circulation of dances and compensate Black artists directly on public ledgers, even after the dance has left its creator. Crypto-choreographies eliminate the need for traditional intermediary banking systems to track transactions or—as I will mention below—for show hosts to validate creators. Understanding how dance meets NFTs is critical for considering the consequences of racialized cultural production and its circulation as short-form dances—which White dancers assume to be deracialized when they leave the creator's racialized Black body. But before discussing crypto-choreographies' impact on contemporary practices, situating them alongside copyright aims by Black artists becomes key to exposing the possibilities they offer.

JaQuel Knight Makes History

Choreographer JaQuel Knight registered the popular dance *Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)* for copyright protection in 2020. In an interview, Knight says it was important for him to register the dance because "it validates our positioning and ownership. What copyright does is allow you to still have your hands on it, even after the work is done [...] you still have ownership and you should still collect some sort of residual payment for such usage" (Shapiro 2020, n.p.). Knight emphasized the importance of copyright protection for validating ownership and collecting residual payments for

usage. Knight has registered ten dances through the US Copyright Office. Knight's aims foreground his desire, and that of other Black choreographers, to be compensated for their art. Yet compensation is only the start. Dancers do not get ongoing royalties afforded to actors, directors, composers, and producers. "Choreographers," Knight maintains, "are really the bastard kids of industry" (quoted after Fuhrer 2022, n.p.). Residual compensation and licensing models are absent within the logics of dance making. Property ownership and residual royalties are the cornerstone of Knight's copyright registration goals. Knight started his public mission in 2020 to register Black vernacular dances despite copyright laws offering dance makers protections for their work since 1978 (Nierman 2015).

Knight's endeavor for copyright registration is notable and, as I stated in the introduction of this article, understandable given the centuries-long history of structural barriers against Black persons in the United States. Knight choreographed *Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)* for Beyoncé at age eighteen but noticed that producers and musical artists received royalties and multi-million-dollar deals after the projects were done (Milzoff 2020). The public and producers failed to recognize him despite his dances having helped music videos become popular. Claiming legal ownership of a dance via copyright registration became a process for him to use existing institutional structures to protect intellectual property and keep ownership of it after it left his body. As he says, copyright is a way "to still have your hands on it" (Shapiro 2020, n.p.).

Knight's copyright registration involved a 40-page-long process of transforming the dance into Labanotation with the help of the Dance Notation Bureau. Knight's comment about the page length appears in several of his interviews and is not simply an anecdote (Milzoff 2020). Choreographic works undergo a process of translation into other expressive media for them to be recognized as protectable expressive practices. Copyright law states that single movement or individual dance and acrobatic acts cannot be considered registrable because they are not "organized into a coherent whole."[10] An artist makes a coherent whole evident and tangible through a medium of expression other than dance that reveals "movements in sufficient details to permit the work to be performed in a consistent and uniform manner." [11] Dancers seeking registration can use Labanotation or Benesh Dance Notation, video recordings of a performance, and textual descriptions, photographs, or drawings as evidence of the wholeness of the work.

The documentation of a dance must be sufficiently detailed for copyright registration because infringement claims must be distinguished from homage, simulacra, or inspiration. The 2011 public case of global icon Beyoncé versus choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker competing over who infringed upon the other's intellectual property has received notable popular and academic attention. White Belgian contemporary choreographer De Keersmaeker alleged that Black popular artist Beyoncé stole dances from the recorded performances *Rosas danst Rosas* (1997) and *Achterland* (1994) and created the music video *Countdown*. De Keersmaeker was unsuccessful in her legal pursuit. The case sparked a global dispute—mediated through dance and YouTube videos that ended with De Keersmaeker releasing her dance through instructional videos after she invited others to copy it. She created *Re:Rosas! The fABULEUS Rosas Remix Project*.

The Beyoncé-De Keersmaeker debate blurs the lines of property and fixation because *Countdown* draws on different videos and dance excerpts, creating a non-infringing homage. Beyoncé's choreography is a tribute to the different dance forms without violating copyright law despite the exact resemblance of certain short dance moves and sequences. In discussing the legal scenario between Beyoncé and De Keersmaeker, Alexander H. Schwan contends that even though the case concerned which of the artists possessed the original dances, the second copy of any dance lacks originality, exactitude, and authenticity. Dance undergoes the process of privation: "the second copy loses an exactitude the first copy might have had" (2017, 159–160). Schwan rightly points out that "any movement will always be at least partially a copy of other movements because the human possibility to move is limited and the sheer anatomy does not allow for radically innovative movement that have never been made before" (2017, 175). Limited actions afforded by the human body's anatomy will provide a limited range of expressive movement. One cannot speak of an original or a copy; choreography is always both already.

Choreography may not be original or a copy, or both at the same time in its enactment, but the process of assembling steps and the racialized identity politics in which the dance creator is entangled impacts Black choreographers' experience of privation differently. The US Copyright Office guards dancers from privation in the intertextual sea of movement, yet privation and protection perpetuates unequal hierarchies of power. Brenda Dixon Gottschild argues that there is no idea of original movement when she refers to the intertextuality that connects different dance forms—stating that this process of weaving new movement is unconscious and automatic (1996, 3). Gottschild, however, cannot help but identify the central role of African descendants in shaping American culture production despite the denial and invisibilization of Africanist and Black aesthetics. There is some danger in misunderstanding the pos-structuralist notion that all texts are intertexts because it perniciously obscures and perpetuates a silent form of structural and symbolic racism. It actively erases how Africanist movement and bodily ways of being have shaped entire industries—a "pervasive presence that touches almost every aspect of American life" (Gottschild 1996, 3). The US Copyright Office does not protect this history. It protects individual creations dependent on cultural constructions deemed consistent and uniform. Black dancers use legal avenues to compete over violations claims, relying on documentation to verify the source of a dance and enforce claims against unrightful use. They use copyright registration against loss of exactitude in its embodied execution and dispossession.

The Law's Limits

When I first heard about De Keersmaeker's legal claim against Beyoncé in 2012, I sided with the global pop icon, seeing it as a form of reparations. I now realize this debate oversimplifies the devaluation of Black dance creation and its labor, and how copyright registration contributes to this ideology. US copyright law only protects complete and documentable whole expressions of repeated steps and movements, not individual concepts, short sequences, or social dances. To fully grasp this issue and its stakes, we must consider how artists use extra-legal strategies to bypass

copyright law limitations and what this means for the protection and circulation of dances that do not qualify for the US Copyright Office's idea of a coherent whole.

Copyright law allows dances to be registrable if they are fixed into dance notation, video, or photographs and if their coherent whole is identifiable in that documentation. A dance work qualifies for copyright registration through the process of fixation. For example, Knight secured legal protection of his dance by translating *Single Ladies* to Labanotation. In repeated news coverage of his success, Knight and other Black dance makers he helped through his foundation are shown with large posters of their dances in Labanotation. The will to document is key to Black choreographers' contemporary aims. That Knight successfully copyrighted ten dances demonstrates the efforts that Black artists are adopting to fix and visually document their dances and use the extent of the law to protect against any illegal and improper use of their works.

These efforts follow traditionally White dancers' aims to secure credit and protect against infringement. Historicizing struggles by dancers to copyright claims and intellectual property, dance studies scholar Anthea Kraut maintains that artists use patent registration as an endeavor towards fixity and singular authorship to protect their work (2011). A choreographer's efforts regarding the "artist" label, intellectual property, and ownership through legal avenues requires differentiating oneself from other racialized and sexualized dancing bodies. Furthermore, Caroline Picart argues, dancers' claims rely on "implicitly racialized formulations that correlat[e] whiteness with intellectual property" (2013, 686). While copyright protection goals tend to benefit White men more than White women choreographers, they both benefit from the privilege of Whiteness. Successfully copyrighting dance is historically a White choreographer's endeavor where Whiteness is property.

Outside of copyright law's idea of fixity, however, dance performance possesses a standardization and lasting materiality through the social sphere. As I maintain elsewhere, in my writing about choreography's relationship to democracy and state repression in Mexico, dance is transmittable across time and space because it has a level of verifiability that endures as a form of truth-telling practice.[12] Similarly, Kraut identifies extra-legal strategies among African American vernacular dancers from the 1930s and 1940s in the United States (2015). She highlights gift economies, shaming, rumors, and anti-singular authorship practices in response to the law's limits. Both assessments value dance and embodied movement as fixed and documentable evidence beyond photographic, written, and audio-visual tools.

Extra-legal strategies of verifiability and individualized style re-animate the debate about dance performance being an ephemeral practice and propose challenging readings about what it means to "fix" a dance. Kraut argues, "In the unprotected sphere of vernacular dance, outside the law's rigid distinctions between idea and expression, between performance style and 'the work,' artists were free to declare discrete steps, arrangements of steps, and ways of moving as their own" (2011, 152). This extra-legal practice in African American social spheres, what Kraut calls *corporeal autography*, is adopted by dancers to assert embodied intellectual property. Repetition of a movement leads to a dancer becoming identified with a gesture or way of moving. Kraut

insightfully observes that repetition plays a critical role in the grammars of dance. Repetition generates momentum while connecting a dancer to the dance they created. The repetition of the move or gesture is re-enacted to "achieve the effect of inscription of identity" (Kraut 2011, 154). A Black dancer doing a dance repeatedly links the gestures to the person doing it regardless of the length of the dance. However, Black artists' corporeal autographies terminate at shorter durations when confronting copyright law.

Short, recognizable dance moves like "The Carlton" and "Nae Nae" reference Black popular culture and characters and are inscriptions of identity in contemporary dance practices. "The Carlton" and "Nae Nae" are two corporeal autographies unconnected to larger choreographic works but are still part of popular culture through the circulation and repetition of simple dance routines. Alfonso Ribeiro's famous "Carlton" dance became popular in the 1990s with the success of the show *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.* The dance is named after his character, and it was done any time Carlton celebrated and expressed (in secret) extreme happiness. Similarly, "Nae Nae" is a dance associated with the character Sheneneh Jenkins from the 1990s show *Martin.* In both cases, the dances are short (seconds-long), discrete steps referencing Black popular culture and characters. In Ribeiro's case, the distinct dance is so recognizable that it was included for purchase in multiple video games as a celebratory dance. Ribeiro was not consulted, nor did he receive royalties for the inclusion of the dance. He filed lawsuits but dismissed them in 2019. The US Copyright Office stated that "The Carlton" is a simple dance routine and not a work of choreography, which was significant in Ribeiro's failed lawsuits against other video game companies.[13]

Ribeiro's double bind is that discrete steps are not recognized as choreography but dances—and especially Black vernacular dances regardless of length—are extremely valuable and profitable in gaming, entertainment, and social media. Dances bring in dollars. Ribeiro's dance was featured for purchase in *Fortnite*—a game that is free to play. *Fortnite* makes its money from in-game purchases, with one of the most profitable being dance emotes. Gamers purchase celebratory dance emotes to deploy after completing sections of the game. Dance emotes cost between five and ten dollars each (Statt 2018). Ribeiro may have created and become popularly linked to the famous Carlton dance, but he cannot own the gestures to file an infringement claim. The pernicious aspect of this situation extends from an unconscious belief that Black choreographers produce and deploy singular moves and discrete steps for the benefit of all. Black choreographers in contemporary dance practices are exploited, with their creative work often seen as a contribution to the larger cultural landscape rather than being recognized as the property and ownership of the Black choreographers themselves. This is an extension of how Black enslaved persons were exploited and how their repetitive and short embodied acts in picking tobacco, cotton, and sugar cane were perceived by their White owners as contributing to the masters' house rather than the ownership and property of the enslaved individuals themselves. Black short-form dances are the new cash crop.

Expecting Black artists to generate popular short-form dances that circulate in open expressive economies without financial compensation is composed racial capitalism. Composition is meant in two ways. One the one hand, composition is understood as the unequal arrangement and

structuring of social and labor hierarchies through race. On the other hand, composition refers to the arrangements and structuring of dances through the filter of race. The overlapping sense of these compositions is a dance focused understanding of Cedric J. Robinson's deft contribution to our understanding of the extractive practices in colonization and capitalism when accounting for race (2020). Composed racial capitalism is the unsettling bias within dance communities where Black embodied works (the outcome and extraction of labor) are valued and expected but the laborers are not. Composed racial capitalism is reinforced through social media apps and the popularity of short-form dances that circulate on them. Social media applications depend on user-created content to generate revenue through data mining and advertisements. This is a swifter form of dance as advertisement. However, in this case, the users themselves become the marketing teams who promote and sell the dance moves for merchandising and sponsorship contracts. Josh Richards, a top White TikTok performer and content creator, makes the objective clear, "Influencers need to learn how to properly monetize" (Brown 2020). This trenchant system unduly impacts Black choreographers' access to wealth. Black users may receive compensation, but platforms and White artists receive greater profits and circulation.

Contemporary dance on digital platforms presents a contradictory sense of Blackness as both hyper-visible and invisible. Kraut observes that White female artists who make copyright claims to negotiate their subjectivity often do it at the expense of other minoritarian subjects—i.e., De Keersmaeker v. Beyoncé—without acknowledging the impact of those minoritarian subjects' aesthetic and dance practices on the dancers and their work (2015, 263–280). Kraut's argument does not go far enough to highlight the systemic implication of her observation given what Ribeiro's case, as well as the prevalent use of TikTok for the dissemination of short-form dances, reveals. The ubiquity of what Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (2014) call a Black sensibility makes calling out appropriation difficult. Black or not, dancers swim in the collective cultural production shaped by Black aesthetics. This is akin to what Brenda Dixon Gottschild called "Africanist" aesthetics (2001). This aesthetics is so "native [to American concert dance] that we take it for granted" (ibid, 340). Dances, and bodies that deploy them, are both Black and not. A Black sensibility and the prevalence of Africanist aesthetics are so part and parcel to American dance culture that discussing the love and theft of short-form dance in terms of appropriation/appreciation appears redundant. To call a dance "appropriated" (usually by White American dancers) belies the very fact that to dance in the United States is to already deploy an Africanist movement ethos regardless of the dancer's White skin.

Consuming and participating in dance in the United States without attending to its Africanist genealogies and Black sensibilities makes it impossible to know how it is appropriated and sold as a racialized experience for financial gain. Instead, it is more fitting to discuss the circulation of short-form dance in terms of racial precarity, anxiety, and fantasy. As I mentioned above, Eric Lott (1992) helps us assess how White Americans live out their racial anxieties and fantasies through blackface performances. Relatedly, what we see in the circulation of short-form dances and their theft is a staging, playing out, and profiting of racial fantasies by White dancers. TikTok dances and dance challenges make playing Black possible and repeatable in seconds. TikTok, Jason Parham (2020) elucidates, is the evolution of blackface. The pain of these fantasies is that their exploration

is readily accepted and profitable, and that Black aesthetic practices are perpetuated as surplus for the enticing of the fantasies while the material, economic, and embodied (unequal) realities of Black lives are disregarded. White dancers enter the circulating economies of racial difference, anxiety, and fantasy through short movements and gestures. These fantasies rely on privation, without legal protection, as a cornerstone of their execution. Deploying The Carlton is not simply about trying on a short dance; it is to flirt with the Black vectors that gave rise to that dance and lead away from Blackness to Whiteness—even if the racial referents are constructed to begin with. In this way, composed racial capitalism linked to TikTok dance communities stages White supremacy. When dancers use TikTok, they deploy the White master's gaze. White dancers exploit and profit from Blackness while bringing in dances into the master's new house. Copyright laws sanction this exploitation by dismissing short dances and denying social dances as protectable works.

It Is Not Choreography

US copyright law contributes to composed racial capitalism by not recognizing simple dance routines as works of art and choreography. Alfonso Ribeiro sued Epic Games for selling his dance and his likeness as an emote and argued that the entertainment company capitalized on the popularity of the dance and mislead audiences by mislabeling the dance in the game.[14] Ribeiro dismissed the complaint against Epic games after being unsuccessful in acquiring copyright protection from the US Copyright Office. In response to Ribeiro's petition, Saskia Florence, Supervisor Registration Specialist of the Performing Arts Division, defines "choreography" as understood by the office and maintains that choreography is a subset of dance; they are not synonymous. She also describes the dance submitted by Ribeiro. The Carlton is summarized in one sentence, "The dancer sways their hips as they step from side to side, while swinging their arms in an exaggerated manner." Her description supports the refusal, and she concludes, "The combination of three dance steps is a simple routine that is not registrable as a choreographic work."[15] The Copyright Office's description of The Carlton makes apparent the colorblindness that supposedly enters adjudicating processes.

The Carlton is more intricate than described in the refusal letter.[16] The dance involves a complex and jerky movement of the neck. The arms' "exaggerated manner" is physically demanding because it requires significant torso control. Beyond physical difficulty, what is a tremendous feat is the way the dance captures the coherent expression of joy. In its repeated performance across different stages, the dance summons gaiety. But it is not just any gaiety, it is choreographed Black gaiety. Inspired by Black comedian Eddie Murphy's "The White Man Dance" and White actress Courtney Cox's dance in a Bruce Springsteen video, Ribeiro created the dance to mimic White people dancing. He says of the dance's origin, "That is the corniest dance on the planet that I know of, so why don't I do that" (Holmes 2015). The dance began as an impromptu decision when filming the show, but it became a Black corporeal inscription for audiences and the series. The Carlton appears in the series finale with Ribeiro and co-star Will Smith dancing with abundant joy. The

characters celebrate their strong ties and—like the Black cakewalk performers from the mid-nineteenth century before them—mock White dancers.

The US Copyright office rejected Ribeiro's copyright application for the Carlton dance, emphasizing the dance's association with simple routines and social dances rather than complex choreography, even though it was performed and filmed on a stage before an audience. Florence makes clear, "the Office defines choreography as the composition and arrangement of a related series of dance movements and patterns organized into an integrated, coherent, and expressive whole." Social dance and simple routines do not possess patterns leading to a recognizable work. Even if simple routines, social dances, or derivative movements of social dances "contain a substantial amount of original, creative expression," the dances lack what Hip Hop scholar Naomi Bragin best describes as *choreocentricity*—that is, organized and authorized movements, patterns, and thinking that require legibility along European concert aesthetics (2014, 102). Dancer and Doctor of Law candidate Olivia Roche (2023) says dancers need a compulsory licensing scheme instituted by the government for profit distribution and to break up the monopolies on TikTok. This would ideally be accompanied by a nonprofit, third-party entity adjudicating and registering the dances and appropriately distributing royalties. A compulsory licensing scheme could curb underenforcement and undercompensating. This persuasive argument does not address how copyright registration favors dancemaking that is compulsory, anti-social and antagonistic to non-European descended modes of creation. By stripping movement creation and composition away from the social sphere and towards *choreocentricity*, dancers who use copyright processes, or are excluded from using it, are unmoored from the racial conditions that give rise to dances. This approach upholds White and Euro descended creative processes and centralizes the means of legal protection of those works.

Dance for Sale

Short-form dances are a syncopated racialized phenomenon that constructs and deconstructs material outcomes based on a dancer's epidermal and gendered identities. The idea that dance is ephemeral or traceless, Alexander H. Schwan (2017) reminds us, lacks sufficient complexity. Predominant cultural attitudes that position dance as an ephemeral practice indirectly justify its expropriation and theft. They leave out the financial benefits, material industries, and upward social mobility (Malnig 1997) that arise from dance practices—often benefitting White dancers who knowingly or unknowingly steal dances created by Black choreographers and aim for literal replication without questioning the dance's origin. Interestingly, Marcia Siegel was partially right when she argued "[dance] is an event that disappears in the very act of materializing" (1968, 1). However, this disappearance impacts all dancers unequally.

In short-form dance economies—where the theft of Black aesthetic practices structure entire aesthetic industries—the ontology of performance is not its disappearance and present-ness that evades capitalism's grip and disciplining—what Peggy Phelan (1993, 146-166) sees as performance's greatest strength. Rebecca Schneider's sustained reappraisal of Phelan's orientation towards ephemerality elucidates a productive tension between disappearance and

reenactment—where what came before (the past) and is made explicit in (live) performance functions as bodily transmission and results in the creation of echoes (2011, 105). Extending Schneider's proposal based on what short-form dances reveal, the ontology of performance is the circulation of its echoes across medial boundaries and when racialized movements take center stage between representations and reenactments linked to the remains of a performance.

Contemporary dance is not only about the interpreted and vanishing moves that people watch and choreograph on stages and mobile screens in the present moment. Dances appear, rather than vanish, on second bodies. Dances are created to compel live reenactment and accelerate material circulations with divergent paths depending on a dancer's intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. For White dancers, expropriated dances are done to keep the movement echoes and disappear the Black creators and not to preserve the latter. Dancers create, assemble, and steal movements and gestures in the choreographies themselves and deploy echoes of those compositions to assemble currents of likes, retweets, copycats, and monetization prospects. Dancing is a double effort of creating and controlling—of keeping your hand on the thing. This twofold movement had historically been principally afforded to White choreographers.

If dance accelerates the lives of White dancers in the process of reenactment, then it slows down and reduces the lives of Black artists in the wake of its deployment. At issue with Jalaiah Harmon's *Renegade* dance is the compensation and ownership and its material consequences for the dancers and choreographers involved after the short-form dance was created. Harmon originally choreographed the dance on the platform Funimate in September 2019 as a dance challenge with friend Kaliyah Davis. When Harmon saw her dances on TikTok and Instagram without credit given to her, she commented that she was the original choreographer. The dance echo was accelerating beyond her ability to link it back to her. People did not believe her. She did not receive full and public credit until Taylor Lorenz' feature article was published in *The New York Times* on 13 February, 2020. By that time, many popular artists and even former First Lady Michelle Obama had danced the *Renegade*. Following the *Times*'s article, Harmon performed the dance on *Ellen* in February, where White host Ellen DeGeneres gifted her a green jacket with "The Original Renegade Dancer" on the back and gave her money. DeGeneres said that there were small items in the pockets. The host took out a stack of cash totaling $1,000, then another, and then another—until she gave Harmon $5,000. Later, Harmon was invited to the National Basketball Association's All Star half-time show in March of that same year—where she performed the dance in the center of the court by herself.

Harmon's appearance on *Ellen* was supposed to symbolize repayment and visibility for Harmon's association with the dance—linking the owner back with what was owned. More importantly, the visit on the show was meant to put a stop to the circulating echo that appeared to have the wrong author. DeGeneres authenticated the reunion and vouched for Harmon's control. Although it is uncertain how much money Harmon and D'Amelio made directly from the *Renegade* dance during the fall of 2019 and 2020, it is evident that the $5,000 paid to Harmon by the *Ellen* show was a meager amount compared to the massive profits made by entertainment and advertisement agencies through the widespread circulation of the dance. Further highlighting the disparities,

D'Amelio made approximately five million dollars by monetizing her content the same year when she began using TikTok and became synonymous with the *Renegade*.

The dispossession and reauthentication of the *Renegade* exposes that the concept of "original" is contradictory in the D'Amelio-Harmon case. While there is a shared understanding of the unique moment when Harmon created the *Renegade* by arranging movements in a novel way, the dance is both an original and a copy simultaneously. Harmon was transparent that the dance was built on pre-existing moves like *The Whoa*, *The Wave*, and *The Dab*. Using the term 'original' overlooks the fact that these moves came before the *Renegade*. This raises the question of why Harmon needed to be the original choreographer. Asserting the 'original' title is crucial for staking a claim to the dance's embodied uniqueness and for discursively recognizing the creative value of the Black dancer. Much of the dance expressed a whole new arrangement. This was different from D'Amelio who only modified small portions of it. Beyond the embodied modifications, a significant social alteration occurred. Harmon created the dance as a challenge with her friend Kaliyah Davis. Meanwhile, D'Amelio usurped an existing arrangement and monopolized it for individual gain. Harmon had to challenge the 'whiteness-as-trustworthiness' equation that accompanied D'Amelio's version. The title 'original' prompted doubt to the assumed Whiteness of the *Renegade*'s creation process. Even as the short-form dance changes and builds on previous ones, the discourse of valuing Black dancers and sociality merits repetition.

This competition over the 'original' title presents a challenge to the lasting effects of post-structuralist ideas (such as those put forth by Barthes 1977, Berger 1972, and Lyotard 1984) on the perception of dance as an art form. These ideas assert that art objects do not possess discrete or ultimate meanings and that grand narratives do not exist. Although post-structuralist values have had a significant impact on dance, with a focus on minor subjects and co-creation of dances, it is important to note that these ideals did not anticipate dances as advertisements on digital media. There remains a prevailing assumption among White dance practitioners that dance is a universal art form that people can enjoy as they please and access swiftly with social media applications. Trevor Boffone maintains that most White TikTok users resent being called appropriators.[17] They are just having fun because dance is a shared experience meant for all. These comments reveal the way in which post-structuralist ideas of ownership, or lack thereof, are twisted along racial lines and justified through universal claims to dance's public availability as fun and shareable—without consequences regarding its use and concerns about dispossession.

DeGeneres transferring the *Renegade* back to Harmon exposes the double impact of White dancers under-citing Black gestures and the difficulty of proper attribution to the genealogy of a dance and its maker. Racialized dance echoes impact how short-form dances accrue their power: through instantiation or accumulation. When race and gender are accounted for in these processes it appears as though the copy executed by the White female dancer Charli D'Amelio in the TikTok seconds-long video acquires value in its instantiation because other dancers assume it to be authentic, fun, private, and possess originality. This is unlike the Black female dancer Jalaiah Harmon who acquires authorship and ownership through the dance's accretion because it is assumed to be a common good without an owner. Harmon had to convince audiences and

required substantive support from *The New York Times* and other media outlets to link the echo with the creator.

D'Amelio dispossessing Harmon of her dance without attribution is a prime example of political geographer David Harvey's idea of dispossession by capital accumulation (2004). Harvey's analysis is useful as it helps us assess the flagrant occurrence of commodity theft. D'Amelio privatized Harmon's dance and employed it in service of concentrating her wealth. Yet Harvey's entire framework does not apply as easily to the theft of Black short-form dances. Dispossession occurred because Black vernacular dances are assumed to be public goods rather than commodities managed and protected by a nation-state interested in keeping them away from private hands. Black dances exist in the public sphere and are assumed to be readily available for private interests, advertisements, and monetization.

White dispossession of Black short-form dances benefits from social media applications' exploitation of time. That White dancers strip Black choreographers of ownership with ease is evidence of unethical practices and renders the racial and gender markers of an ordinary White temporality. White dancers stealing dances are not only pilfering authorship and claiming ownership, but they are also pocketing time from the Black creators. After a dispossession happens, Black creators must produce time to convince the public of their work. By contrast, White female dancers on TikTok gain immediate recognition by majority White audiences and are invited to late night shows like Fallon's without questioning the history of their work. They benefit from a White temporality and its ability to serve as an expressway for quicker popular recognition and authorial titles, as well as the financial benefits accompanying that ascension through the love and theft of Black expressive practices. Dispossessing a Black dancer is a thieving of the good (the dance) and of time while adding more labor to reclaim what was stolen.

Adopting, reenacting, and modifying short dance movement sequences and gestures is a lucrative business. In the first year of using TikTok and being the highest earning creators, White teenagers Addison Rae and Charli D'Amelio earned nine million dollars combined (Brown 2020). They monetized short dances through paid programming, content sales, and branded merchandise. TikTok's commercials in late 2021 highlight its appeal to users who enjoy watching short, embodied gestures. The ads feature people discussing Khame Lame's signature gesture, which he uses to comment on complicated solution videos. Lame is an Italy-based Black Senegalese entertainer.[18] His videos end with a simple gesture of opening his palms as if to show that the solution is not difficult. The commercial ends with the tag line "you have to see it."

Although Lame performs no other complicated movements such as those executed by Harmon in her dance video, his gestures and Harmon's dances unite through an equal emphasis on gesturality and short sequences. If gesturality, as Juana María Rodríguez (2014, 99-138) makes clear, animates entire racialized, sexualized, and gendered worlds that are up for re-inscription in the moment of their enactment, then, in their performance, the accretive value of that simple movement renders it available for circulation. When a dancer deploys a single move or a sequence of gestures, as simple as Lame's or Harmon's fifteen-second *Renegade*, that value is up for absorption and

reinscription in the circulating intertextual web of embodied expressive practices. D'Amelio saw the *Renegade* once it had been brought over to TikTok in a simplified format by Black dancer @global.jones in October 2019, and she further modified it slightly. Where Harmon accentuates complex sharp hand movements and the bobbing of her head, D'Amelio adds more emphasis on undulating her hips and upper torso, concluding her fifteen second rendition by hiking her hips five times and performing "duck face"—her lips pressed together and pouted. These short-form dance videos are not simply memes or viral content to watch as they vanish. The phrase "you have to see it" is coded with the clause "and you must try it." Reenactment results in privation. Privation gives way to re-inscription. Re-inscription results in expropriation. The gestures circulating and being reenacted through meme culture are racialized and used for fantasy play, corporeal re-inscription, and profit.

Reclaiming a Dance

Crypto-choreographies, dance NFTs created by Black artists, serve as digital and social authentication for Black artists who aim to curb the disappearance of Black life and the dispossession of a dance (as commodified good), labor, and time. Jadu app creators and Black choreographers Harmon, Cookie Kawaii, and Blanco Brown released three holographic dances on OpenSea for Juneteenth 2021. The Jadu Genesis collection includes *Renegade* by Harmon, *Throw it Back* by Kawaii, and *The Git Up* by Brown, all under nineteen seconds long. These three dances received over 10 billion views on TikTok, Funimate, and YouTube, and countless copies were made without proper credit or compensation for the Black creators. The dance NFTs were recorded at Microsoft Mixed Reality Studio with 106 cameras, capturing the dancers in 360 degrees without any cutting and splicing. The cameras capture more than the usual upper body that is framed on TikTok and Instagram. The dancers are performing solo in front of a black backdrop while glowing particles that resemble flying embers float around them. The files were sold on OpenSea. Users can select any one of these dances and see the last purchase price for each of the assets. Harmon's *Renegade* was purchased by user AMJ1111 on 19 June, 2021, for four and half ETH (then valued at over thirteen thousand US dollars). The purchase amounts go to the choreographers. Users can select specific purchase events and see full transaction details on a public ledger hosted on etherscan.io.[19] Users of OpenSea can also make an offer on the digital asset. *Renegade* NFT can be bought on OpenSea or accessed through the Jadu app. In the app, users can download the dances and project them into living rooms to perform with Harmon in augmented reality.

What distinguishes Jadu from other dance NFT collections and assets on OpenSea is its emphasis on altering the contemporary dance economy with a clear stance against dispossession by accumulation and composed racial capitalism. The collection's landing page says, "Much of internet culture, specifically viral dances, originate from black creators who often don't see monetary gain/credit. This collection is a way to use NFTs to reclaim these trends for the original creators while immortalizing their performances as holograms."[20] Jadu collaborated with Harmon, Kawaii, and Brown to create holographic performances purchasable as NFTs to guarantee that the dancers receive compensation and are linked with the dance in perpetuity. Jadu's descriptions of each

dance provide historical context and capture the dancers' feelings about their dances' impact on social media, including their frustration at not receiving credit. For example, Cookie Kawaii notes that despite creating music since 2011, she had to comment on social media that she created the viral dance to her own song *Vibe* in 2020. These crypto-choreographies work against dispossession and erasure.

A year after appearing on *Ellen*, Harmon, with Jadu media's help, sold the *Renegade* for almost three times the $5,000 dollars pulled out of Harmon's pockets. The *Renegade* NFT's increased value is not substantial compared to five million dollars, but it represents the value of the dance itself and the cultural significance of racial and gender differences expressed through it. Buying the NFT is not exploiting these differences, but rather a way to appreciate and celebrate them, as well as honor Harmon's control of her dance. Buyers are not purchasing a colorblind dance. They are purchasing the racial experience linked to Black dance. Racialized gestures are crucial in giving animated movement its meaning and value. This makes it clear that no dance is truly original without acknowledging the racial conditions—however constructed—in which it originated. Crypto-choreographies foreground the racial value that gives Black dances their meaning, authorship, and ownership. The Jadu Genesis Collection has resulted in the creation of crypto-choreographies, which offer a new way of circulating, valuing, and compensating Black choreographers in the wake of rampant dispossession and dance as advertisement.

Immortalizing the Simple Dance Routine

Crypto-choreographies are a process of immortalization. Capturing or "fixing" a dance via video regardless of its length is no longer enough. Dances must be, as Jadu creators say, immortalized. Harmon's *Renegade* NFT features the dancer repeating the complex arm and feet movements with ease. Wearing black sweats and a white T-shirt, she wraps her hand around her head and then extends her arms out to accent the heavy bass beats from K Camp's song *Lottery* that accompany her. Her feet barely move from underneath her. A colorful magenta light casts a glow on Harmon's shoulders. The camera revolves around the dancer and a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view showcases the Black dancer's full body. The *Renegade*'s location is unclear. Similar to galaxies glacially hovering in an expansive universe, white particles float around Harmon as she dances in an infinite black space.

The holographic NFT rendition of *Renegade* is different from the two other popular forms of exhibiting the dance. A version of it was available for sale as an emote on Fortnite in July 2020. In this version promoted by parent company Epic Games, Harmon's face and body is distorted into a game figure avatar. She wears orange suspenders, a white top, green hair, and tall boots. But once the emote is purchased, the avatar can be any skin the gamer chooses. In the 2020 TikTok version of the *Renegade*, the teenager is in a room resembling a bedroom with a light fixture on top and a black shelf on the viewer's right-hand side. Harmon presents her backstage life and just so happens to capture herself dancing—exposing what Erika Pearson, building on Erving Goffman, called the backstage/front-stage straddle common to social media to play identity (2009). On the *Ellen* show, Harmon said she was on her way to a dance class when she decided to create the *Renegade*. She

conceived the dance in five to ten minutes. The Jadu holographic version de-contextualizes the dance from the original impromptu domestic scene. The everyday-ness captured in the TikTok video, however staged, is removed in favor of an expansive black backdrop. The totality of her Black body is front and center.

The futurity ascribed to Harmon's dance moves is not relegated to an affective sphere of the virtual that cannot be accessed—existing beyond the corporeal conditions of this world. Harmon's crypto-choreography makes evident that Black female sensation is necessarily accessible and worth protecting in perpetuity. Crypto-choreographies are the virtual manifestation of Black flesh, sensation, and bone bundled together through public ledgers of a digital exchange market fully graspable. The flesh captured in crypto-choreographies is akin to the *flesh dance* that Jasmine Johnson describes in her study on Black women dancing—where policing and pleasure concur (2020, 165). Making a connection with Johnson's work, however, does not mean Harmon is being adultified. She is a teenager. Her age and the dance's length are critical. Seconds-long dances created by Black youth can be monetized and valued, allowing for the possibility of ongoing compensation for the dancers. Because crypto-choreographies are stored on a blockchain, they provide a form of documentation and immutability that can protect the dance from erasure, regardless of the creator's age.

Immortalizing the *Renegade* suggests making apparent Harmon's ongoing claim to her ownership and racialized experience in the wake of dispossession. Crypto-choreographies are evidence of the bond that privation and re-inscription erase. They provide a perpetual link between racialized flesh and the dance, which serves to authenticate the dance and its instantiation. This creates a definitive claim, with substantive public support, that the dance is indeed connected to the Black dancer. By coupling the dance with the creator, this eliminates the gap that exists between the transfer of the dance over time and the person who originally created it. The bond is materialized, the labor honored, and the content reauthorized back to the Black artist. Evidence in this sense is unlike the evidence copyright law aims to serve given the limited duration of copyright protection—lasting generally the life of the author plus seventy years (U.S. Copyright Office, n.d.). Crypto-choreographies can still circulate and be copied and danced and recorded on social media by others, even as they are now attached to their originators. Immortalizing the dance means that the dances are linked with the Black dancer—inseparable from that person's body in perpetuity.

To immortalize a Black dance does not necessarily mean to accept it without alteration. Harmon modified the version of the *Renegade* from its original TikTok posting before she recorded it for the holographic NFT. In the NFT version, the dance takes a 'get down' aesthetic. She bends her knees and hips repeatedly, as well as adds wider leg stances. Harmon's weight is on the balls of her feet rather than on her heels. There is more of a spring and bounce to her body. The purchase of the NFT is not the *Renegade* on TikTok. These changes suggest that Black artists immortalizing a dance are not about stopping its modification completely. Instead, they are closing the racial chasms that form in the creation of a dance and the circulation of its echo in reenactments. Crypto-choreographies provide proof, without a doubt, of the immortal Black hand on the roving thing.

Crypto-choreographies are Black choreographic objects thwarting institutionalized surveillance and disciplining, even as they become dancer tools for monitoring theft. Crypto-choreographies are not simply dance NFTs said another way. Instead, they emerge and circulate through the transference of Black dance moves from creator to one short-form video to another. To bridge the gap between the original form of a dance and what is being circulated, Black dance makers must detach the dance from its choreography, but not in the way that the Copyright Office suggests, as seen in its refusal to register short-form dances like Ribeiro's application. Choreographer William Forsythe's commitment to unlinking dance and choreography is useful, although he is silent on choreography's connection to structural and symbolic inequalities and race and racial economies (Forsythe, n.d.). For Forsythe, choreographic objects are those things that organize human movement in conscious and unconscious ways. Black dance NFTs are choreographic objects deployed by Black artists to claim individual authorial stances and, more importantly, become entities that discipline and repattern relationships with and through dance. This observation nuances André Lepecki's (2013) precise contribution on surveillance and conformity through *choreopolicing*. Unlike the *choreopolitical*—opposite of *choreopolicing*—crypto-choreographies are dedicated to the re-organization and monitoring of Black movement, repatterning racially aware accountability and supervising practices to avoid theft by White dancers. The #BlackTikTokStrike demonstrates Black dancers' willingness to participate in financial economies and how they repattern behaviors of Black dispossession and expropriation. By converting Black embodied practices into digital forms across multiple media, Black dancers utilize them as choreographic objects, while still maintaining their connection to the Black dancer who created them.

Crypto-choreographies move in two ways simultaneously. They assemble and deploy as their own objects while maintaining a connection between the Black creator and what is created. This double maneuvering is central to crypto movements. They work *otherwise* against normative and monopolizing modes of embodied practices, as described by Victoria Fortuna (2018). Crypto-choreographies assemble movement in such a way that they close the gap between the instantiation of Black gestures and the person who created it, even after the movement has left the mover. In essence, crypto-choreographies bridge the divide between the original form of Black movement and what is being circulated but without aiming to monopolize and fix a dance.

What results in the case of the crypto-choreographies is a concern with the critical phenomenology of racialized movements and their link to justice concerns in contemporary dance practices. Crypto-choreographies are an apparition of the flesh, blood, authorship, and sweat of Black labor and intellect when those virtual embodiments are instantiated, even while the dance may not be the same. Crypto-choreographies seize the abundant corporeal and material aspects of movement that verify its racialized nature without denying its originality and alteration. This is unlike traditional copyright registration processes that fix a dance in a static way, demand uniformity, promote scarcity, and require arbitration by federal institutions. Crypto-choreographies allow for the recapture of dispossession and expropriation while recognizing the complexity and nuance of dance as both an individual and cultural phenomenon.

Conclusion

Jalaiah Harmon and Charli D'Amelio are two dance makers navigating short-form dance economies and their racialized conditions. Despite not being initially credited with making the *Renegade*, Harmon expressed no ill feelings towards D'Amelio and even hoped they could collaborate one day. Ultimately, she is a teenager who loves to dance. She likes that "We make up a dance and it grows" (Lorenz 2020). The debate surrounding the 'original' creator highlights not only the issue of determining authorship of a particular dance but also concerns about who is deemed deserving of creating, managing, and benefiting from an original dance as it gains popularity, grows, and is reenacted across medial boundaries.

In this article, I discussed how copyright registration and crypto-choreographies are affecting our understanding of representational and racialized economies, and the implications of these developments in the love and theft of dance. Popular gestures within short-form dances are enabled by remix culture and a TikTok application that encourages repeated borrowing with the goal of monetizing dance. I remarked about Knight's copyright aims and Harmon's appearance on the *Ellen* show to highlight the stakes of this conversation. Between short gesture movements such as *The Carlton*, Harmon's *Renegade*, and the longer choreography in JaQuel Knight's music videos, artists exist in a murky choreographic space where inscription of identity is tantamount.

The copyrighting and crypto-choreographies analyzed herein illustrate the growing legal and digital attention given to closing gaps between what was with what circulates in dance economies from streets to music videos to short-form digital reels. Closing endeavors such as these reveal dance practices that require proximity not only through aesthetic means but also with the lives of those persons who give rise to aesthetic forms. Where White dancers on TikTok exercise proximity by dispossession, crypto-choreographies are about nearness by reclamation. Black artists' close relationship with their creative work emphasizes the importance of love as a founding justice principle, rather than a means of expropriation. It calls for a love of dance as an ethical commitment to reducing disavowal. Instead of fetishization and proximity-for-theft, dancers adopting justice centered repetition of movement prioritize undoing the mechanisms that perpetuate inequality. Dance can either serve as a vehicle for social mobility and fame through short-form dances or, with an ethical calculus, it can serve to remember the past and acknowledge the Black lives and bodies that gave rise to the forms. This past is not static, but rather a space and time that embodies the history of Black dances and compensates Black dancers even as their movement changes in style and length.

Artists must not choose between copyrighting and crypto-choreographies. Instead, I am highlighting the different approaches undertaken by Black artists to transform and reshape the production and distribution of their work, and to exercise greater control over the processes of creation and expropriation. These joint strategies demonstrate how contemporary dance is a material practice and thus challenges the longstanding perception of dance's ephemerality. Artists have multiple options available to them and are using these strategies in combination or separately to create and control their work now and in the future as it grows. Harmon's crypto-choreography

reveals the lasting impact of the artist's moves, how they circulate, and even posit their existence of a metaverse yet to arrive.

What remains unclear still is identifying if all Black movement needs to be captured and up for sale to undo the love and theft affair rampant in dance practices. Choreography Online is the first web platform for selling and buying limited-use choreography licenses. Based in Canada but available worldwide, and launched in 2019, the company serves as an intermediary for choreographic transactions and proposes to be a facilitator of exchange of payments between sellers and buyers of choreography. There is no initial fee for artists to post and sell performance rights, but the intermediary takes a ten-percent commission after the sale. Should choreographers shrug a digital clearinghouse and opt to volumetrically capture their dances as NFTs, the cost is cost prohibitive. Perhaps an augmented reality metaverse awaits where dancers, and their movements, may be free from the chains of financial logic and held instantly socially accountable beyond half time show reprimands and empty choreographer credits. Until that time comes, choreography is unequally up for sale and the primary means of deliberation should be more talking and less dancing.

Notes

[1] A year after D'Amelio's appearance on Fallon's show, Addison Rae Easterling appeared under the same conditions. She performed dances she did not create, as Fallon scrolled through white posterboard cards.

[2] In 1952, Hanya Holm was the first artist to register a choreographic work, but not as choreography. It was categorized as a drama. Before Holm, Loïe Fuller (1862–1928) filed to register her *Serpentine Dance* with the U.S. Copyright Office, but she was unsuccessful. Choreography outside a dramatic-lyrical designation was not a legally recognized category under copyright law until after January 1, 1978. For more, see Kraut 2011.

[3] Currently, there is no singular metaverse. There are different platforms competing to become the central digital space for virtual reality.

[4] It is unknown whether pak is one person or a collective of people.

[5] Rodriguez-Fraile first bought Everydays for under seventy-thousand dollars and then sold it at the Christie's auction.

[6] In 2021, the cryptocurrency market exhibited a decline in value that started to resemble securities in the stock market with rises in interest rates, leading some financial experts to conclude that cryptocurrencies function more like traditional securities rather than an alternative financial model. While the value of cryptocurrencies in dollars was reduced significantly, the implementation and use of the technology continues to spread. In 2024, valuations rebounded and reached new records.

[7] There are ongoing lawsuits against professional sports athletes who endorsed now shuttered crypto exchange market FTX.

[8] Refer to Calma (2021) for an overview of the environmental implications of crypto-art and the shift from proof-of-stake to proof-of-purchase in major cryptocurrencies.

[9] To test this out, I downloaded the Jadu app and augmented my living room with Harmon's *Renegade*. I danced alongside Harmon.

[10] See Circular 52, Copyright Registration of Choreography and Pantomime on copyright.gov. Accessed 1 Nov 2021.

[11] Ibid.

[12] See Aldape Muñoz 2022.

[13] See coverage of the case here: https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2019/02/15/fresh-prince-star-alfonso-ribeiro-cant-copyright-dance-feds/2879417002/. Accessed February 1, 2022.

[14] A copy of the complaint receipt can be found here: https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/8423008/1/alfonso-ribeiro-v-epic-games-inc/

[15] The email correspondence from the Copyright Office was made public and is available here: https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/5737799/Ribeiro-copyright2.pdf

[16] I grew up watching *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and have done the dance on many occasions, but I viewed a version of the dance on YouTube as an aide in this analysis. Ribeiro performed the dance when he participated in Season 19 of *Dancing with the Stars*. The video can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbSCWgZQf_g&ab_channel=HopMedia

[17] Boffone made these comments during the roundtable discussion *TikTok and Short-Form Screendance Before and After Covid* hosted online (https://screendancejournal.org/article/view/8348) but a longer exploration of these remarks can be found in Boffone 2021,

[18] My comment on Lame's gesture has far less to do with equating the experiences and audience reception of a Senegalese Black artist with the Black artists in the United States than with the gestural concerns at the center of the discussion.

[19] The full transaction history is a series of hashed numbers referencing the unique identifying transaction. The *Renegade*'s purchase can be found here: https://etherscan.io/tx/0xe183ec02ecb577846739357a851cc26486fe1df8dfec9e1acce30383a5712ec0. Accessed January 20, 2022.

[20] See https://opensea.io/collection/jadu-holograms. Accessed January 31, 2022.

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Biography

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