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Okay but what if we didn't do that?

Countering White Supremacy and Anti-Blackness through Community Building
in the Choreographic Process

By Mara Senecal-Albrecht
DAN 498

May 5th, 2021

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	4
Research Questions	6
Community Values//Intentions	9
Literature Review	11
Blackness and Abstraction	11
Appropriation	20
Embodied Trauma	21
Disability Justice	23
Racial Capitalism//Anti-capitalism	27
White Supremacy Culture	30
Methodology	33
Semester One: Building Community	41
Semester Two: Fleshing Out the Work	46
Performance Design	58
Audience Reception	63
Collaborator Reflections	67
Final Reflection	69
Conclusion	72
Appendix	74
Important Concepts and Terminology	74
Performance Program	79
Resources on Recent Incidents of Anti-Blackness at the College	81
Supplementary Materials Guide	81
Bibliography	83

Acknowledgements

Recognizing and honoring those that have shaped our lives and moving bodies is an important part of counteracting the erasure of appropriation and anti-blackness. In a community where so much embodied knowledge is exchanged, ownership can be stolen and blurred. Before I enter this work, I want to state that I am not only made up of my own experiences but of those that came before me, who have educated me, who I have seen in a video, whom I have seen in a concert, spoken to, or simply seen move in the world. I want to take this time immediately to honor and acknowledge the Black women and femme artists and scholars from whom I have learned so much in my growth as an artist and as a person over the past four years. To Shani Collins, Samantha Speis, Rosemarie Roberts, Shayla-Vie Jenkins, Nia Love, Onye Ozuzu, Myssi Robinson, Henryatta Ballah, Nathalie Etoke, nora chipaumire, Shakia Barron, Catherine Kirk, Ariana Speight, and Jasmine Hearn, whether it was one class, 5 days a week for 5 weeks, a semester, a year, or four years, thank you for all you have offered and continue to offer into this world. Next, I would like to thank my¹ five incredible collaborators in this project, Journee Hardaway, Zion Martin-Hayes, Lindsey Perlman, Ayana Sequira, and Alyssa Bodmer. Thank you for coming on this journey with me through the tears, laughter, discomfort, awkward silences, busted shoulders, busted knees, joy, friendship and everything else in between. Thank you to Rachel Boggia for advising me, for our 1.5 hour long talks every week, for dealing with my complete incompetence with deadlines, and for supporting me all the way through. Thank you to Shawn Hove for letting me annoy you most of the time and for helping me with lights, for controlling the cameras, and helping me set up. Thank you to Kevin Hyland for being so willing to jump onto this project insanely last minute. The final performance could not have manifested

¹ Please note that the word 'my' is used here and in other places not to denote ownership or superiority and was simply used for the sake of simplicity. Furthermore, "the collaborators with whom I am working" is such a mouthful and "the collaborators" could be read as too vague.

as beautifully as it did without your gorgeous playing and musical support of my co-collaborators. Thank you to David Dorfman for being my second reader and for jumping on this train so last minute. Thank you to my mother Nora Senecal for sending me resources on polyvagal theory three days before this paper was due and thank you to my father Daniel Albrecht for helping me communicate with Connecticut State Parks even though our outdoor performances never happened. Thank you to Karen Hanna for deepening my knowledge of the Disability Justice movement and providing me with the resources to learn to love myself in all my difference. Finally, I would like to thank all those who were able to attend our performances in person, it was a joy to welcome you into our space.

Introduction

The Beginnings...

Prior to delving into this work, I believe it is important that you, dear reader, listener, participant, viewer, understand the origins of this project. I have always wanted to do an honors thesis, probably since my first year. I think initially it was because I am an overachiever but as I got more into creating my own work, I felt that doing a final long term creative process in my final year of college was something that was important to me. In my initial proposal, I had originally wanted to investigate meaning in dance and whether a piece can be truly meaning-filled or meaningless. However, I quickly became far more interested in one of my sub-themes: the relationship between whiteness and abstraction.

Why?

From my interest in the relationship between whiteness and abstraction, came the idea for this project. Reflecting on the knowledge I already had of appropriation, anti-blackness, erasure, white supremacy, etc. from being in the dance world, as an Africana Studies minor, and from the research that I was doing, I began to think to myself,

“Okay, so I have all this information, what am I actually going to do with it?”

“How am I going to reshape myself as an artist?”

“How am I going to change as a choreographer?”

These are questions that I think every white person reading this paper and others like it should be thinking to themselves, in the context of their own vocations. Not to assuage your white guilt or make you or your institution look good but because harm has, and is continuing, to be done.

This project is as much an honors thesis attached to an institution as it is a development process for myself. The things I have tried in our rehearsal space are things that I plan to continue in my own practice and life as an artist.

Disclaimers

Prior to fully delving into this work, I wanted to make a few disclaimers. This reworking of the choreographic process that takes place in this project does not attempt to dismantle every single problematic and racist feature of the choreographic and performance process. In the beginning I wanted to do that, but quickly realized that given my constraints of working within an institution, this predominantly white environment, the fact I am one 22-year old queer white woman, and a global pandemic, dissecting every white supremacist feature would be nearly

impossible. Instead, this project and its process seeks to do what it can and prioritize the safety of the BIPOC members of the community.

Secondly, I want to be clear that I am not, nor was I intending to, reinvent the wheel here when it comes to choreographic processes. As a young artist no one really teaches you how to lead a rehearsal or develop a piece, it is rather built from one's own experiences in the studio, with different choreographers and in different contexts. In developing this work, I hope to take what I know and the habits I have acquired and modify and change and rethink them to create a space that listens to artists, that dismantles hierarchy, that prioritizes BIPOC artists' health, acknowledges a multiplicity of abilities, and develops community.

Research Questions

This entire project was and still is, fluid and malleable. Thoughts, practices, and ideas shifted and changed, were dropped and brought in. With this fact in mind, the research questions were never stagnant. They changed multiple times over the course this year and the following questions represent their semi-finalized state of being. The research questions are broken down into two categories, written and practice-based. The former are designed to guide the written and theoretical research of this thesis while the latter are crafted to shape the in-studio practice. Below I have selected two different examples of the research questions, one set from the beginning of the process and the current set, to illustrate how they changed over time.

November 2020

Written Questions:

How are Africanist aesthetics, ideas, and sensibilities reflected in American performance culture?

How has Black dance been exploited by white dance makers?

In what ways did the Judson movement and the tool of abstraction reinforce racial hierarchies and the racialized normal?

How has dance pedagogy and choreographic spaces enforced white body supremacy?

What is the process of deconstructing capitalist notions of art production? In the choreographic space? In the performance space?

How does anti-racist work connect to the anti-capitalist movement and to disability justice?

Practice Questions:

How do we create an anti-racist process in which folks feel they can bring their whole identities into the space?

Where does white body supremacy live in our subconscious body?

How do we harness and reclaim abstraction to call for new possibilities of normal, of ordinary?

How do I, as a white choreographer, decenter myself in the process//product and center stories that are not my own in a respectful and equitable way?

How do we pay embodied tribute to each of our dance lineages?

In what ways have toxic, unhealthy, white supremacist ways of being become normalized in our choreographic processes?

March 2021 (current)

Written Questions:

How are Africanist aesthetics, ideas, and sensibilities reflected in American performance culture?

How has black dance been exploited by white dance makers?

In what ways did the Judson movement and the tool of abstraction reinforce racial hierarchies and the racialized normal?

How does anti-racist work connect to the anti-capitalist movement and to disability justice?

What are the characteristics of white supremacy culture?

Practice Questions:

How do we create an anti-racist process in which folks feel they can bring their whole identities into the space?

Where does white body supremacy live in our subconscious body?

How do we harness and reclaim abstraction and pedestrian movement to call for new possibilities of normal, of ordinary?

How do I, as a white choreographer, decenter myself in the process//product and center stories that are not my own in a respectful and equitable way?

How do we pay tribute to each of our embodied lineages?

How do we rid a choreographic process of harmful practices rooted in white supremacy?

Community Values//Intentions

The following list began development in the summer of 2020 by myself with the few immediate intentions I wanted to be true for this work. It was then added to and modified by my collaborators when we began in September and was continuously worked on after that. The format is modeled after the community guidelines of Freeskewl, an online platform for movement classes, performances, discussions, and community, with whom I interned during the summer of 2020. The phrasing Freeskewl was inspired by is modeled from The Dance Union podcast's introduction of "My dance union is" which they do at the start of each episode. These two groups are incredibly influential to me as an artist and as an individual and they deserve all the credit for this format and phrasing. These values and intentions are the foundations of this work and will be featured both here and in the section on choreographic process to emphasize their importance.

This rehearsal space/work (is).....

a group that operates on collective decision-making

a place where everyone is free to express themselves in any type of way

will work to be an anti racist process

invested in improvisation

a place folks can take a break from if they need

process oriented

leans aesthetically toward modern and contemporary but recognizes and uplifts the

ancestry and lineage of these forms

is accessible..i.e. does not cost anything to attend, will be in a wheelchair accessible

area, will work to meet the access needs of all attendees

will be adaptable to all learning styles and learning differences

intersectional

will not be performed in a proscenium space

womanist (feminism is a contested term that is dominated by whiteness as white

women stole from a lot of Black and indigenous ideas)

rejects capitalist ideas of productivity

subject to change

a place that holds vulnerability

~~will not take place on the connecticut college campus, a privileged and predominantly~~

~~white space, and instead will take place in new london~~

investigate embodied lineage

a space to pause

a space to listen to one another and to talk (about anything)

will have open, continuous communication

will check in at the beginning, middle, and end of rehearsal

will do the utmost to meet all the access needs of every group member

a safe space to cry

where feedback is encouraged

a safe space for queer and trans folks

a place where rehearsals or performances will not conflict with religious obligations or

practices

knows we are 6 people, in this studio, on this campus, in New London, in Connecticut,

in the U.S., in North America, on this planet, in this solar system, in this galaxy that is

just one in a bunch of other galaxies.

Literature Review

An Introduction

This work is built around a plethora of intersecting ideas and scholarship. It recognizes that the concepts and ideas explored in the literature review below do not fully encapsulate the wealth of knowledge that informs this project. It acknowledges that the worship of the written word is a facet of white supremacy culture and that the devaluation of knowledge that exists outside of the academy is inherently white supremacist. This work honors and supports the notion that knowledge lives in the body, in the oral traditions of BIPOC communities, and in the minds and experiences of femme folks, crips, queers, poor folks, BIPOC, women and other marginalized body minds. This statement is one I encourage you to keep in mind always when consuming this material. As this project is an intersectional one, the literature review is organized around a series of themes that are bolded at the start of their respective sections. Additionally, I encourage you to read the Key Terminology and Concepts section in the Appendix as well as it holds ideas that perhaps did not require lengthy explanations and therefore did not have another place to go.

TRIGGER WARNING: This literature review contains discussions of anti-Blackness. This trigger warning is intended for BIPOC folks who may be worn out from reading about the violence inflicted on their communities, not for white folks who get uncomfortable talking about racism.

Blackness and Abstraction

This project is built upon an idea of deconstructing of white supremacy and embodying the anti-racist in the choreographic process. Therefore, to begin the long overdue process of

acknowledging, honoring, and uplifting Black voices and Black artistry, it is imperative to examine the influence and impact of the Africanist aesthetic on American culture and performing arts. Perhaps the most well-known scholar who has written about this reality is Brenda Dixon Gottschild in her seminal work, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (1998). Many college dance students are likely familiar with the second chapter of this work that breaks down the five key traits of the Africanist aesthetic that can be identified in not only African or African diasporic art, but American art and culture as well. Briefly, the five characteristics of the Africanist aesthetic are embracing the conflict, polycentrism/polyrhythm, high-affect juxtaposition, ephebism, and the aesthetic of the cool (for full explanations of each characteristic, please see the Key Terminology section in the Appendix. Today, twenty years after this book was written, American culture still is built upon and defined by Africanisms just as much as European ideas, “Indeed, Americans Black and white inherit the Africanist aesthetic.” (Gottschild 7) She notes that while cultural borrowing did indeed take place, it was done in a way that was exploitative and appropriative, denying true ownership and continuing to oppress and other the African American community. Furthermore, while many people (well, perhaps prior to the summer of 2020) may assume we live in a multicultural, post-racial society because of greater integration, the ground of cultural construction is far from even and is still shaped by who has the power, which continues to be the dominant white [male] gaze. (Gottschild 134) To have true, “multiculturalism,” all parties must have the ability to shape and own the space equally. Placing this work in the context of this project, Gottschild speaks directly to the denial of Black ownership of aesthetics and ideas, not only in the context of immediate art world but in America as a whole, which allows us to see how white supremacist practices and beliefs systems have seeped into every single aspect of American life. Therefore, to

engage in the task of dismantling white supremacy, there must be a recognition of the repeated exploitation of the Black body and mind by white folks. In addition to providing a sound examination of late 20th century culture, Gottschild walks us through more specific historical chapters on American minstrelsy, George Balanchine, and the Africanist subtexts in Modern/Postmodern dance. In the latter chapter, Gottschild notes that a significant portion of the hallmarks of the aesthetics of the postmodern era come from Africanisms. The nonlinear, non-narrative, ironic, cool/relaxed, and radically juxtaposed elements of postmodern dance that separate it from the previous era, are ideas that existed in African and African diasporic art forms for centuries and have since informed the American habitat. This influence applies not just to performance but practice as well as postmodern makers shifted their focus to process over product//start-to-finish resolution and frequently developed their work from improvisation. (Gotschild 49-57)

While Gottschild primarily focuses on aesthetics and does not go deeper into the socio-political implications of the relationship between postmodernism and race, Rebecca Chaleff picks up where Gottschild leaves off in her article, “Activating Whiteness: Racializing the Ordinary in US American Postmodern Dance” (2018). Chaleff explains that while Judson artists sought to dismantle the conventional understandings of dance performance and choreography, their focus on the “ordinary” subsequently reinforced the regulation of racialized bodies and emphasized the supremacy of whiteness as ordinary. (Chaleff 72-75) Concentrating on two very well-known postmodern works, *Trio A* by Yvonne Rainer and *Locus* by Trisha Brown, the author admits that while these two artists did disrupt narratives of gender and of virtuosity, by the very nature of their white bodies and their intention of pedestrianism, they emphasized the idea that whiteness and the white experience, is something universal and

subsequently, neutral. Looking at Gottschild and Chaleff together, it is clear they both identify the second-class position of Black creators. Their [Black creators] work and bodies are still regulated and pigeon-holed by the dominant white gaze and beliefs surrounding what is acceptable for Black folks to create and determines whether or not they will receive credit for that production. In most situations, appropriation wins and white creators benefit the most. While these pieces would not necessarily disagree, there are visible differences that can be attributed to their publishing dates and the intentions of the work. Through the lens of 2020, “Activating Whiteness.....” feels more relevant and charged which could be attributed to the fact it was published more recently in a time where the dance world, like many other communities, is having a reckoning with anti-Blackness and exploitation. The work of Gottschild gives a substantial base for us to understand the work of later scholars like Chaleff and allows for us to understand the deeply rooted and exceedingly important presence of the Africanist aesthetic in American dance.

The challenge to the neutrality of the white body in space found in Chaleff’s work was an aspect of her piece I found especially relevant to the practice-based portion of this work. She states that, “to people of color, whiteness is never invisible. The visibility or invisibility of whiteness is dependent on who casts the identifying gaze.” (Chaleff 78) From my own research, this situation is a felt experience for the three BIPOC members of our choreographic community. In speaking about changes in dance academia and conversations around anti-blackness and explicitly anti-racist policy, one of my collaborators, Journee Hardaway said the following, “You can say as much about anti-racism and have these conversations about change but at the end of the day, I am still in a room full of white people in which I am one of the very few Black

people.”² This statement represents a direct connection to previous scholarship because all that is wrapped up in Blackness and anti-Blackness, Hardaway experiences immediate separation from her peers even though a space might be sold as inclusive. Furthermore, because of all of the generational and historical trauma carried and passed on between generations and generations of Black folk, Black bodies are likely to react in protective ways when surrounded by white bodies. This idea is central to the work of Resma Menakem which I will touch on later in this review.

In her analysis, Chaleff speaks to the position of privilege that white bodies have onstage as their race does not proceed or define them for white audience members, “presumed universality of the white subject enables white bodies to circulate unremarkably yet influentially within the context of performance, moving from a position of privilege in which their race does not precede or define their presence onstage.” (Chaleff 76) Conversely, the bodies and works of BIPOC creators are automatically racialized as even if the work has nothing to do with identity or socio-political commentary. The dominant white gaze immediately assigns ideas, assumptions, or stereotypes about the work that are bound up in the artist’s race. This idea translates further into possibilities of movement for artists of color, as illustrated in the words of Gerald Casel, a queer, Filipino-American artist, who was invited to learn and to choreograph a response to Trisha Brown’s work, *Locus* in 2016,

“Formal constraints have the capacity to invigorate creativity, however, they do not function equally for all bodies. More precisely, there is no such thing as pure movement for dancers of color.... One of the assumptions that postmodern formalism arouses is that any body has the potential to be read as neutral—that there is such a thing as a universally unmarked body. As a dancer and choreographer of color, my body cannot be perceived as pure. My brown body cannot be read the same way as a white body, particularly in a white cube.” (Casel 2016 in Chaleff 2018)

²This quote was paraphrased from my own notes at the time. I received permission from Hardaway to paraphrase and include it in the work.

This quote perfectly encapsulates how the so-called ‘neutral body’ is a myth for Black and brown artists and exemplifies how the exclusion of the Black and brown body from the radical intentions of the postmodern movement has carried through to impact not only the work of their time in the 1960s and 70s but the contemporary work of today.

Continuing the discussion of whiteness and abstraction from the perspective of non-white artists, is a piece by choreographer, performer, composer, writer, and educator Miguel Gutierrez entitled, “Does Abstraction Belong to White People?” Published in *BOMB* magazine in 2018, Gutierrez recounts several scenes from his life as an artist in which he felt disconnected from and often confused by, the comments or attitudes of white artists when confronted with race and art production. The whole piece itself is especially poignant but there are two moments that stand out to me personally. The first comes from a discussion between Gutierrez and a white female mentor of his following a presentation by Thomas Defrantz at Movement Research. I have included the entire quote below because my summary wouldn’t do a sufficient job.

“Later, after the talk, she pulls me aside and says, “I just don’t understand how you dance these ideas. How are people going to do this?” I’m not sure exactly what she is referring to. Afro-pessimism? Race? Ideas in general? I haltingly try to tell her, “Well, um, I sort of think some people are already doing this ... have been doing this ...” To explain this to her feels so awkward. Obvious. I feel suddenly thrust back to the edge of the chasm—how can she not understand that for some people it’s not about a “choice” to make dances about this?” (Gutierrez 2018)

The last line of this situation rings true to the discussion of whiteness and abstraction because it brings “choice” into the picture. In all technicality, artists can make work about whatever they want but for Black, brown, and other artists of color, the choice isn’t really there. Firstly, Gutierrez’ speaks similarly to what Casel is discussing in Chaleff’s work in which the physical bodies of people of color do not have the privilege of white bodies in presenting “pure

movement” or “neutral work” because of the hyperracialization of the Black and brown body in the eyes of the dominant white audience. Here, Gutierrez is talking about the same thing but also the experience of living in a racialized body and how that deeply colors and influences the work that you're going to generate. If your oppression and marginalization is so prevalent and so constant in your mind, so influential to your identity, and the way that you are perceived and treated in greater society, it's no wonder that this is more likely to show up in your work.

Another conversation that stood out to me for its language was a moment in which Gutierrez brings up a conversation between himself and a white dancer about their frustrations with the New York downtown dance scene,

“I say how my current frustration is the lack of people of color in downtown dance artists’ work. “Well, that’s just who’s in the community,” she answers, unquestioningly, as if the white choreographers’ casting choices have nothing to do with subjectivity or representational politics. That somehow their bodies can be signifiers for a universal experience that doesn’t need to look at whiteness as an active choice or as the default mechanism of a lazy, non-existent critique.” (Gutierrez 2018)

Again, we are presented with the idea of “choice,” but in this circumstance it is from the perspective of whiteness as, “an active choice.” Gutierrez is not trying to say that being white is a choice but using your whiteness as a tool to highlight so-called universality or in a way that does not confront or is unaware of the privileges that you have, is problematic. It further emphasizes the idea that the BIPOC body is extraordinary and whiteness is not relevant to the ideology of the work.

Partially responding to this article of Miguel Gutierrez is Juliana F. May, a white Jewish choreographer, in her conversation with Anh Vo entitled, “On Whiteness and Abstraction” featured in *Movement Research* in 2019. Right away, she problematizes the idea of the (white) neutral body, saying that it, “situates the work that comes out of that thinking as deeply

unconscious.” (Vo 2019) This statement reads as a significant criticism that also brings forth the idea Gutierrez touches on that white people are often so oblivious to the racialized environment that we live in. Particularly, because we exist in the art world whose community members pride themselves on their liberal beliefs and an openness that often transcends what is happening in the broader socio-political world. Connecting to Gottschild, she notes the prominence of improvisation in her Eurocentric, western, postmodern dance lineage. In these settings, when it comes to discussing positive and negative space, she notes it becomes clear that white people think of whiteness as negative space going further to state,

“I think white people operate inside this thing of: whiteness is negative space. As if you can’t see it. That we can take up space and that content is like identity. Content is identity is positive space. So, when we operate inside of those assumptions, we take up so much more space. We claim abstraction as our own identity. And so, that allows us to say that I can create work about nothing.” (Vo 2019)

Along those same lines, later in the discussion of the misinterpretation of her work, Anh Vo identifies that because abstraction is not concrete, people can kind of take it wherever they want. Their conversation continues as follows,

JM: So, people were exploiting the abstraction?

AV: Yeah, that’s why whiteness and abstraction go together because they both have this tendency toward the universal.

JM: Right.

AV: It’s so easy to universalize. To go beyond the particular and then drive it to anywhere you want.

JM: I’m thinking about things people use to write in grant applications about the universal human experience and how you don’t say that anymore. It was at some point in time, in the 90s maybe. But the universal experience is not relevant anymore.” (Vo 2019)

From the conversations I have been in and the work I have seen, I would agree that folks are moving away from work that is universal, especially younger makers, as we are more attuned to

the radical shifts happening in the dance world and the idea that everyone's experience is influenced by their intersectional oppressions and privileges. That is not to say that felt experiences cannot be shared among all people and that cannot be interpreted through art, but one has to recognize that the way universality is demonstrated can be influenced by your race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, etc.

Thinking about abstraction as a compositional tool rather than a way to make blanket statements, May uses abstraction as a method of entry into work that deals with trauma. Since abstraction does not follow narrative tropes or organization, May notes that abstraction enables the trauma to define itself through the work, "Trauma exists in terms of memory out of sequence. And it's an embodied experience most of the time, it doesn't have to be retold." (Vo 2019) As someone who is also a white, woman maker, I found this explanation to be helpful because it demonstrated a way to use abstraction as a compositional tool as a white person, without centering the white body as neutral or making universal statements, rather drawing the audience in through nonlinear imagery connecting to personal experience.

Pushing against the narrow understandings of Blackness and the pigeon holing of Black creatives is Tommy F. Defrantz in his dialogic-manifesto-lecture-performance, "I AM BLACK (*you have to be willing to not know*)." Presented at American Realness in 2016, Defrantz identifies how, "discourse of race in contemporary performance falls apart when whites try to understand Black performance," and how despite the depth and intersectionality of the work presented by artists of color, they, "are inevitably compelled to reduce their work and experience to the unknowable, shameful category of "race."" (Defrantz 9) In response to these circumstances, Defrantz puts forth 10 frank points and the first four speak directly to this issue. They are,

"Stop using black dances as empty referents"

“Stop trying to understand my blackness”

“Dance is not representation; it is action.”

“Black referents are exceedingly complex.”

(Defrantz 2019)

In these first items of this manifesto, Defrantz is essentially saying that Blackness is so much more complex than you [if you are a non-Black viewer] could understand and is more complex than race, saying, “race is not blackness.” Furthermore, Blackness and Black artistic production is exceeding in a way entirely separate from whiteness as it embraces the contradictory mode of reality, calls attention to the present moment, gestures beyond itself, and concentrates on dancing as life. While these points explicitly connect to the three previously mentioned texts, Defrantz’s work is also relevant to this project because it speaks directly to me as a white maker. Later in the article, he goes on to offer the points, “Of course this is personal, and no, it isn’t about you,” and, “You really don’t get it, and it’s not yours to have.” These phrases are highly important for me to keep in mind and reflect on throughout my process because there were moments where I did not understand or grasp on a certain level, what my BIPOC collaborators were putting forth, simply because I am not Black and because I have not lived the experience of a Black person or the history of Blackness, I will never understand. I just have to accept this fact and not claim ownership or knowledge over something that isn’t mine and that I cannot have.

Appropriation

While recently touched on, one of the concepts that is very important to this project is that of appropriation which is the act of taking something for one’s own use or gain, without the permission of the owner or creator. This phenomenon is colloquially understood in the context of

cultural appropriation in which, for example styles of dress, hair, music, and ways of speaking are taken by a dominant culture from a subjugated one, for the gain of the dominant culture. Despite the obviously problematic nature of these actions, some folks contest appropriation with the claim that cultural exchange is bound to happen and is a natural social process. In Brenda Dixon Gottschild's work, *The Black Dancing Body* (2003), she offers a way of conceptualizing the path of appropriation and responding to comments about cultural exchange, saying, "APPROPRIATION leads to APPROXIMATION leads to ASSIMILATION." (Gottschild 21) Firstly, she describes that it is a question of who has the power, whether that be the power of wealth, proximity to whiteness, or societal persuasion. If the ground is uneven, the playing field of cultural and artistic exchange is not open and accessible for all. Regarding the path of appropriation, she writes that in order to be accepted by the dominant culture, i.e. white culture, the cultural borrowing/stealing must be modified and warped to an aesthetic or feel that will meet the aesthetic approval of the dominant culture. Once it does, it is then fully incorporated into the white cultural arena. This analysis by Gottschild is relevant to this work because exchange within the dance/performance community is highly fluid and while that is often an admirable characteristic, it is important for white artists (myself included) to remember the imbalance of power that exists based on race and not steal from BIPOC artists instead of being attached to the idea you can find inspiration from anywhere.

Embodied Trauma

When discussing race and anti-Blackness in the context of embodied modalities, like dance, it is important to have some understanding of embodied trauma. One of the key supporting theories around embodied trauma research is that of polyvagal theory. Developed by

Dr. Stephen Porges, Polyvagal Theory, “focuses on what is happening in the body and the nervous system, and explains how our sense of safety, or danger or threat, can impact our behavior.” (Integrated Learning Solutions 3) The theory centers around the vagus nerve, the longest nerve in our body and which connects our mind to our bodies. The vagus nerve helps to regulate a number of physiological functions including heart rate, blood pressure, sweating, and digestion and determines our reactions to cues from the world around us, especially those related to survival and protection. In polyvagal theory, there are three states: sympathetic state which is our fight or flight response, the dorsal vagal state which is our freeze response where we become immobilized by an immediate threat, and the parasympathetic/ventral vagal state in which our nervous system is centered and at rest. When put into practice in a therapeutic setting, polyvagal theory seeks to settle our trauma responses by stimulating the vagus nerve. (Integrated Learning Solutions)

In the field of social work and trauma research, Resmaa Menakem, author, healer, licensed clinical social worker, and trauma specialist, connects research on the vagus nerve to the history of anti-blackness in the United States in his work, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (2017). Menakem explains that when trauma responses are triggered over and over, they often become unmetabolized in the body and can be passed on from person to person and generation to generation. Trauma damages the very cells of our bodies and the expression of our DNA. It is damage that can be passed on from mother to child especially if the mother is experiencing a traumatic environment while pregnant. From an environmental standpoint, children are very susceptible to trauma responses in the adults around them because their younger nervous systems are less likely to be able to override certain events. As trauma continues from generation to generation, it becomes what is

known as historical trauma and becomes part of the culture, described by Menakem as, a bomb going off, “over and over again.” (Menakem 39) For Black folks, these trauma responses were triggered through a history of violence, enslavement, subjugation, racial profiling, discrimination, microaggressions, policing, hypersexualization, and disrespect by white folks. Menakem traces the history of trauma back even further to white folks in medieval Europe and an environment where human beings tortured, oppressed, abused, enslaved, conquered and colonized one another. He cites this history not to discount the power of white (body) supremacy or let white people off the hook but instead to illustrate how this history of brutalization ended up in white bodies as compounded trauma and was taken out on and transmitted to Black and Native bodies through colonization, brutalization, oppression, and murder.

Understanding historical and embodied trauma is relevant and important to this work because our community is a multi-racial one that consists of both Black and white bodies. In preparing the work and the space, as a facilitator I need to be aware that people are living with trauma responses in their bodies each and every day and that it is going to impact how they enter, live in, and exit the space. With this in mind, incorporating the tuning of the vagus nerve and connecting the bodies in the space is highly encouraged to give people an opportunity of exiting their fight, flight, or freeze responses.

Disability Justice

The disability justice movement (DJ) began around 2005 in conversations between Mia Mingus and Patty Birne, two queer disabled women of color around the issue of ableism within the radical and progressive movements in which they were involved. These conversations eventually expanded to include other friends and activists Leroy Moore, Stacey Milbern, Eli

Clare and Sebastian Margaret. It is from these conversations, phone calls, video chats, formal meetings, informal meetings, and one-on-one chats that the disability justice movement was birthed and conceptualized. According to *Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is Our People* (2019), the disability justice primer and essential book published by Sins Invalid, the disability justice performance project that centers the stories of disabled BIPOC and LGBTQ / gender-variant artists, the disability justice movement is built around a framework that asserts that,

All bodies are unique and essential

All bodies have strengths and needs that must be met

We are powerful, not despite the complexities of our bodies, but because of them

All bodies are confined by ability, race, gender, sexuality, class, nation state, religion, and more and we cannot separate them.

(Sins Invalid 19)

It is important to understand that the disability justice movement is distinctly separate from the disability rights movement. While the U.S. disability rights movement did a lot of great work on the legal front for disabled people and helped to establish civil rights for people with disabilities, the movement has a number of issues stemming primarily from its lack of intersectionality. It has been criticized for being too single-issue, focuses solely on white disabled experiences, centering only around mobility impairments, and its concentration on the symptoms of ableism but not the roots. (Sins Invalid 13) With all the work they did, the disability rights movement also, “invisibilized the lives of disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, disabled people who practice marginalized religions (in particular those experiencing the violence of anti-Islamic beliefs and actions), queers with disabilities, trans and

gender non-conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others.” (Sins Invalid 15) Conversely, the disability justice movement takes a distinctly different, more intersectional approach that recognizes that each person’s relationship to ableism is impacted by other systems of domination and oppression. It understands that ableism, particularly in the United States has always been interwoven with the history of white supremacy and colonialism. As a young movement fighting the isolationism brought on by capitalism and ableism, much of disability justice work is done by individuals working within their own communities and their own settings yet even this separation, the movement building initiated by disability justice is brought together around 10 principles:

1. Intersectionality
2. Leadership by those most impacted → queer disabled BIPOC
3. Anti-capitalist politic
4. Commitment to cross-movement organizing
5. Recognizing wholeness → disabled bodies are not broken and do not need cure
6. Sustainability
7. Commitment to cross-disability solidarity
8. Interdependence
9. Collective access
10. Collective liberation.

(Sins Invalid 2015)

Since its inception, white supremacy and colonialism have used ableism as a tool of oppression in labeling non-white bodies and minds as disposable, invalid, defective,

unproductive, worthless, dirty, and unintelligent. In labeling a person in this way, they could be marked for domination by the white, colonial power and targeted for eradication, imprisonment, and institutionalization. To illustrate this phenomenon in the context of the United States, in 1851, Dr. Samuel Cartwright wrote in the *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*: “It is this defective hematosiis, or atmospherization of the blood, conjoined with a deficiency of cerebral matter in the cranium . . . which has rendered the people of Africa unable to take care of themselves.” (Cartwright in Clare 23-24) Within the same article, he also created numerous “diseases of the mind” such as drapetomania, which he claimed led enslaved African Americans to run away, and “dysaesthesia aethiopica,” which led them to be lazy. (Clare 24) This example demonstrates how “science” and ableist language of defectiveness was used to mark Black people for oppression while also painting white domination as a good thing for Black people and the natural order of things. While this was written 170 years ago, this kind of language and mindset exists today for example, in the ways that schools treat Black children, particularly Black girls. According to a study conducted by the Center for Poverty and Inequality at Georgetown University, it was found that people see Black girls to need less nurturing, need less protection, need to be supported less, comforted less, are more independent, know more/have more experience in adult issues, and know more about sex. Due to this specific age compression that begins as young as kindergarten, Black girls are not given the privilege and opportunity to be children and are held to racialized and absurdly high standards of behavior that result in extremely punitive responses to their actions. (Epstein et. al) While it is perhaps less apparent, this example illustrates ableism as a tool of white supremacy because Black girls are being labeled as “abnormal” and “disruptive” and therefore it is deemed acceptable for them to be brutalized under systems of white supremacy.

The disability justice movement and the history of white supremacy and ableism is relevant to the work of this project for the simple reason that one cannot claim to be anti-racist or create spaces that are anti-racist without also being in support of the disability justice movement. Furthermore, in continuing to support ableist language or actions, not meeting the access needs of your community members, and/or by refusing to recognize intersectional oppressions and privileges, you are blatantly supporting white supremacy and creating spaces that have the potential for harm.

Racial Capitalism//Anti-capitalism

The world's dominant economic system, capitalism, in its most basic definition, is a structure most means of production are privately controlled, and production and income distribution is guided by the invisible hand of the market. (Britannica) Discussions of capitalism are often conducted in tandem with its most popular critics, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. They see capitalism as a system of continuous exploitation and advocate for its destruction and the overthrow of the bourgeoisie by a unified proletariat revolution. They are not wrong that capitalism is exploitative yet their methodology and historicization of capitalism is flawed. In his seminal and underappreciated work, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983), Cedric Robinson argues that Marxism is inherently problematic as a, “conceptualization of human affairs and historical development that is emergent from the historical experiences of European peoples mediated, in turn, through their civilization, their social orders, and their cultures.” (Robinson 6) Along those same Eurocentric lines, their (Marx and Engels’) analysis of working-class movements is based upon those of Europe and completely ignores proletariat activism of people of color in other regions that occurred far earlier. An additional problem with

Marxism is that it follows the common narrative of economic development with slavery is being seen solely as a feature of feudalism in which wealth accumulation occurs through primitive, violent means. While he occasionally references slavery in his work, Marx, in his assertion that capitalism is a negation of feudalism and a necessary step towards communism, completely ignores the fact the capitalism is actually quite violent and depends on enslavement, most often of Black and brown bodies.

With the common pitfalls of Marxism established, we can turn to the theory of racial capitalism, which is essentially all capitalism. According to Robinson, the development of capitalism is intrinsically tied to racism in its essence as it emerged from the already racialized environment of Europe during the feudal era. This racialism that existed in early Europe did not define the relationships Europeans had with communities outside of their sphere, but rather involved a categorization, colonization, and subjugation of peoples internal to Christendom.

(Kelley) This racialism that existed in early Europe did not define the relationships Europeans had with communities outside of their sphere, but rather involved a categorization, colonization, and subjugation of peoples internal to Christendom. Therefore, says Robinson, the “development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions.” (Robison 2) Considering this history, all capitalism is therefore racial capitalism.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, a contemporary abolitionist scholar and activist, defines this relationship between capitalism and racism quite succinctly saying, “Capitalism requires inequality, and racism enshrines it.” (Gilmore at Lannan) The now globalized capitalist system depends upon the exploitation and enslavement of others. It is not a magical free-market world where people have equal choice and opportunity as its supporters believe, but rather it creates and feeds off of systems of inequity to deprive those racialized ‘others’ at the bottom of sustainable livelihoods,

of possible futures, and of agency. Today, the project of race and subsequently racism, helps to bolster and protect this natural quality of capitalism because it drives wedges between groups and develops hierarchies based upon presumed differences and superiority.

In addition to being racist, capitalism has also broken the human psyche down with its obsession with productivity. An essential part of the capitalist system, productivity or efficiency, is simply the ratio between output versus input in an economic system and is seen as, “principal driving force for positive economic growth (and attendant tax revenue) and an improving standard of living.” (Young) However, as society has increased its concentration on productivity and people are working longer hours and continuing to push themselves, wages have not risen to meet this increase in working hours. This situation is what Marxists would call an increase in exploitation. It also increases competition within the workforce because employers are looking to achieve the highest output for the lowest cost, therefore asking people to do more, to be more, to be faster, to be better, or to be stronger than their peers, and for less and less compensation. (Illing) This demand for productivity has not only negatively affected physical minds and bodies but it has also infiltrated the way we see ourselves in the world. It reduces people down to tools of a system and equates worth with how much you are able to produce to continue to feed the capitalist system. Furthermore, those who do not contribute to these “normative” levels of production are subsequently seen as less than. It is worth noting that “normative” levels of production are inherently ableist, white supremacist, and gendered because it is women of color who perform some of the most uncounted, undervalued, and underpaid labor in the world. (Sins Invalid 12)

While it may seem far fetched, an anti-capitalist sentiment is essential to this project. As with disability justice, one cannot call themselves an anti-racist and advocate for Black liberation

without also being anti-capitalist. Furthermore, this work seeks to fight the narrative that capitalism has ingrained in us since birth that we are not valuable unless we are continuously producing and achieving. As expanded upon in the methodology, this process moves as slow as is necessary for the community and does not try to achieve more for the sake of having more.

White Supremacy Culture

One of the most widely cited pieces of scholarship on the practices and tendencies of American culture that exemplify a white supremacist and colonial mindset, is the essay, “Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture” (originally published 2001, updated 2021) by and Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun (most recent versions credit only Okun. In spring 2021, Okun updated the text and included a forward following Kenneth Jones’ passing) . Written in an approachable format that moves characteristic-by-characteristic, the authors breakdown qualities of white supremacy that live in our approaches to the world that perhaps we may not typically associate with white supremacy or even notice. In addition to identifying the attributes, Jones and Okun offer a number of possible solutions under each section for organizers. To avoid simply copying and pasting the entire essay, I have condensed and paraphrased the features into a list below:

perfectionism^{*3} -propensity towards concentrating on inadequacies or what is wrong vs. what is right, mistakes are personalized, making a mistake becomes being a mistake, less time for reflection

sense of urgency -discourages thoughtful or democratic thinking//collaboration, sacrificing relationships and safety of BIPOC for quick results

³ Asterix were added to the original essay by Okun to denote the work of Daniel Buford, “ * These sections are based on the work of Daniel Buford, a lead trainer with the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond who has done extensive research on white supremacy culture.” (Okun 2021)

defensiveness -criticism of those with power as seen as rude or inappropriate, unwilling to hear or consider new or challenging ideas, white people spend energy defending themselves against accusations of racism

quantity over quality* -little to no value of process, discomfort with emotions or feelings, prioritizing decisions made over hearing everyone's voice, all resources directed to producing measurable outcomes

worship of the written word -those with writing skills are more highly valued, does not honor a multiplicity of communication modes

only one right way -only one way to go about something or move towards a goal, those who differ in their ways or cannot adapt are less valued

paternalism -those with power think they are more capable at decision making, those without power are uninformed as to why decisions are made but understand its impacts, those with power do not feel they need to understand the perspectives of those they are making decisions for

either/or thinking* -things are good//bad, with us//against us, tries to simplify complexities, does not understand both//and, pushes those who are still processing

power hoarding -little to no shared leadership, power seen as a limited commodity, resistance to change organization, those with power believe they have best interests at heart

fear of open conflict -emphasis on politeness, those who bring up uncomfortable issues are blamed, those in power are afraid of expressed conflict

individualism* -discomfort with working as a team, belief that you must work alone, desire for personal recognition, isolationism, valuing competition

i'm the only one -resistance to delegating tasks, believing you are the only one who can get something done

progress is bigger, more* -success as being something big, progress is associated with expansion, focus on achievements in the now rather than sustainability

objectivity* -believes in neutrality, believes emotions are destructive, requiring people to think in a linear way

right to comfort -belief that those in power deserve to be comfortable, equating individual acts of unfairness against white people with systemic racism which daily targets people of color, does not understand discomfort can be a place of growth and learning

(Okun and Jones, 2001, updated Okun 2021)

The work of identifying and dismantling white supremacy culture is relevant to this work because the features outlined in the essay explained above are quite visible in the dance community. For example, ballet has a strong emphasis on perfectionism and having a “perfect” body for the technique, postmodern dance has an affection for body neutrality and universalism, choreographers//producers//directors frequently conserve their own power, are seen as the supreme authority, and are often resistant to criticism, and artists are pushed to continuously produce work (more = progress). In the rehearsal process, these features of white supremacy culture were not necessarily confronted outright but in looking back at the process, we were actively trying to counter these qualities whether we were consciously aware of it or not.

A Conclusion

In jumping from history to analysis to theory to concept to system to theory again, the design of the literature review was to cultivate a web of intersecting ideas. While not exhaustive, it is my hope that it began to illustrate the depth of white supremacy in our culture, our ways of being, and how we relate to one another.

Methodology

This work begins first and foremost with the community values and intentions. They shape how we treat one another in the space, how we go about our work, and how we see one another, they are therefore the beginning step of this project's methodology. You will note that they are being repeated for a second time in this thesis. This action is to emphasize their importance to both the written and practice based material and as a foundational document, was and continues to be something we come back to as a working community.

Community Values and Intentions

This rehearsal space/work (is).....

a group that operates on collective decision-making

a place where everyone is free to express themselves in any type of way

will work to be an anti racist process

invested in improvisation

a place folks can take a break from if they need

process oriented

leans aesthetically toward modern and contemporary but recognizes and uplifts the

ancestry and lineage of these forms

is accessible...i.e. does not cost anything to attend, will be in a wheelchair accessible

area, will work to meet the access needs of all attendees

will be adaptable to all learning styles and learning differences

intersectional

will not be performed in a proscenium space

womanist (feminism is a contested term that is dominated by whiteness as white

women stole from a lot of Black and indigenous ideas)

rejects capitalist ideas of productivity

subject to change

a place that holds vulnerability

~~will not take place on the connecticut college campus, a privileged and predominantly~~

~~white space, and instead will take place in new london~~

investigate embodied lineage

a space to pause

a space to listen to one another and to talk (about anything)

will have open, continuous communication

will check in at the beginning, middle, and end of rehearsal

will do the utmost to meet all the access needs of every group member

a safe space to cry

where feedback is encouraged

a safe space for queer and trans folks

a place where rehearsals or performances will not conflict with religious obligations or

practices

knows we are 6 people, in this studio, on this campus, in New London, in Connecticut, in the U.S., in North America, on this planet, in this solar system, in this galaxy that is just one in a bunch of other galaxies.

Conceptualizing the ‘How’

As previously stated and can be inferred at this point, the approach to this work was multifold and consists of written scholarship and practice based work that included conversations, embodied explorations, reflection, and visual art practices. In approaching the written scholarship explored in the literature review above, I chose to concentrate on authors whose work was from an Africanist perspective, a critical race theory perspective, and/or who were BIPOC scholars themselves. Instead of the typical concentration on white artists and white artistic production, I specifically chose scholars with these viewpoints because I believe they offer deeper insight into the impacts of race, gender, and class on the development of identity of postmodern dance. Furthermore, in desiring to create an actively anti-racist rehearsal process, I drew upon anti-capitalist sentiments against the exploitation of marginalized BIPOC communities as well as the work of disability justice scholars fighting the web of harm created by ableism bolstered by colonialism, white supremacy, and the heteropatriarchy. Overall, the intent of the literature review was to illustrate the intersectionality of this work and to offer a snapshot of the literature informing the project.

Moving forward to the living, experiential practice of this body of work, it began with a multi-racial cast of five artists and myself. In inviting folks to join me in this work, I felt it was important to create a group that was majority BIPOC for the obvious reason that this work is

about Blackness but to also include to other white artists given the importance of white folks doing anti-racist work. I also chose not to have an all BIPOC cast because as a white choreographer, I did not want to appear as though the project would fetishize the Black dancing body and to avoid hierarchical implications. For reasons of departmental demographics, the cast is made up of women and nonbinary folks yet this make-up is inherently important to me. Beginning in the middle of September, myself and my collaborators met each week on Sundays to move with one another, share meals, stories, memories, and advice and most of all, support one another. Concretely, the intention of the practice based work was to explore what it meant to develop an anti-racist choreographic process built upon shared values and collective decision-making and to create rich choreographic work rooted in individual movement lineage, identity, and open communication. Yet, above all, the priority was to create a space where each person, in the full multiplicity of their intersecting identities, felt cared for.

The following sections will break down the rehearsal process by semester and will include details about the day to day as well as a reflection on each section of the working process. You may notice the tonal shift in the writing at the points of reflection. This choice was intentional to preserve the emotional quality of the reflection process and honor self-reflection as it was an instrumental feature of the working community. The original tenses of the entries will be maintained to illustrate the place from which I was writing and change over time. Finally, the methodology section will conclude with a layout of the performance design and structure of the performance day.

Collaborator Biographies

One of the essential elements of this work is its focus on community building and the community would be nothing without its members. As the work is centered around human needs, dialogue, collective decision making, and vulnerability, it is necessary to feature these biographies directly in the body of this written work rather than in the appendix. Each of these biographies were written by the collaborators themselves and allows them to define themselves and their intersecting identities in their own words. I have also included my own biography as well.

Journee Hardaway

Journee Hardaway is a current senior at Connecticut College, majoring in dance and sociology. She is a recent Pathway presenter, completing research regarding the body's position in circle dance formations through the Bodies/Embodiment Pathway. She has been trained in a variety of styles at a competitive studio in Rocky Hill, CT, not too far from her home in Newington, CT. In college, she has studied West African, Modern, Ballet, and Hip-Hop with amazing professors and guest artists, getting the opportunity to travel to Senegal and Trinidad and Tobago to learn from and work with Black dance companies and choreographers. She is a current intern with the post-modern dance company, David Dorfman Dance, and will be pursuing a path in arts administration upon graduation. Journee identifies as a mixed race Black dancer, daughter, sister, friend, student, and uses she/her pronouns.

Ayana Sequira

Ayana Sequira is a senior at Connecticut College, double majoring in dance and studio art. She was also a recent Pathway presenter in the Bodies/Embodiment Pathway in which the culminating project was a joint presentation with another member discussing the mind/body

connection through the lens of psychology and an interactive movement practice. She hopes to eventually enter the arts/creative therapy field because she is very passionate about helping others and being a mentor to younger generations. She was born and raised in Brooklyn, NYC and plans to return there after graduating college. Throughout her life, she has studied many dance styles including (but not limited to) Ballet, Modern, Post-Modern, Jazz, Tap, West African, Afro-Caribbean, and Hip-Hop at a variety of dance schools in the NYC area, most notably at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. She identifies as a queer mixed-race artist, pronouns being she/they, and considers a large part of her identity to be influenced by her height, as she stands proudly at 6', and her purple curly hair.

Alyssa Bodmer

Alyssa Bodmer is a sophomore at Connecticut College double majoring in dance and neuroscience. Since she is still early in her college career and only recently declared her majors, she is still quite unsure about what she wants to do post-graduation, but has a sneaking suspicion it may include attending graduate school as well as plenty of travelling. Alyssa grew up in Belmont, Massachusetts which is part of the greater Boston area. She attended dance schools in the neighboring towns of Watertown and Newton where she studied ballet, modern, contemporary, tap, and jazz. She also participated in her high school performing arts company where she practiced high intensity musical theater dance. Since coming to college, she has expanded her practice in modern, ballet, choreography, and improvisation. She also experienced a taste of Cunningham in her first year of college, where she realized that her love of dance involves high amounts of athleticism. She identifies as a white dancer and uses she/her pronouns.

Zion Martin-Hayes

Zion Martin-Hayes is a current sophomore at Connecticut College double majoring in English and Dance with a minor in French as a CISLA scholar. She will study abroad and connect her interests in linguistics and dance in an effort to explore how dance can transcend language barriers. Post graduation she hopes to join the Peace Corps or a similar organization to expand her world knowledge in both the dance and linguistic fields. Her interest in dance stems from her background in visual arts where she eventually realized dance was a way to physically embody her practice in drawing and painting. She is fascinated by the formation and socialization of languages because she loves the construction of poetry and conveying an artistic message. She grew up in Chicago, Illinois with a Montessori and Jesuit education, and now finds perfect harmony at a Liberal Arts college. At Connecticut College, she found freedom of expression in modern and postmodern movements, but her most notable class was in improvisation where she studied under Lisa Race. Zion identifies as a Jamaican Canadian African American dancer and uses she/her/hers pronouns.

Lindsey Perlman

Lindsey Perlman (she/her, he/him) is a dancer and choreographer from Miami, Florida pursuing a dual degree in Dance and Religious Studies at Connecticut College. As a senior at Conn College, Lindsey has had the great privilege of performing in faculty and guest works by Shani Collins, David Dorfman, Samantha Speis, Rachel Boggia, Lisa Race, and Ellie Goudie-Averill. She also studied abroad at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance through the DanceJerusalem program, where she studied the Gaga movement language and Batsheva Repertory. Lindsey recently completed her senior capstone in dance, a dance film exploring

physicality and embodiment in Jewish practice, identity, and community. Lindsey identifies as a white, queer Jewish artist and uses she/her and he/him pronouns.

Mara Senecal-Albrecht

Mara Senecal-Albrecht (she/her, they/them) is a senior Dance major and Africana Studies minor at Connecticut College. She identifies as a white, queer, cisgender, neurodivergent woman artist, using she/her and they/them pronouns. Raised in South Burlington, Vermont, she has spent the past 4 years studying with David Dorfman, Heidi Henderson, Lisa Race, Ellie Goudie-Averill, Shawn Hove, Shani Collins, and Rachel Boggia. In performance, she has had the privilege of performing guest artist works by Rashaun Mitchell + Silas Riener, Annie Rigney and Samantha Speis of Urban Bush Women as well as numerous faculty and student choreographed work. During the fall of her junior year she studied abroad at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance through the DanceJerusalem program, where she studied Gaga and Batsheva repertory, Vertigo Dance Company repertory, Cunningham Technique, contact improvisation, and more. Outside of dance, she has also spent some time as a tech theatre apprentice and loves to play with lighting design when she gets a chance. After graduation, she has no idea what she is doing but wants to be free from academic institutions for a good bit and work professionally as a dancer and choreographer.

Semester One: Building Community

General Outline:

As referenced in the methodology, the primary intention of the first semester was on cultivating community. We established community values and intentions, vocalized each of our needs, and checked in with each other as a part of the rehearsal process. In countering a sense of urgency and the need for bigger progress, both emblems of white supremacy culture, the process was slow. Initially, I had to fight my urge to do 100 things every rehearsal but eventually I learned that doing the one thing and having a deep conversation about it was enough. Expanding upon the activities outlined in the methodology section, the following paragraphs will elaborate on how we worked to build relationships with one another and our movement practices.

Building Relationships with One Another:

Within this rehearsal process there were of course the community values and intentions but our actions towards building relationships with one another went beyond that. After our check in, we moved through a physical warm up together the phrasing of which was developed by all of us and with each of us leading a designated section. If someone felt as though they could not lead their particular section that day because of injury or because they didn't feel up to it, we switched roles and figured out what was possible for that person that day. Along those same lines of showing up for one another, each time we did an improvisational score, we took time at the end to witness one another's movement. The practice of witnessing is fairly common in dance spaces and provides a way for collaborators to simply take in their co-collaborators movement without looking for something or with the intention of offering critique. Given how much knowledge lives in the body, the practice of witnessing someone move is a way of

nonverbally saying, “I see you.” In the interest of taking care of one another, folks did not have to be witnessed if they did not want to be. Exploring one’s own embodied experience can be an incredibly vulnerable practice and often having people’s eyes on you, even if they are with love and support can be too much. In addition to sharing movement, we also shared meals with one another. COVID-19 studio rules required us to air out the space for 30 minutes so we spent that half hour eating snacks and just talking about our lives. I think this time was incredibly helpful not only for all of us to get to know each other even better and talk about issues pertaining to the work or ones that were coming up in our lives, but I think it was also beneficial for the younger members of our group because they could seek advice from us older folks about navigating this academic institution. On paper, these little actions perhaps don’t seem like much but I believe that in the long run, spending all this time learning to see one another was actually incredibly beneficial to the functioning of our community and the choreographic work.

Movement Practices

Beginning around the second or third rehearsal, the first movement score we engaged with was an investigation of our own movement lineages. Now these lineages could not only pertain to the movement we had absorbed in a codified dance space but also in community spaces like our homes, our backyards, family celebrations, etc. It began with a journal exploration in which we mapped out either through words, illustrations, or doodles the histories of our moving bodies. We then all improvised together in the space dropping in and out to witness one another’s movement. We also took time during rehearsal to explain our illustrations or words to the community. As always, everyone had the option of being witnessed or not. For examples of the movement lineages, please see the supplementary materials folder.

Another movement exercise we did that overlapped with the intention of getting to know one another was a very simple movement-meditation practice I developed around the body as home and sourcing safe spaces, people, and sensations from our memories. Essentially, the score invites the participant to begin by picturing themselves in a space they feel safe, secure, and that feels like a home (it doesn't have to be someone's actual home acknowledging that home spaces are often rife with trauma). From there add the time of day, sense of smell, taste, touch (something you initiate), physical sensation (something you experience), and finally a person or people with whom you feel safe and secure. We took turns in groups of three witnessing each other's bodies investigating these realms, not to search for specific movement motifs but to simply to recognize how each of our bodies respond to memory and to feeling at ease.

One of the final improvisational scores was the Personal Pedestrianisms score which eventually became part of the final work. The Personal Pedestrianisms score was developed by myself reflecting on the work of Rebecca Chaleff in, "Activating Whiteness: Racializing the Ordinary in US American Postmodern Dance." (2018) . Pedestrian movement is a hallmark of the postmodern dance movement but given the demographics of its main practitioners, the pedestrianisms that came from the movement come from a very specific white, middle class lens. Furthermore, in articulating these quotidian movements, they put forth an idea of universalism that placed the white body and the white experience as neutral. With this dynamic in mind, I wanted to investigate the abstraction of pedestrian movement but from a place that embraces multiple perspectives and redefines normalcy. In this score, participants were invited to explore gestural, everyday movements that they had seen done by family members, friends, community members, ancestors, etc. They were asked to consider the questions of why they chose certain movements over others, where those movements come from, and how they reflect or how are

they influenced by society or culture around them. In witnessing one another, one of my collaborators, Zion Martin-Hayes described this practice as though she was, “watching everyone’s memories.” For me, this practice is so wonderfully tender and vulnerable and it was so exciting to hear and recognize the similarities and differences between one another’s personal pedestrianisms and just how deeply connected to emotion they are. One of my favorite moments came after the first time we did the score and we were sharing out and every single BIPOC member of our community had braiding as one of their personal pedestrianisms. Even though I am a white woman and have no personal connection to this experience, it was really heartwarming to see the simple joy of them sharing this moment with one another.

Reflection on first semester (written December 17th, 2020):

Over the course of this semester and the first half of this honors thesis, I felt I have really sunk into growing with this project. There are certainly moments where I worry that perhaps I could have done more research and reading over the summer and really honed my research questions, but I don’t think that would’ve gotten me to the place I am with this work having been working in the studio with my cast since September. Working to build that community has become much more important to me and has certainly shaped the trajectory of this thesis. Looking back on my questions from September, it is fairly easy to see that especially in the written research questions, I was trying to approach a number of areas but at a much more surface level. Comparing those questions to the version I crafted for November, I believe that they became much more specific to the group values and my own hopes for our artistic circle.

Regarding practice-based work, I think I have been able to come to more clarity on how I want to approach exploring this particular embodied research. In the beginning, I had this idea

that I would bring all these different scores by BIPOC artists into the space in non-appropriative ways and working with them would allow us to experience an improvisational education that wasn't soaked in whiteness. Yet, I realized that this task was a lot larger and more complicated than I had intended and that in the big picture of this project, it didn't really fit in. While it is a process that I still believe would be incredibly important and valuable, now just isn't the moment for it. Once I settled in that realization for myself, I felt a little lost about how to move forward. I was fully engrossed in the work I was doing in the studio and learning from my co-collaborators that I could not quite grasp how to experience the work I was learning in my body. Yet, I think it is leaning into the body and reading about the collective embodied experience that helped me to gain a bit more traction in how I want to approach embodied research.

Moving forward, my objectives for the coming months begin with falling into the embodied research and to resist getting caught up in not knowing how I should approach my knowledge from a choreographic standpoint. I want to build greater trust between myself and this project as a whole. Looking back on my intentions for lots to be going on and big political statements, I think I have grown away from them in some way or another. Believe me, I still want radical change, but I have decided to invest my time even more in my cast and following through as best I can in my own values on this small scale. I decided on this intention closer towards the end of October, but I want to hold onto it moving forward. In proceeding with my scholarly work, I plan to put more emphasis researching the elements that contribute to anti-Blackness in the dance world but not explicitly. I will work on expanding my knowledge of anti-capitalist art making//dance, anti-Blackness and disability, and dance pedagogy. These are all subjects I already have a knowledge base in, but I feel as though for this project, they are areas I need to expand upon more in my research.

Semester Two: Fleshing Out the Work

General Outline

Following a very long winter break, we returned to the process at the beginning of February. After being with one another for 3 months in the previous semester and talking, moving, eating, and moving together, the plan for the second semester was to develop a piece of set material and of improvisational scores that could be shown in the beginning of May. Transitioning to the spring, our rehearsals expanded to a total of 3 hours per week, with 2 hours of movement rehearsal time on Sunday evenings and 1 hour of dinner discussion time on Wednesday nights. The Wednesday nights could eventually be redesigned as movement rehearsals as needed but to preserve the conversations and openness for dialogue cultivated during the first semester, Wednesday was reserved for sharing a meal, thoughts about the work, or just about our lives. To better illustrate the flow of the rehearsal process, the following section breaks down the work on the basis of improvisational practice, the practice of set material, group discussions, and piecing together the work. For me as the choreographer and facilitator, it also makes a dense, ever-changing, and improvisational choreographic process easier to discuss.

Improvisational practice

Restarting the rehearsal process, we began with an improvisational score I developed investigating agency and ownership through the lens of gender. In December, when we were on Zoom following our return to our homes after the Thanksgiving break, we performed a similar embodied exploration around defining the physical self and how we saw ourselves versus how others saw us. However, we found that it had too many intersecting ideas to process at once and needed to be broken down further. It is for this reason that the first rendition of the Investigating Agency and Ownership score was done through the lens of gender because it provided greater

specificity. I acknowledged then and continue to acknowledge now that, of course, one's experience of gender and gender oppression is intersectional and impacted by race, class, ability, sexuality, and age but as a group of women and nonbinary people, the social construct of gender is something that is tactile for each of us. In a score of their own movement improvisations, I invited my collaborators to reflect upon their own embodied experience of sociocultural expectations, labels, commodification, etc. versus having expressive agency over one's own body, movement, voice, etc. through the lens of gender. Supporting the dichotomy of self versus the socio-cultural-political landscape, I supplied these additional words to reflect upon: voice, self-love, expectation, reality, choice, options, definition, narrow, open, culture, and society. Over the course of the month we did this score about 3 times in segments of 10-12 minutes of continuous movement. Each practice was followed by a 5 minute journal free write and a sharing out session. As always in this space, sharing out was never mandatory and was always an invitation. Below is a collection of words and phrases shared by my collaborators in our discussions of the practice that provide an example of what our conversations circled around:

radiate rippling from the pelvis rejection of gender roles hands on ankles
bent over how much do they know me? moving past symmetry
expectations of nonbinary expression in movement power in femininity as a nonbinary person
uncomfortable vs. powerful musculature (like my calves) intrusive thoughts
i'm better shoulders and fingers how much space am i taking up? lines

Moving from gender, my collaborators and I explored the same improvisational score through the lens of race. The prompt was constructed in similar fashion and invited the artists to investigate expressive agency over their own voice (artistic or otherwise), body, aesthetic, style,

attitude, etc. versus anti-blackness, appropriation, white body supremacy, commodification, violence, labels, suppression, and oppression. As with the investigation surrounding gender, we recognize that each of our experiences of race are impacted by our intersecting oppressions and privileges and that the focus on race as an embodied experience is merely for the sake of specificity. Given the subject matter of this improvisational score, as the facilitator, I went about guiding the group in a much more tender fashion and we often did not do a share out directly after the score or after the reflective free write. As a white choreographer and facilitator, I had no right to my BIPOC collaborators' trauma or experiences, they do not owe me anything, the institution anything, their fellow collaborators anything, or the audience anything. Even when we did share out after this score, no one was pressured to say literally anything at all. Below is a non-exhaustive collection of words and phrases that were offered during the share out of this score:

dancing polar opposites body-oriented, bone tracing slide elementary school pimp walk
hands in pockets hand rubbing unnatural shapes and positions tree to climb
getting stuck in patterns awareness to the point of self-consciousness my mom
long acrylic nails --not one of those girls black ink → into the universe, on a glass wall
chains --could you dance in them cutting string teasing my fro
seeing the space stretching and lengthening Black luxury, Black royalty

The Investigating Agency and Ownership score, whether practiced through the lens of gender or of race, was articulated in conversation with the literature explored in the Blackness and Abstraction of the literature review. As illustrated in those sources, the BIPOC experience and creative expression is so often defined and questioned by the dominant white lens. Furthermore, BIPOC creative output, when deemed valuable by the dominant white lens, is

stolen for the financial benefit of white creators. This score attempts to conceptualize an environment where the BIPOC collaborators of this community (and their white collaborators) can articulate their identities uninhibited and retain ownership of their own creative expression.

Engaging Set Material

At the beginning of March, I introduced set material to the choreographic process. Prior to learning any material, however, we went over the access needs of each member of the group when it came to learning new material. Access needs are, “those things that are needed in order for someone to fully participate in a space or activity.” (Sins Invalid 75) For example, I have ADHD so focusing on a task for a long period of time might be difficult or I may completely miss movements because my brain does not record them. Therefore, repetition is key. My collaborator, Lindsey Perlman, for example, has an auditory processing disorder so she really needs to be able to see the movement you are teaching because her brain takes more time to process auditory cues. Additionally, if we were explaining directions or other cues, we would need to lower or turn off the music and minimize extraneous noise to prevent sensory overwhelm. Generally, discussing access needs in a choreographic process is something I never experienced or ever seen done before but is absolutely necessary. Each of us have different ways of learning and it can be frustrating and invalidating when a choreographer or teacher sees only one right way of teaching material. Furthermore, in not meeting the access needs of artists, a choreographer is deepening the hierarchy between themselves and the dancers because they are not treating them like human beings with diverse experiences and ways of thinking. With this in mind, in teaching the set material for the piece, we went as slow as the whole group needed, changing directions, and shifting perspectives.

Another factor we considered in making the teaching of choreography more accessible and equitable was in adjusting it to fit the bodies moving in the space. For example, because my collaborator Ayana Sequira is a significantly taller person than I am (she is 6', I'm 5'3"), the movement pathways I create might not work the same way on her body as they do on my own body. With this circumstance at play, we worked together to adjust the movement ever so slightly to fit her body because all in all she is the one who will be living in the movement, not me. From my own experience in choreographic processes, changing the choreography to better fit someone's body isn't something that I have encountered and I have definitely danced material I did not feel comfortable doing for the sake of the work. When I say 'uncomfortable' I mean in a way that causes physical and/or emotional trauma. I am not saying I do not love performing material that is effortful and pushes my limits. Overall, in teaching the choreography to my collaborators, I was as open as possible to shifting or adjusting movement because I wanted my practice to be in alignment with the community values and intentions and I wanted my collaborators to feel as though they had a home in the movement material.

Finally, regarding the honing of the material, we also democratized the landscape by inviting collaborators to step in and out of the choreography to watch their fellow collaborators move. Through this practice, the dancers were able to shape the material as much as I did. As a choreographer, I found it incredibly helpful because they have a different and almost deeper understanding of the work than I do because they are living the physical experience of it. Their insight was fundamental to the way the work was presented and I am grateful for their active voices.

In developing the set choreography for this work, I began with the body like I always do. I am someone who struggles to approach my work from a place of meaning and for me the body

is an incredibly rich and deep vessel of knowledge and lived experience that it is often the only place I can directly source my movement. However, in order to create a bit of structure for myself, I developed the material around the skin, the pelvis, and the feet. Going piece by piece, I began with the skin as the largest organ in our bodies and as the most visceral site of racialization. Next, I oriented myself around the pelvis as a hypersexualized and stigmatized location and one that became so through anti-Blackness, colonization, and femmephobia. I also attribute my interest in the pelvis to my time spent learning from Samantha Speis who often speaks about letting go of the shame around our pelvis. In our own community, the pelvis also played a key role in defining movement during the Investigating Agency and Ownership through gender score. Similarly, I chose to focus on the feet because of their presence in our own scoring as a way to connect the set material and the improvisational scoring but also because the focus of having the so-called perfect, pointed feet comes directly from ballet, a distinctly white form. Yet, I wanted to subvert this white, perfectionist narrative of the ballet foot and have the feet flexed, loose, or Barbie-footed (a habit where dancers extend through the ankle but not the toes). The only time a foot was pointed was solely for function. In the interest of citing sources, the flexed foot is an unmistakably Africanist feature and is present in most African and Afro-diasporic dances. Additionally, in Brenda Dixon Gottschild's work The Black Dancing body, the feet have an entire chapter and its presence in my mind likely informed my choreographic attention to that particular body part.

Devising the piece:

The work in its current form (I never think of any piece of work I make as being done), consists of three sections; a section of the Personal Pedestrianisms score (see semester one

description), a section of improvised solos and duets built around the Investigating Agency and Ownership through Gender and/or Race score, and finally a section of high energy, unison set choreography. Pulling apart these sections, I chose the Personal Pedestrianisms score to be the opening of the work because I feel it is very tender and simple. As each individual collaborator is sourcing gestural material from friends, family members, community members, and ancestors, they provide an open portal through which the audience can enter the work and connect to a sense of familiarity. The second part of the work consisted of two duets and two solos under the backdrop of a set phrase I had developed to continuously repeat as each performer when in and out of their respective solo//duet. The performers had the option of exploring the Investigating Agency and Ownership either through the lens of gender or the lens of race which they could choose depending on the day and how they were feeling going into the performance. There was never an obligation to choose one or the other and when it came down to it, any of them at all, because I wanted them to feel safe to be vulnerable in themselves and their movement and if that wasn't the energy they were experiencing in the space at that time, they did not have to put themselves through something that could be potentially traumatic. Finally, the third section of the piece was made up of two big, high energy phrases that I developed while wearing bright green pants and listening to a lot of techno (while this note may seem trivial I think it had a significant impact on my mindset while working). The first of the phrases was repeated three times for the purpose of building intensity and exploring embodiment and the second was designed to be a unison, circular moment for my collaborators to join together before closing the piece. Overall, I wanted this ending section to be big and in your face and intense and physical to reflect the ownership the dancers had over the space and their general badassery as artists and people. The

space we created held a lot of tenderness and vulnerability but I also wanted the viewers to understand the power of the community as well.

Regarding sound, it actually took me a very long time to learn what I actually wanted and did not come together until a couple weeks before the show. When I create material, I do not use music and when we were working together in the rehearsal space, either on the improvisational scores or the choreography, my collaborators and I would just have on ambient soundtracks to fill and carry the space. The songs were different every time and I had a hard time deciding what would be best for the work. I love the dance works that are performed in complete silence but the random sound scores we had been playing in the background seemed to really cultivate an atmosphere and support the dancers in their work, especially during the improvisational sections. Then, about 10 days from the show, one of us had the idea to invite one of the student musicians from the dance department to play for us and I reached out to Kevin Hyland (he/him) and he was totally on board. Although his positionality as a white masculine presenting person immediately brings in complex issues of hierarchy and domination, Kevin is someone whom myself and all of my collaborators trusted and felt comfortable bringing into the space. After I sent him the community guidelines and chatted with him about access needs, he came into a few rehearsals to get a feel for the piece, try out some stuff, and worked with myself and my collaborators to cultivate the right sound for the work. While I had originally only intended for him to play for the Personal Pedestrianisms score, his sound ended up working so well and helped the performers a lot so he ended up playing for the first and second sections. In conversing with him about sound, I was clear that just as these two sections are incredibly improvisational for these movement artists in the space, but that he was also absolutely welcome to improvise and jam out and communicate with the dancers in the space.

While it may seem like a more trivial aspect of devising a choreographic work, costumes were actually an important factor for us to consider when developing a community and choreographic process centered around treating dancers like human beings and not just tools for your art making. There have been countless times that myself and my collaborators have been made to wear costumes that were uncomfortable, that we felt were unflattering, that we couldn't dance in, or simply didn't even fit correctly. In developing the costumes for this work, my collaborators were invited to choose a dress or jumpsuit from their own closet based on the following prompts:

- 1) That you feel comfortable dancing in. You feel like you can move your legs and like it won't inhibit you from showing off your moves.
- 2) That shows your body in a way you like. I want each of you to feel confident and comfortable in what you are wearing but because physicality and embodiment are really important parts of the process, I would love for viewers to be able to read a lot of information visibly in your body.

- (After this one, I invite you to be inspired by one or more of these prompts) -

- 3) A dress that makes you feel comfortable in who you are as a person
- 4) A dress that makes you feel gorgeous and sexy and expansive
- 5) A dress that references your lineage or past or those who came before

Above coordination or matching, I wanted my collaborators to feel comfortable and beautiful in what they were wearing so they did not have to think about it while they were moving.

Finally, given our time constraints, developing a title had to be short and sweet. Initially we tried to develop an acronym that was all our names but it ended up being kind of goofy so we

let it go. As so much of the understanding of this work comes from living in the process of it and being in the community, I came up with the phrase, “you kinda had to be there.” I did feel it was a little exclusive though so I brought it to the group to mull over. Some did not mind the exclusionary aspect because that was the reality but to lighten it up a bit, Ayana Sequira suggested we add the phrase, “After many talks,” because that is what we did; we talked a lot. With that, the title of the work became, “After many talks (you kinda had to be there).”

Group Discussion

While conversation wasn't as large a part of the rehearsal process as it was during the first semester, it was still something for which we continued to take time. Given that our longer rehearsals were reserved for movement practices, we frequently used our Wednesday night dinners to share with one another our reflections from the improvisational scores we had done or talked about ways transitions in the piece could be initiated. For example, the “What If?” question that was the impetus for the line shift during the first section of the piece first came up during a dinner conversation. I also occasionally brought questions or prompts to them based on the scholarship that I had been reading and was interested in hearing my collaborators thoughts on. For example, during one of our discussions we had a conversation inspired by the interviews in Brenda Dixon Gottschild's *The Black Dancing Body* (2003) on what defines Black dance versus white dance and what defines the Black dancing body versus the white dancing body. We did a simple free association journal reflection for about 7 minutes per question and then shared out. Funny enough but oddly expected, all of us had more negative connotations and judgements of white dance than of Black dance. I believe this congruency of thought occurred because all of

us have a more in-depth knowledge of dance history and the ways in which white dance and its culture have appropriated and exploited Black aesthetics, values and bodies for its own benefit.

Below is a sample of different ideas that came up:

Black body/Black dance:

muscles on Black skin, watching them move

Ralph Lemon

all rhythms

Liberation

joy

club styles

public

circle

opposing vibrations

family reunion

white body/white dance:

everywhere

standard

ballet

stiff, restrictive

regal

skinny and tall

barren

lines

uniform

expensive

From the beginning of the semester our conversations were often geared towards logical questions around performance and location. I will not go into the back and forth details about location and viewership of the work because they are not as relevant but I believe reflecting on the fact that these conversations happened and were continuous, is a marker of collective decision making with this choreographic process. Rather than myself, as the choreographer and facilitator of the space, making each choice about location or audience or costumes or footwear, these kinds of decisions about the way this work would be presented were always made with the input of the whole group.

Reflecting on the process in the second semester

To be candid, the second semester of this project was incredibly difficult, both I think for me as a choreographer and facilitator and for my collaborators as well. The second semester is always very busy in the dance department but this year with the stress of COVID-19 and not having a spring break, each of us burned out really quickly. We contended with a few injuries, one of our collaborators supposedly getting COVID-19 (we still believe she didn't really have it), and the entire month of April being swept up by senior capstone projects. I never wanted this project to be burdensome for people so each rehearsal I came in with two different versions of a plan and let the group choose what they wanted to do based upon what felt possible for the day. To many choreographers, I think our process would seem slow and frustrating which I'll admit sometimes it felt as though I was pulling teeth in conversations or teaching movement because I was stressed about time and our upcoming shows and wanted to move faster. Looking back, I do think that one of our biggest struggles was with time. For a few weeks in April, I was pretty unclear about the exact time our rehearsals would end, how we would be using our time, and planning our rehearsals around senior dance capstones (we kept having to move dates around). In response to this problem, my collaborators came to me and were like, "Hey, I really love this process but I feel as though with the way we have been working lately that my time hasn't been respected or valued." In the interest of being honest, I noticed that my immediate response in my body was to become defensive because I felt I was doing the best I can, but I took a step back and I was like, "No, you are completely right, I have been super vague about time and that is disrespectful and as an artist I know exactly how that feels and it is pretty fucking annoying." So at the beginning of rehearsal after that issue was raised, we sat down and had a conversation and I just listened to my collaborators about how things could work in a way that made them feel as

though their time was valued. Different strategies that were brought up were to announce the end of rehearsal so that folks who had to leave felt that they could leave and have an agenda laid out at the beginning of rehearsal. The latter suggestion was something that was incredibly flexible because a sense of urgency is something we were trying to actively work against.

All in all, the way we worked together was what needed to happen in this moment. This process was one that recognized that we cannot separate who we are and our lives and experiences from our art making. In articulating our day to day practice we acknowledged that some days are not going to be great days say, for example, learning a bunch of material because you're so stressed about finishing your dance film capstone that your brain simply cannot absorb new information. As the semester progressed, the space became one in which we continued to lean on one another more and more for support with check-ins at the beginning of rehearsal that went on for about 20 minutes. I felt as though we were all just in need of a place where we could just talk about things and know that the community was going to hold space for you. And perhaps that isn't what most people see dance rehearsals as being about but honestly I don't care because we did what was needed for the community and I think it made all the difference.

Performance Design

Location

Referencing the community values and intentions, the original design of this project was meant to be done outdoors and off the Connecticut College campus. The desire to do the project outside of the confines and jurisdiction of the college began early on in this project's conception. It was developed as a way to disconnect from privilege and white supremacy as the college is a predominantly white institution (PWI) that continues to prioritize white comfort over the

physical, emotional, and psychological safety of Black bodies and minds.⁴ Furthermore, as the work deepened and our community became closer, it became clear that the anti-Black behaviors and actions of the college administration and students had actively harmed members of our own community. Therefore performing off campus seemed like the best options for keeping the BIPOC members of our community safe while at the same time acknowledging the wrongdoings of the college. In these outdoor locations, we would perform what are known in the performing arts community as “pop-ups” in which we would periodically perform the work in a specific location in the presence of whomever happened to be walking through the area at that time or to whichever friends or colleagues we had informed about the piece.

However, with the persistence of COVID-19, things became much more complicated and difficult to plan ahead. For example, in scouting locations, there had to be enough room for social distancing and we had to be constantly following the updates from the governor when it came to the size of possible gatherings. These restrictions narrowed down our options to a couple of state parks and the New London piers. Upon reaching out to the state parks department, they informed me that I would need to apply for a special permit at least 60 days in advance and given that I reached out to them in early April in anticipation of performing the first weekend of May, our performance would not be able to happen in the state parks. Next, I attempted to reach out to the New London waterfront as well and while they were open during our desired weekend, I would have needed to apply for insurance, receive a noise permit, and acquire an additional permit for \$100.00 from the mayor’s office. With all things considered, given the complications of local and state bureaucracy and a limited budget, we had to let our original intention of

⁴ If you are interested in learning more about incidents of racism and anti-blackness on this campus as well as the lackluster response from the college administration, I encourage you to look at the Instagram pages, @blackvoicesconncoll and @blackvoicesconncoll2 (back up account). The accounts are cited as resources in the appendix. I have also included an article from The College Voice that describes an incident in which a BIPOC student was specifically targeted by the school administration for their abolitionist hangings in their windows.

performing off campus go. Upon hearing we would not be able to perform off campus, a number of folks asked me why my collaborators and I had not simply arrived somewhere and decided to perform there. While spontaneous art making is of course the dream, my biggest concern with taking that route was the potential of police or other “law enforcement” bodies becoming involved. As an avid supporter of the defunding police and abolitionism as a whole, a police presence was the very last thing I wanted for this performance and I did not want to put my BIPOC collaborators or potential attendees at risk.

When the off campus performance intention was no longer viable, my collaborators and I explored the idea of on campus performance options that would be in both the studio and outdoors. An in-studio showing was something we had floated in late February during one of our dinner discussions and was conceived as a way to invite friends and other supportive individuals into the intimate, tender space we had created without distractions and potential disruptions from the outside world. While we did explore different spaces around campus and in the arboretum, it became clear that at this time in the semester and with each of us experiencing deep exhaustion and burn out, we decided to narrow our focus to producing two in-studio performances.

Setting Up the Space

With our minds settled on two in studio performances, the shaping of the performance experience took place. Throughout this working process, as the choreographer and facilitator, I have been very concerned with protecting the integrity, intimacy, and tenderness of the space and I wanted that to be reflected in the performance space. Firstly, the amount of people per performance was capped at 30 individuals, this limit was mostly for COVID-19 safety but I believe even outside of the pandemic, I would have wanted the audience to be small. Continuing

a practice from our own rehearsals, the audience was arranged in a circle around the performers and were offered the option of sitting on the floor or in a chair. Providing a choice of seating was intentional because many folks, myself included, find it much more comfortable to sit on the floor than in a chair and it helped to support the anti-hierarchical intentions of the work. Theatre spaces are often arranged in what is known as a proscenium space in which the audience is separated from the performers by a decorative arch that proceeds a deep set stage that is often raked. Essentially, a proscenium space is what typically comes to mind when people think of the theatre. However, these spaces are rife with hierarchy, not only in having the audience above the performer but theatre spaces often require fees to enter performances which is exclusionary. Therefore, to reject this inaccessible set up, the audience was arranged in a circle on the same level as the dancers. Additionally, the lighting design was intentionally sparse. While I did use stage lighting for the performances, they were incredibly minimal and only used so that we did not have to use the harsh fluorescent lighting that lights Myers in the day to day. To further level the playing field, the lighting was kept the same throughout the entire space so that the performers could see the audience members and the audience members could see one another to further deepen the sense of community in the space. The lights were also kept intentionally bright so that audience members could write or draw as the performance progressed.

Performance Day

While it created a busy day for all of us, my collaborators and I decided to do a double performance day in which there would be a performance at 7 pm open to the entire campus community and an 8:30 pm performance for students only. In my time here at Conn, I have never experienced a performance art piece that is exclusive for students only and I simply wanted to

see what it would be like for a community of peers to share their art making for 20 minutes together without the presence of faculty or other authority figures. As a facilitator, I wanted to simply see what it would be like to reject gerontocracy, hierarchy that comes from age, and have a space that honored the knowledge of youth. While I love and respect the dance department faculty, their very presence establishes a hierarchy in the minds of the performers and the other audience members and can completely change the dynamic of the place. Upon arrival, the audience members received a copy of the community values and intentions as well as a program, a copy of which can be found in the Appendix. Following, they were invited into the space by Elisabeth Wales (she/her), our house manager and asked to fill the space beginning with the innermost circle. As the audience entered the space, the Spotify playlist cultivated by myself and my collaborators at the beginning of our time together back in September, played in the space. When they felt ready, my collaborators entered the circle and made themselves comfortable in the space and chatted with one another. After a six minute hold, I entered the space, introduced myself to the audience and walked them through each of the pre-show statements I had placed in the program as well as the community values and intentions. I then checked in with my collaborators and passed the show over to Kevin Hyland (he/him), our musical collaborator and his playing began the work.

Audience Reception

Following the performance, the audience members were invited to stay if they were able and would like to do so for a post performance talk back. Those who stayed were invited to journal about anything and everything they had seen or experienced while viewing the piece for approximately 6 minutes. After completing the free write, the audience was asked to simply hold onto their thoughts. Typically during post performance talk backs, the audience would ask questions of the dancers yet in the interest of flipping the script and challenging the idea that the performers are moving FOR the enjoyment of the audience, I decided that myself and my collaborators would ask questions of the audience first. Prior to the performance, I prepared the three following questions to invite the audience to answer:

How is what you have just witnessed similar to or different from your past experiences?

What has been your embodied experience throughout this viewing?

Who could you see reflected in the dancing? Yourself, a friend, a family member, an ancestor, a community member?

For both performances, I actually ended up only being able to ask one of these questions to the audience members because of COVID-19 time weirdness but for the first show, I began by asking folks what had been their embodied experience throughout the viewing. These were a few of the responses I received,

I found myself mimicking the butt circles, torso circles, in my own body

Being caught up in the circular music

Embodied circular

I felt most a part of the dance when there wasn't any music

Realizing the intimacy of breath

Experiencing the visceral swelling of the dance

Taking enough time to acknowledge everyone

I felt free to look at everyone, know the ways they were interpreting

Foot taping

I was very hot, physically and I felt the heat of the movement

Finger focused on the different actions

Like I was riding a wave, in and out of unisons

Experiencing a sea

Feeling the dance in my chest

The space felt like when you were in gym class as a kid and you all sat under those big parachute things

From there, we let these musings hang in the air and take up space and then we transitioned into audience questions. Timing was difficult during the first performance period because I had to get everyone out a half hour before the second performance so we only had time for one question. Lisa Race, a professor in the dance department, asked about the progression of the choreographic process, a question both myself and my collaborators answered.

During the second performance talk back, per the suggestion of my collaborator Alyssa Bodmer, we asked the audience, “Who could you see reflected in the dancing? Yourself, a friend, a family member, an ancestor, a community member?” This question ended up being more challenging than we had anticipated and our collaborator Zion Martin-Hayes actually got the ball rolling by talking about how during this round she saw her mother which was both special and new for her because it had not happened before. After warming up the space, a few others shared what they saw:

People alone caught up in a task for which they are typically not being watched,
experiencing and noticing that juxtaposition

Seeing us (so much about that community) -- Lindsey

Noticing the past brought weight and how it brought weight but also experiencing a sense
of uplift at the potential for the future

Individuality in the community

Given how tricky the first question seemed to be, I transitioned to a more open invitation,
asking the audience to simply share their thoughts, their embodied experience, and what they
saw: Here are a some of those responses:

Noticing who the dancers were seeing, drawing you in with the focus

Seeing candles in a dark space

Seeing past versions of people --ancestors, childhood, or who are they are here [on
campus] moving

It felt like it was contact improv but they weren't touching

I sometimes felt as though I was intruding

After receiving and hearing the experiences of the audience, we transitioned into
questions about the piece. The first one was for my collaborators and asked about what was
going through their heads throughout the piece and the second was for myself and inquired about
the intention of the third section of choreography. For a full picture of our conversations with the
audience, please see the audio resources section.

In addition to receiving feedback from the audience after the performance during the talk
back, I also invited a few of my peers to reach out with words, phrases, sentences, and other
musings about the work. Here are their experiences:

*“initial thoughts: re-invention of energy, generation of energy
embodied experience: listening and seeing the dancers' physical exertion in silence; so
much beautiful repetition and with the changes in orientation, the dancers created
landscapes; felt like I was moving with them especially in the last unison phrase,
strength, pride.” - Sydney Bryan, she/her*

“I saw my classmates, my peers, my friends

Strength

Dynamic

Individuality juxtaposed with community

So many places to look

Gestural movement really engaging

*Felt like it meant something different to each of the performers, as well as each of
the audience members*

*Strut off at the end and circular orientation of audience broke traditional barriers
between viewers and performers—at some points I got distracted watching other
audience members watch the piece (but distracted in a good way, like it gave it
another layer).” - Susanna Procario-Foley, she/her*

*“I had the blessing to enjoy a moment, a moment that is gonna be stuck in my mind for a
while, i felt like i was sitting in my nostalgia, and it just felt so real, seeing each dancer
do a meaningless gesture, but meaningless depends on perspective, they each had their
own meaning to it, they're own associations, events, relationships and memories with that
'meaningless' gesture. and I think that was such a beautiful moment to appreciate, live
in, and understand how much perspective matters.” - Moqu Alqudah, he/him*

*“I really enjoyed the pedestrian movement piece; what movements are encoded
into my body, my muscle memory?*

*Sitting in a circle around the dancers, with them just past arm's reach was a new
performance experience for me and I enjoyed the way you related this to the
breaking down of hierarchies.” -Lydia Klein, she/they*

“One of the community values that really stood out to me in relation to the performance was the group’s acknowledgement that “we are 6 people, in this studio, on this campus, in New London, in Connecticut, in the U.S., in North America, on this planet, in this solar system, in this galaxy that is just one in a bunch of other galaxies.” The first part of the performance evoked the sentiment of this last community value, of positioning yourself as a small fragment of the larger world. There was a comfort in the smallness of each task the dancers were miming, yet it felt large in its value. Additionally, each dancer was inexplicably tied to the others, when one moved, all moved into an organized line, adding order to the individualistic chaos. The meaning I extracted was that no matter how small the task, and how individual, it affects the others around you, it affects the community. There was an intimacy in the distance between each dancer. They were each doing something on their own, yet comfortable with the presence of others.”

-Margaret Condon, she/her

“The thesis performance was an intimate, exploratory experience made more so by the circular set up, soft lighting, and live music. Hearing the heavy breathing of the dancers as they moved within feet of each audience member incited a physical reaction within myself. I felt tension build in my chest while observing the minute, nuanced details of the first section, then I experienced an energetic release in the high tempo second section. I appreciated the sense of community and lack of hierarchy, which was clearly and effectively the intention.”

-Catja Christensen, she/her

Collaborator Reflections

Following the formal end of our rehearsals after the performances, I invited my collaborators to share any reflections they had at the conclusion of the process. In the true spirit of our working practice, these reflections could be anything from full paragraphs, to fragment sentences, to associations, to phrases, to even just a collection of words. As always, they had the option to share or not and some chose not to or instead met with me personally. These are the offerings of those that chose to speak.

Zion Martin-Hayes

a practice

an adjustment

time

ability

agility

collective sweat

breath

disconnection

journey - journee

movement of a point and of points

ink

the sound of the word ink

Alyssa Bodmer

New and exciting

Lots and lots and lots of discussion

Sharing and listening and distractions

Changes in dynamic in day/nighttime rehearsals

Dinner!

Sticky floor and boxes to slippery floor and sort of sometimes using boxes

Itching for choreography

Purple

Kindness

The letter y

Sweat and tears

Star feet

Support

A special space

Journee Hardaway

safe space to be vulnerable and cry

my friendship and understanding of these people developed throughout this experience

-I relate to them, differ from them, hear them, and see them
going back into my memories
learning about myself, my movement qualities, learning about others and being taught by
them
in my head while improvising but really proud of how my ability to improvise has grown
with practice and prompts
i wrote a lot of personal reflections and thoughts and appreciations to my fellow cast
members in my letters to them and so I will leave those unseen..
what if this were all Black people/movers

Final Reflection

While I have already taken the time to reflect upon both the second and first semester in their own right, I would like to take some time to consider the process as a whole. Looking back on this entire process over the course of the full academic year, it was an overwhelming yet deeply transformative ride. Slow, tender, and at times a little chaotic, the work I have done with this incredible community of people is something I will carry with me into the future. Of course, as with any process, there are things that go less well than hoped and I will start with those issues first so that we can end on a positive note. As I spoke about before in the second semester reflection, time was one of our biggest challenges. We were constantly running out of time in rehearsals or in our conversations and each of us had different relationships toward time and process. Some wanted to move faster through the work and itched for choreography early on, others were okay with just talking for rehearsal, and some wanted to be there longer but had other things to do. As a choreographer and facilitator, with the shifting environment of the rehearsal process and constantly learning from my collaborators and seeing new possibilities in the work, I often got lost in what I was actually doing. When it came time to write formally

about the work I was doing and our process together, I wanted to say, “But wait, I am still learning, I am not ready, I need more time.”

This situation brings me to another point. I came to the realization a few days ago that this work and the design of the project was not very compatible with an academic setting. Both myself and my collaborators were constantly overwhelmed and overworked from the productivity and sense of urgency demanded of us by the academy. A number of us were also processing our traumas that were exacerbated by members of the college administration. For the BIPOC members of our community, there was the added stress of a predominantly white institution (PWI) and facing the constant onslaught of microaggressions and macroaggressions. Overall, it is an environment that shuts down our needs as multifaceted individuals and runs so counter to the space we were trying to create. Personally, I always wanted to be super attentive to the needs of others and how tired and stressed everyone was but I realized that oftentimes I failed to advocate for my own needs as an overwhelmed and depressed person and just wanted to make sure everyone else was okay, in true femme caretaker fashion. All of these circumstances, both for myself and my collaborators, frequently impacted how much of ourselves we could bring into the space to explore the work. That is not to say of course that in the greater world we would not be struggling with these emblems of white supremacy culture or our own trauma or that racism and anti-Blackness wouldn't exist, but perhaps it would have been different and may be a little easier. Yet, in realizing these issues, we simply keep them in our minds eye and work to create a better dialogue in the future rather than focusing too much on the things that didn't work.

Aside from our troubles, there were so many wonderful things that came from this rehearsal process. Working with this group of people every Sunday was one of my favorite parts of the week. Reading books is great and all but the knowledge that comes from a community is

so rich and should not be ignored or devalued. In my previous experience with rehearsal processes, there was never enough time spent on actually knowing one another and reaching out and supporting each other. Perhaps folks will say that a rehearsal process isn't supposed to be a therapy session and you should leave your shit at the door and just come in and make the work but I think that is kind of stupid and inconsiderate. Dancing, and moving in general, is an incredibly emotional process and cannot be detached from our experiences in the world. Furthermore, the body is an emotional treasure trove and when you are asking someone to expand upon and source from their embodied knowledge, it is rude and unsafe to not work to or even actively refuse to, create an environment that honors that. I think the same goes for considering people's access needs. If you are not asking your collaborators what they need in order to fully participate in the work or ignoring those needs, you are directly shutting people out of the space. Maybe our process wasn't perfect but I believe we tried to do something radically different in seeing and honoring people in who they are. Our space was one that held space for and supported an incredible amount of vulnerability and that's all I could've asked for.

Finally, touching briefly on the performances of this project, it was weird transferring a space with so much intimacy and tenderness to a presentational context, but I am so glad we did. In speaking with and hearing from folks after the show, many attendees expressed beautiful interest in the work we were doing and felt touched by it in some way or another and for that I am honored. Whether it made them think about their own everyday lives, their relationships with others, or the power of a community, I was glad to have cultivated a performance environment that created a window for the audience into the work we were doing without directly exposing the vulnerable memories and experiences of my collaborators. As a viewer, this work continuously made me tear up, even with the joyousness of the community and seeing my

collaborators work and communicate with one another, I still felt as though there was something incredibly heartbreaking about the work and I have yet to put a finger on it. With all things considered, with our ups and downs, I am proud of the work we did and the community we created.

Conclusion

Retracing our steps through the process, this work began with an inquiry into the relationship between whiteness and abstraction and quickly became about the relationship between white supremacy, in its embodied, cultural, and ideological forms, and the choreographic process. Sourcing from scholarship on the Africanist presence in American cultural product, whiteness and Blackness in the face of abstraction, racial capitalism, disability justice, and white supremacy culture, the intentions of this work were intersectional. In our year long rehearsal process, we shared improvisational scores, meals, stories, conversations, dreams, pain, breath, and space. Together we developed a performance piece using improvisational scores and set material, creating a work that encapsulated memory and was exploration of identity and community. In honoring process over product, this work is not complete for me. I plan to continue identifying white supremacy and anti-Blackness in the choreographic process by exploring a wider range of scholarship on dance pedagogy and in other locations. It is also my hope to interview and engage with more BIPOC artists, movers, makers, scholars, and young people in the future renditions of this work. Additionally, I hope to bring this performance work back as well, perhaps with a new group of folks and not in a pandemic, just to see what it would be like and how it would change and grow the work (I know some of my collaborators are interested in performing the work we created again). Finally, I would like to offer some thoughts

and advice to those interested in this work specifically or their own community building. In the free flowing spirit of our process, here are series of words or phrases that I would like to leave you with:

it will take time, you are going to get fidgety

don't forget about your own needs

you are going to mess up

not everything will be perfect, perfectionism is white supremacist anyway

you will get lost, allow your community to ground you

building an anti-racist process is not one size fits all, your process won't and shouldn't

look exactly like mine

allow for silence

there will be things you won't understand

reminder -Blackness and the Black experience is not a monolith

celebrate and honor the fullness of each person

lineage

joy

hope

pain

failure

listen to your community above all else.

Appendix

Important Concepts and Terminology

Full engagement with this work depends on the understanding of a number of key terms and ideas from a broad range of subjects. Furthermore, I may use some terms differently than the way they may be colloquially understood. Some terms may also not be used at all but are concepts I consciously keep in mind and I encourage you to do the same. For the sake of efficiency, there is an alphabetical list of ideas/terms below. Additionally, this format also provides a resource for you to turn back to should you need clarification.

Abolitionism -the principles and practices of eradicating structures of inequality, oppression, and exploitation. Most people associate this term with the abolition of slavery but the abolitionist movement is still alive and well for example in the prison abolition movement.

Abstraction -In the art world, abstraction deals with the departure from linear, narrative, representational, and/or symbolic imagery, movement, or ideas.

Africanist [perspective] -of or relating to the continent of Africa or African values. Taking an Africanist perspective is to consider the agency of African and African diasporic peoples and their descendents in shaping historical processes, culture, social values, art, etc. and to make choices. It is often used in analysis of the Atlantic or Western world.

Africanist Aesthetic -Defining features of African or African diasporic visual art, music, dance, and thought. According to scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild, there are five principles of the African Aesthetic:

1. Embracing the conflict

This aesthetic can be described as, “a precept of contrariety, or an encounter of opposites.” It recognizes that life itself is full of contradictions, difference, discord, and irregularity and accepts these circumstances rather than trying to resolve or ignore them.

2. Polyrythm/polycentrism

The idea that there can be many things happening within the same body at the same time, with the prefix ‘poly’ meaning many. The first, polycentrism, dictates that movement in the body can come from multiple points at once and similarly, can be polyrhythmic, meaning the body can be maintaining multiple rhythms and beats at once.

3. High-affect juxtaposition

Contrary to the European aesthetic, the Africanist aesthetic values moods, attitudes, or movements reject the need for transitions or other connective links. When

these ideas are contrasted, they may produce irony, surprise, innuendo, or exhilaration with the overall intention to heighten the moment.

4. Ephebism

Coming from the Greek word for youth, ephebism in the Africanist aesthetic represents itself through attributes like power, vitality, flexibility, and attack through sharpness, speed and/or force. Intensity also comes through in a kinesthetic way that recognizes feeling as sensation rather than emotion. Another physical characteristic is the flexibility and suppleness of the torso which represents the youthful spirit of ephebism.

5. The aesthetic of the cool

The final aesthetic is one that lives in all the other concepts. It comes in movements that join vitality and composure. There is a disinterested, detached, careless, or mask-like energy that is commonly seen in a nonchalant facial expression that is maintained while the body remains quite hot. It is seen through oppositions, asymmetries, and radical juxtapositions.

BIPOC -Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. This term came to prominence in 2020, responding to the fact that POC is a super broad term that often muddies the distinct histories of slavery and colonization and current experiences of racism and oppression of Black and indigenous people in America. Therefore, adding the specific ‘B’ and ‘I’ to ‘POC,’ BIPOC offers greater recognition of Black and indigenous people and the issues that impact them.

Crip - “In-group slang [term] for people with disabilities.” (Sins Invalid 79)

Decolonization -the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies and systems of white supremacy. For indigenous folx, it also involves reclaiming their culture, land, bodies, religions, and community support systems.

Diaspora -According to the Cambridge Dictionary, diaspora is defined as, “a group of people who spread from one original country to other countries, or the act of spreading in this way.” In the context of this paper, ‘the diaspora’ will refer to the African diaspora and the dispersal of people of African descent whether by enslavement or migration.

Divest -In activist circles, the idea of divestment often means disengaging financially from corporations, organizations, or institutions that are harming the planet, hold racist or colonial ideology, are anti-LGBTQIA, etc. by refusing monetary support from these entities or not giving money to them. Similarly, this honors thesis seeks to divest ideologically from whiteness and white body supremacy.

Femme -Generally, the word ‘femme’ is, “a descriptor for a queer person who presents and acts in a traditionally feminine manner,” and comes originally from the working class lesbian community. (Tonic) Today, the term is used beyond the lesbian community by queer people with all different gender and sexual identities. For many femmes, the descriptor goes beyond physical appearance and encompasses things like emotional labor and healing, sensitivity and strength, and a departure from traditional femininity. (Cecelia)

Folx vs. folks -sometimes the word ‘folks’ is spelled with an ‘x’ as in ‘folx.’ While the word, ‘folks,’ is technically gender neutral and not inherently exclusionary, inclusion shouldn’t be assumed in every situation. Therefore, the spelling of ‘folks’ with an ‘x’ as in ‘folx’ has been created to explicitly include groups marginalized on the basis of gender. However, it is hotly debated and many queer folks feel like it is performative. Additionally, the use of the ‘x’ in the term ‘womxn’ has been dropped because it reads as though transwomen are not included in the regular spelling of ‘woman.’ In this thesis, the regular spelling of folks will be used but does not serve to deny or invalid trans and gender nonconforming folks.

Hyperracialize -A heightening of the word racialize. To say someone or something is ‘hyperracialized’ is to say their body, behavior, and identity is **distinctly and constantly** defined by their assumed racial presentation in the public view.

Intersectionality -The theory that social categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability that are intertwined to create systems of multiple oppressions and privileges. According to Kimberlé Crenshaw who developed the concept in 1990, “intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects.” (Crenshaw in Columbia Law, 2017)

Judson -Refers to the Judson Dance Theater and adjacent like minded-movement artists working out of the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, Manhattan, New York circa the 1960s and 1970s.

LGBTQIA+ -Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual +

Lineage -the descent line from which someone or something comes. The people, places, and ideas from which you are born. Ancestry. In this setting, the word lineage is thought of both in a familial* sense but also in a movement sense of where your movement comes from; who are the teachers, techniques, and sensibilities that live in your body and where do they come from.

*Please keep in mind that ancestry is both a source of pride and community in the Black community but also one of trauma as many Black folks, particularly in the U.S., do not know who their ancestors are or where they come from because of enslavement and denial of Black life.

Neurodivergent -experiencing less typical cognitive variation most often pertaining to, but not limited to communication, thinking, sensory processing, and physical movement. Some examples of neurodivergent states of being are having autism, ADHD, ADD, dyslexia, OCD, and APD.

Pedestrian movement -everyday, common movements like walking, running, eating, getting dressed, etc. The incorporation of pedestrian movements in choreography or improvisation is a hallmark of the postmodern period.

POC -People/Person of Color. While this term is a much better catch all than say ‘non-white’ which centers whiteness and can create a sense of community and coalition, it has recently gotten some heat for being too broad and blurring the unique experiences of oppression of Black and indigenous folk.

Postmodern -Refers to the period that came chronologically after the modern dance movement in the 1960s. Common themes associated with the postmodern dance movement are abstraction, pedestrian movement, contact improvisation, release technique,

Queer -A term that has been reclaimed by the LGBTQIA community as a sort of umbrella term that is used to make space for those have been othered by social norms and customs, by outdated notions of gender, and by LGBTQ+ rights movement itself. Keep in mind that even though it is a general term, ‘queer’ means lots of different things to different people. Additionally, it should be noted that social norms and customs around sexuality and gender have been heavily influenced by white, Western ideology and that many indigenous cultures have much more nuanced and expansive ideas of gender and sexuality.

Racial Capitalism -According to Cedric Robinson in his seminal work, *Black Marxism*, racial capitalism is rooted in the idea that According to Robinson, the development of capitalism is intrinsically tied to racism in its essence as it emerged from the already racialized environment of Europe during the feudal era. This racialism that existed in early Europe did not define the relationships Europeans had with communities outside of their sphere, but rather involved a categorization, colonization, and subjugation of peoples internal to Christendom. Therefore, says Robinson, the “development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions.” Considering this history, all capitalism is therefore racial capitalism.

Racialization -Inhabiting the lexicons of sociology, critical race theory, and intersectionality studies, racialization refers, “to the processes by which a group of people is defined by their “race.” Processes of racialization begin by attributing racial meaning to people's identity and, in

particular, as they relate to social structures and institutional systems, such as housing, employment, and education.” (Yee, June Ying. "Racialization." In *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*, edited by Richard T. Schaefer, 1111. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008. doi: 10.4135/9781412963879.n455.)

White Body Supremacy -According to Resmaa Menakem, white body supremacy is the idea that, “every white-skinned body, no matter who inhabits --and no matter what they think, believe, do, or say --automatically benefits from it.” The term ‘white supremacy’ without the body tends to be overintellectualized and white progressives distance themselves from it because they are not neo Nazis or screaming racist slurs. Yet, they benefit just as much from whiteness as those who are openly racist. Therefore, by placing white supremacy in the body, privilege of all white people is inferred.

Womanism -A term coined by Alice Walker in 1982 to include the ignored experiences of Black women and uplift their voices in the feminist movement. Quoting Walker’s book, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*, a womanist is, “... A Black feminist or feminist of color... A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally capable... Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*” (p. xi–xii). Since the terms ‘feminism’ and ‘feminist’ are steeped in whiteness, this project prefers to use the terms ‘womanism’ and ‘womanist’ to uplift black women and recognize the intersections of racism and sexism. Personally, I also prefer the term womanism because feminism is rooted in the term, ‘female,’ which defines biology rather than gender and is therefore exclusionary to transwomen.

PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

After many talks (you kinda had to be there)

An Honors Thesis Presentation in Dance

Performed by Journee Hardaway (she/her), Ayana Sequira (she/they), Lindsey Perlman (she/her), Zion Martin-Hayes (she/her), and Alyssa Bodmer (she/her)

Musical Collaborator: Kevin Hyland (he/him)
Additional sound: "We Are One" by Novelist

Choreographic composition: Mara Senecal-Albrecht (she/they) with input and assistance from the performers

Faculty Advisor: Rachel Boggia (she/her)
Lighting and Tech Support: Shawn Hove (they/he)
House Manager: Elisabeth Wales (she/her)

Run Time: ~ 20 minutes

Post Performance Discussion to follow for approximately 20 minutes.

(program continues on reverse side)

Physical, emotional, and psychological safety of BIPOC, queer, and trans folks is prioritized, if you cannot support this intention, please do not attend or leave.

We acknowledge this showing and post performance discussion takes place on the land of the Western Nehântick and Mohegan indigenous peoples, land that was stolen by white settler colonizers and renamed New London. We acknowledge the original caretakers and residents of this land to shed light on the physical, sexual, cultural, emotional, and psychological violence against Native communities that happened in the past and continues to happen to this day and to counter the erasure of Native communities and their experiences.*

Children are welcome, this space is not one that asks people to disconnect from their greater lives.

Please know that you are allowed to leave the performance at any time for literally any reason. If you need to drink water, drink water, if you need to go to the bathroom, go to the bathroom, if you need to blow your nose, blow your nose, if you need to eat, eat something. You do not have to ask permission from anyone to do any of these things or similar tasks.

If something is triggering in any way or you need to take a break, you are absolutely welcome to step outside or leave. I will not be offended by you taking care of yourself.

Feel free to journal or draw about anything that interests you during the show, the lights will be kept on.

Please respect and honor the community guidelines. If you do not, you will be asked to leave.

*The second sentence was not in the printed program due to concerns of triggering indigenous attendees with certain language and phrasing concerns. An email with a fuller acknowledgement and resources was sent to all attendees following the show.

RESOURCES ON RECENT INCIDENTS OF ANTI-BLACKNESS AT THE COLLEGE

@blackvoicesconncoll → <https://www.instagram.com/blackvoicesconncoll/?hl=en>

@blackvoicesconncoll2 → <https://www.instagram.com/blackvoicesconncoll2/?hl=en>

Acheson, Abigail. "“What I Would like Is an Apology”: Student Asked to Remove Outward Facing Sign." *The College Voice*. The College Voice, 24 Nov. 2020.

<https://thecollegevoice.org/2020/11/24/what-i-would-like-is-an-apology-student-singled-out-for-outward-facing-sign/>

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS GUIDE

Video Material

- Raw performance footage from both the all campus community show and the student only show

Visual Materials

- Movement Lineage Illustration examples
- Performance Poster
- Performance Program
- Photographs from the performance by Davis Badger '21, he/him

Audio Materials

- Audio recordings of post performance talk backs (please note the volume varies based upon how close people were to the mic)
- Elisabeth Wales (she/her) '22 performance reflection recording
- Digital journal excerpts from Mara Senecal-Albrecht's personal archive

- If you are interested in or in need of a full audio recording of the written thesis, please contact Mara Senecal-Albrecht at m.senecal.albrecht@gmail.com. Due to time constraints, I was unable to submit a full audio recording by the institutional honors thesis deadline.

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