

**GOING GAGA: CONTRADICTIONS AND ARTICULATIONS OF THE
CONTEMPORARY IN THE WORK OF
OHAD NAHARIN**

A Dissertation
Submitted to
The Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by
Elisa Rose Davis
Diploma Date August 2021

Examining Committee Members:

Sherril Dodds, Advisory Chair, Dance Department
Laura Katz Rizzo, Dance Department
Laura Levitt, Religion, Jewish Studies and Gender
Naomi Jackson, External Member, Arizona State University

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Going Gaga: Contradictions and Articulations of the Contemporary in the Work of Ohad Naharin

By Elisa Rose Davis

**Doctor of Philosophy, Dance
Temple University, June 2021
Dr. Sherril Dodds, chairperson**

This dissertation engages Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin and his movement language Gaga as significant and celebrated in the world of dance in the contemporary moment. Naharin's choreography and Gaga present significant contradictions that ultimately reveal important tensions at work in the category of the contemporary. I unpack what I identify to be five tensions in place. First, Gaga is discursively and critically described as a style and technique, yet Naharin rejects these classifications. Second, Naharin disavows politics in his choreography, yet his work cannot be separated from the politics of his and Batsheva's home base in the State of Israel. The third tension can be found within the language and principles of Gaga itself as a practice of producing and managing embodied contradiction. Fourth, Naharin claims Gaga as a universally accessible "toolbox" for all movers and all other forms of dance, yet it is uniquely personal. Its applicability to other forms of dance reveals important paradoxes in older genres of dance as they endure in the twenty-first century. Fifth, as a practice marketed separately to "dancers" and "people," Gaga problematizes the distinction between high art concert dance and popular dance. Ultimately, this project demonstrates the significance of Gaga as a movement practice. The context of its development and deployment, its particular dynamic aesthetic, and the way it circulates among communities of professional dancers and non-dancers all point to the complexities of this

form that exemplify the complexities of the contemporary as a multi-faceted category and signifier.

This research is foregrounded in my experiences as a professional dancer taking Gaga classes, workshops and intensives in New York City and Tel Aviv from 2011-2016, and backed by research in the field of dance studies, critical reviews, rhetorical and discursive analysis, and close readings of Naharin's choreography and of Gaga movement. This research engages the complexities in the relationship between these aesthetic, rhetorical, discursive, and embodied contradictions and the contemporary as the label holding them together. I ask how Naharin and Gaga articulate the contradictory terms of this elusive category. This project furthers the academic discourse on Gaga and Naharin as well as broader scholarly studies of popular dance and concert dance practices and aesthetics of the twenty-first century.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT	ii
INTRODUCTION	v
CHAPTERS	
1. ARTICULATING THE TERMS OF THE CONTEMPORARY	1
2. DISCLAIMING AS A CHOREOGRAPHIC POLITICS	20
3. NEVER STOP MOVING: GAGA AS SURVIVAL	54
4. A TOOLBOX FOR REVIVAL: AVAILABILITY AS UNIVERSALITY FOR CONTEMPORARY BALLET AND MODERN DANCE	73
5. CONTRADICTIONS OF OWNERSHIP AND AUTHORITY: CONTEMPORARY (RE)ARTICUALATIONS OF POPULAR IN GAGA/PEOPLE	110
CONCLUSION	138
BIBLIOGRAPHY	141

INTRODUCTION

GOING GAGA FOR OHAD NAHARIN

Ohad Naharin is one of the most visible and celebrated choreographers in the field of concert dance in the early twenty-first century. He has been declared “One of the most influential luminaries of contemporary dance” (Subin 2015), one of “the most influential people in dance today...changing the way many choreographers think about creating work—and how dancers relate to their own bodies” (Wingenroth 2017), and “today’s most widely worshiped guru of modern dance” (Burke 2010). During his tenure as the artistic director of the Tel Aviv-based Batsheva Dance Company from 1990-2018, he has attracted attention from international audiences, professional and student dancers, and critics for his unique approach to movement invention and distinctive choreographic aesthetic.¹ Over the past thirty years Naharin has transformed Batsheva from a primarily local Israeli company, performing mainly repertory works by American and Israeli modern choreographers, into a cutting-edge, “global force” in the dance world (Wingenroth 2017).² The prolific application of terms such as *today*, *contemporary* and *global* within the public and critical discourse surrounding Naharin position him as an example par excellence of contemporaneity in concert dance. The contemporary as a

¹ Having stepped down as the artistic director for the Batsheva Dance Company, he continues to serve as the house choreographer.

² The Batsheva Dance Company was founded in 1964 with the financial backing of Baroness Batsheva de Rothschild. It began as a repertory company for American modern dance. Martha Graham served as the artistic adviser, Batsheva dancers trained in Graham technique, and the company performed Graham repertory, the works of many of her disciples, and some emerging Israeli choreographers (Galili 2009). The company started and remains based at the Suzanne Dellal Center in Tel Aviv, Israel

category is far from straightforward: widely applied, yet deeply contested as to what it describes and signifies. As Naharin is intimately associated with the contemporary, my research investigates its paradoxical meanings and how they can be understood through the contradictions in and around Naharin's work. In this dissertation I examine the ways in which Naharin's choreography, his approach to creating movement, his rhetoric and the field of discourse surrounding him, as well as his status within the larger historical canon of dance serve as productive paradigms for revealing and critiquing the contemporary in the twenty-first century globalized world.

Naharin is most distinguished for his movement language called Gaga. According to Naharin, he developed Gaga as a personalized method of embodied self-research as a way to rehabilitate himself from a spinal injury, and it subsequently became his way to warm up his body to dance as well as generate movement for his choreography (Kourlas 2011; Galili 2015). Over time Gaga has become an established training method for Naharin's dancers, and currently pervades as a movement method available globally to all dancers. Gaga has also been targeted to non-dancers in a track called Gaga/people.³ Due to the enduring popularity of Batsheva around the world, many preprofessional and professional dancers study Gaga As such, it has become its own entity, Gaga Movement Ltd., still intimately associated with the Batsheva Dance Company, yet with its own administrators, website, and programming.

As Gaga instructor, Gaga Movement Ltd. administrator, and scholar Deborah Friedes Galili (2012) reports, Gaga began to spread as a method beyond Batsheva during

³ Gaga's dual tracks of Gaga/dancers and Gaga/people will be addressed in depth throughout this dissertation.

the 2000s, starting in Israel. By late 2011 The Suzanne Dellal Centre in Tel Aviv and other venues in Israel hosted weekly classes. Gaga classes entered the curriculum at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, the Mateh Asher School of the Performing Arts on Kibbutz Ga'aton, and other programs for aspiring dancers. An annual two-week Gaga intensive began in the summer of 2008 in Tel Aviv, inviting dancers from around the world to study Gaga and learn Naharin's repertory. Due to its popularity, a shorter winter program was added in 2010. In addition to master classes given by Naharin and Batsheva dancers during international tours, former company members and twenty-four graduates of the inaugural (and thus far only) Gaga teacher-training program (2011-2012) have increased its global presence. Gaga classes, intensives, and workshops have been available in least 125 cities in thirty different countries, albeit with varying frequency (Galili 2015, 367). During the global COVID-19 pandemic, Gaga classes proliferated on the popular internet platform Zoom, drawing hundreds of participants from across the globe, including places where regular classes are not available.

As Batsheva tours globally, Naharin's style has become increasingly visible on international stages. Many other self-described contemporary companies have performed his work, including Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Staatsballett Berlin, Ballet Frankfurt, Cullberg Ballet, the Paris Opéra Ballet, Hubbard Street, and Nederlands Dans Theater. As Batsheva dancers leave the company to choreograph their own work, Gaga's remains a visibly dominant stylistic influence. Critics eagerly identify Naharin's impact in the works of several of these artists who have found success in the field of dance, including Andrea Miller, Saar Harari and Lee Sher, Sharon Eyal, Danielle Agami, Hofesh Schechter, and Bobbi Jene Smith and Or Schreiber.

This group of artists publicly claim varying degrees of connection to Naharin and to Gaga. While Harari and his company members make up the vast majority of Gaga instructors in New York City studios and advertise their use of Gaga in the creative process, for example, Miller and Schechter only nod to their training with Naharin as formative experiences. Nonetheless, much of the critical attention they garner names their association with Naharin and focuses on the exaggerated, aggressive, contorted, explosively physical movement that can be attributed to the influence of Gaga.

Concurrently, Naharin's style has become increasingly desirable in aspiring professional dancers. Naharin argues that Gaga is a set of tools that complement existing techniques rather than its own style. He claims that "working in tandem with the other techniques dancers have studied or are in the process of studying, the practice of Gaga further builds and equips their bodies, enhancing their ongoing artistic practice" (Galili 2015, 377-8). The aspect of Gaga that hones a dancer's ability not only to improvise, but also to access his or her own body in a more versatile way has produced a demand for Gaga's availability in dance studios and training institutions in many countries around the world. Clearly, among the many somatic and improvisation techniques available to dance students and professionals, Gaga is in high demand as a method for achieving a specific way of moving, produced by Gaga's specific language. Thus, Gaga is a significant global phenomenon, influencing the dance world at the level of aesthetics through Naharin's choreography, as well as at the level of the body through the training of dancers outside of the Batsheva Dance Company.

The Contradictions of Naharin and Gaga

As a significant contemporary figure Naharin and his aesthetic vision of Gaga hold what I identify to be five significant tensions in place. First, Gaga is discursively and critically described as a style and technique, yet Naharin rejects these classifications. Second, Naharin disavows politics in his choreography, yet his work cannot be separated from the politics of his and Batsheva's home base in the State of Israel. The third tension can be found within the language and principles of Gaga itself as a practice of producing and managing embodied contradiction. Fourth, Naharin claims Gaga as a universally accessible "toolbox" for all movers and all other forms of dance, yet it is uniquely personal. Its applicability to other forms of dance reveals important paradoxes in older genres of dance as they endure in the twenty-first century. Fifth, as a practice marketed separately to "dancers" and "people," Gaga problematizes the distinction between high art concert dance and popular dance.

The first paradox involves aesthetic style and technique. There is an established tradition of Western modern and postmodern choreographers such as Martha Graham or Merce Cunningham defining their artistic character through highly personalized and codified movement techniques. Modern and postmodern choreographers created their own techniques to train their dancers to move within the idiomatic style of the company, but not necessarily to serve an improvisation function that would enable them to generate original choreographic ideas (Foster 1997). Naharin's method is noteworthy in that although there are now frequently used terms and phrases that constitute Gaga classes, the method is framed as constantly evolving. Naharin actively rejects the claim that Gaga disciplines the body within the confines of his specific style, but rather offers an

improvisational framework that intentionally creates new movement possibilities not limited to existing movement preferences. Framed as a language for which each practitioner will have his or her own dialect, the Gaga rhetoric thus promotes itself as both universally accessible and uniquely personal. Thus Gaga presents several contradictions as an improvisational method, a somatic practice for embodied research, a compositional tool, and an identifiable aesthetic style. My research focuses on these contradictions and the way that Naharin as an artistic figure and his movement language as it is created, disseminated, adopted, and adapted internationally by dancers and non-dancers, are uniquely positioned to articulate current complexities in concert dance.

Another space of ambiguity comes from Naharin's denial of any explicit political dimensions in his choreographic work or any political agenda within Gaga as a practice. As an Israeli-born choreographer and artistic director of an Israeli government-funded company, however, Naharin's work is consistently received, reviewed, and even protested in the context of the conflict that plagues that region of the world.⁴ This occurs most frequently when the Batsheva Dance Company or the Batsheva Ensemble (Batsheva's junior company) performs outside Israel.⁵ Moreover, critics, audiences, and

⁴Batsheva receives funding from the Israeli government and is associated with "Brand Israel," a campaign run by the Foreign ministry, the Tourism ministry, and the Strategic Affairs Ministry to bolster Israel's image to the international community. The campaign is designed to promote Israel's Western identity (cosmopolitan, secular, democratic) in order to distinguish it from its surrounding Arab nations and counteract negative associations that come from Israel's ongoing conflict with the Palestinian people (Barghouti 2012, 2011).

⁵<http://www.no2brandisrael.org/why-are-we-protesting-the-batsheva-dance-company/>, http://www.boycottisraelnetwork.net/?page_id=655, and <http://boycottisrael.info/content/bfw-endorse-dutch-protest-batsheva-dance-not-welcome-netherlands>.

even dancers still use tropes of violence and brutality when they review or describe other companies performing Naharin's repertory. This research addresses the intertwining of Naharin's aesthetic and the politics of his embodied practice informed by its geographic homeland.

Gaga as an embodied practice produces paradoxes at the level of the body. For example, many of the prompts that inspire the improvised movement during a Gaga class merge contradictory sensations or ideas: feel like a body builder with a soft spine; increase the "volume" of your movement, but not the speed; connect to pleasure through effort; find your groove but always be available to explode. These directives produce texturally and dynamically oppositional qualities. Such embodied paradoxes appear in Naharin's choreography, as well. One of Naharin's hallmark compositional traits is his use of unison. In one moment from *Naharin's Virus* (2001), for example, dancers stand motionless in a straight, evenly spaced, horizontal line at the front of the stage. Suddenly, one dancer begins to move frantically and spastically in place. The surrounding dancers do not acknowledge the moving dancer. The dancer stops just as suddenly as she began, dropping all resonating traces of movement and rejoins the stillness of the line. These jarring moments of stillness juxtaposed with intense, full-bodied movement, seemingly out of control and yet highly contained within the confines of space or the unison of a group, are present throughout many of Naharin's other works.

As described above, Gaga is used as the dominant training method for Batsheva company dancers and has been made widely available to any kind of mover, professional or pedestrian. Gaga has two main iterations: Gaga/people, open to any adult regardless of age, body type, or movement experience; and Gaga/dancers, designed for professional

dancers, and includes some ballet vocabulary and more physically demanding activities, such as aerial and partner contact work. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, two additional iterations emerged: Gaga/seated classes “for those who find it challenging to exercise while standing,” and Gaga/metodika, a more concentrated in-depth study of Gaga’s principles (gagapeople.com).⁶ A website exists dedicated specifically to the public promotion of Gaga as a movement practice separate from the Batsheva company website. The differentiation between “dancers” and “people” suggests that not only is Gaga a practice relevant within the high art world of concert dance, but also as a method for exercise, rehabilitation, enjoyment, and general well-being. Gaga/people thus expands Gaga into the realm of the popular, itself a highly porous category. As a popular practice, Gaga/people implicates the reaches and limits of a practice marketed as globally circulating and available to “everyone.” Gaga/people’s accessibility also raises interesting tensions around the boundaries of ownership for a form that promotes availability in the body while remaining inextricably linked to Naharin as an authorial figure.

My research seeks to unravel the relationship between these aesthetic, rhetorical, discursive, and embodied contradictions and the contemporary as the label holding them together. Indeed, an already contentious and slippery term, the issues of the contemporary

⁶The only stipulation on the Gaga website in terms of who can practice is regarding age limit. To take Gaga/dancers classes one must be at least eighteen years of age. For many years the age minimum for Gaga/people sixteen years of age. Recently, however, an iteration of Gaga for kids aged six to ten years called Gaga/families became available in Israel. Children must have an adult with them and work alongside them. The language in this section focuses on the developmental benefits of Gaga in terms of emotional, personal/interpersonal and expressive exploration.

are made visible through the paradoxes surrounding Naharin as a contemporary figure and Gaga as a practice that has come to represent contemporaneity in dance in the ways described above.

The Character of Gaga

Briefly, a Gaga class offers a guided improvisation. An instructor certified by Naharin gives movement prompts (such as float, quake, groove, connect to the horizontal space, taste something good in your mouth) accompanied by evocative images and metaphors (for instance, as though you are submerged in water, like you have snakes running through the length of your body, like your spine is a chain) and each participant interprets these instructions as they see fit. Rather than replicating a precise series of steps or telling the body what to do, practitioners are encouraged to listen to the body's impulses and connect to the pleasure of movement (gagapeople.com). Thus, each participant moves continuously (instructors assert an explicit directive to never stop moving) with the same dynamic qualities as everyone else in the room, but movement choices are personal to each participant. Importantly, Gaga classes are always held in rooms without mirrors, which encourages practitioners to attend to their immediate physical sensations rather than respond to or replicate a visual image or shape.

Naharin insists that Gaga is less a self-contained technique than a “toolbox” (Tanzraumberlin 2015; Galili 2015) to be used by anyone for self-research: a system by which to identify and move beyond one's limiting physical habits to discover “new” and pleasurable possibilities for movement. For the Batsheva company members and dancers (both students and professional) around the world, however, the codified directives and

terms used in a Gaga class produce a highly specific and recognizable physicality. For example, one of the predominating sensations of a Gaga class is a feeling of floating and an embodiment of liquidity. Practitioners are asked to imagine that they are submerged in water and to move accordingly. This often produces a supple, fluid quality in the arms, and slow, circular motions in the pelvis and shoulders. During floating moments, the body takes a quiet, internal tone. An equally prevalent directive is that of aggressively shaking or quaking the body. This produces a frantic, violent, spastic effect where limbs are tossed around and the whole body takes on a vibratory quality. Gaga also encourages movers to make choices that might exceed anatomical realities. For example, instructors ask practitioners to imagine that their bones have grown too large for their skin and to move as though their bones are stretching beyond their bodies. This produces a quality of exaggerated, outstretched movement and attends to the horizontal space beyond the body's kinesphere. A hallmark trait of Gaga is sinking the pelvis low to the ground with knees opened out to the sides in an exaggerated fourth position.⁷ Most importantly, these qualities are layered onto one other without cancelling each other out, meaning that physicality is designed to intensify, rather than diminish, over the course of the hour-long session. Practitioners are often asked to increase or decrease the "volume" of their movements without losing any movement details. Gaga's distinctive physicality comes from the accumulation of and quick switches between these oppositional movement dynamics without transitions.

⁷The ballet tradition has a standardized set of five positions for the legs and feet. A dancer standing in fourth position has both legs outwardly rotated from the hip. Either the right or left leg is in front of, slightly distanced from the opposite leg, and slightly crossed in front of the opposite leg. A ballerina's weight is centered between the two feet.

The overall aesthetic of a Gaga body is that which changes deftly and instantaneously between soft, liquid, relaxed properties and intensely muscular, explosive, driven ones. Hence, Gaga is a practice of navigating embodied contradictions. I add to this, however, that the discourse underpinning Gaga is also fraught with contradictions as an improvised practice with clearly codified principles and vocabulary terms, a method that asks practitioners to tap into sensations that are imagined, and as a practice that claims to be personal and idiosyncratic yet produces a distinctively recognizable aesthetic. These paradoxes are held within this overarching nomenclature of the contemporary.

Methodology

The disciplinary framing for this research spans several areas. First I situate this research as a project within the field of dance studies (Morris 2009; Dodds 2019). Already interdisciplinary, dance studies allows me to contextualize Naharin within a canon of work that privileges the dancing body as an epistemology and discourse. In order to situate the contemporary as a paradigm in relationship to the categories of the modern, modernist, ballet, and postmodern, I follow and build on the historical and theoretical framing of these movements as put forth by dance scholars such as Sally Banes (1987), Susan Au (1988), Susan Manning (1988), Mark Franko (1995), Jane C. Desmond (1997), and Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick (2003), and Gay Morris

(2006). These works historicize dance genres and offer critical perspectives on the ways in which dance forms are contextualized in practice.

In terms of work within dance studies that build on dance histories to create critical theories I look to Foster (1986, 1997), DeFrantz (2002, 2011), Kraut (2015), Kedhar (2014), Osterweis (2013), Martin (1998). All of these texts foreground the material dancing body as a text for understanding dynamics of power and politics. These scholars ground theory in material practices and contextualize those practices in real world contexts. As my research engages Gaga as a popular form I use the work of popular dance scholars Barbara Cohen-Stratynier (2001/02), Julie Malnig (2001), and Sherril Dodds (2011) as they problematize the discreteness of the popular as a category.

While I claim that Naharin and Gaga are global phenomena, I simultaneously situate them in the context of their geopolitical place of origin and current home base. I approach Israel using current critical scholarship in the areas of culture and politics rather than history.⁸ I incorporate points of view of Israel culture from Rosenthal (2003), and Uri Ram (2007) as well as Palestinian perspectives from Lila Abu-Lughod (2007), Ariella Azoulay (2011, 2013), and Omar Barghouti (2011). For the history and analysis of dance in Israel I incorporate the research of Gaby Aldor (2003), Ruth Eshel (2003), Judith Brin Ingber (2011), and Deborah Freides Galili (2012, 2013, 2015) and Nicholas Rowe's (2009) article on dance in/of Palestine.

As a hybrid term, I approach the category of "the contemporary" from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. Aligned with my rationale for using critical dance studies,

⁸Although history as a discipline is not without criticality, the history of this particular country and region of the world is extremely complex. The content and implications of its competing histories exceeds the scope of this dissertation.

my ideas on the contemporary are in conversation with scholarly work on performance of the contemporary moment as well as theories of the contemporary in/as embodied practice. San San Kwan's (2017) essay "When is Contemporary Dance?" has been indispensable as a source that coalesces the many issues and angles from which to interrogate the contemporary in dance. I also utilize the work of André Lepecki (2004, 2006, 2012, 2014) and Rudi Laermans (2015), whose scholarship theorizes live performance as well as places live performances in conversation with critical theories of temporality.

I also look to studies and theories of globalization as a hallmark framework for the contemporary moment. I use the work of Jameson and Miyoshi (1998) and Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2011) to scaffold my thinking around the circulation of social, political and economic information. Rustom Barucha's (2000) text more directly addresses the flows of artistic and cultural phenomena and how theater can be theorized in the current age of globalization.

I utilize several practical methods for this research. I conducted autoethnographic research in Gaga classes mainly between 2011 and 2016.⁹ Logistically, this method was the most appropriate given that Gaga classes require participation: there are no spectators allowed in the studio. During this period I attended Gaga/dancers classes in several New York City dance studios including Gibney Dance (formerly known as Dance New Amsterdam), Peridance, and Mark Morris Dance Group. I participated in Batsheva's official New York City summer intensive in 2014 also held at Mark Morris Dance Group

⁹Although I continued to take Gaga/dancers classes after 2016, (including some virtual classes on Zoom during the global COVID-19 pandemic), the bulk of my concentrated research occurred between 2011-2016.

in Brooklyn. I attended a Gaga/people class at Beth Elohim Congregation in 2011 taught by Naharin and at the Mark Morris Dance Group during 2014-2015 with multiple instructors. I also participated in the Gaga intensive held at the Suzanne Dellal Center in Tel Aviv in the summer of 2016. I privilege this embodied research as a trained, professional dancer in order to evidence, analyze, and conceptualize the physical experience that Gaga produces. I follow in the approaches of dance scholars such as Marta Savigliano (1995), Barbara Browning (1995), Sally Ann Ness (2003), and Priya Srinivasan (2011) whose formative ethnographies capture their embodied experiences with the dance form while critically reflecting on how their positionality impacts their analyses. In different ways, these authors' works also implicate the ways in which the geographic, cultural, and political contexts inform the dances they study.

Informing my experience with Gaga and Naharin's choreography is my position as a dancer trained in Western concert dance and a Jewish American with familial, emotional, and personal connection to Israel as a state and culture. I therefore incorporate conversations with other participants of the summer intensive in Tel Aviv in 2016 as a way to gain critical perspectives. I asked them to reflect on their backgrounds in dance, their preexisting familiarity with Naharin and Gaga, and about their experience in the intensive.

My methodology also relies on discursive analysis. In terms of understanding how Naharin situates his work and his practice, as well as how others have engaged with his work, I analyze the language used and published by Naharin, Batsheva dancers and instructors, and Batsheva as an institution. I also examine how Naharin and Gaga are discussed within both critical and scholarly discourse. Naharin and his work have been

described, reviewed, and examined in numerous newspapers, dance magazines, Jewish magazines, and blogs. In the absence of extensive scholarly work on Naharin and Gaga specifically, I privilege the critical and journalistic impressions and perspectives as crucial documents of ephemeral live performances that are otherwise lost.

That said, I rely heavily on the small amount of published scholarly research on Naharin and Gaga. I utilize several of the articles and a book written by certified Gaga instructor, administrator of Gaga Movement Ltd., and writer Deborah Friedes Galili (2009, 2012, 2013, 2015) as a foundation for Naharin as a choreographer and Gaga as a movement practice. Her work also contextualizes Gaga as an Israeli practice. While Galili's work offers first-hand knowledge of Gaga and its development as a method, her status as a certified instructor and executive administrator of Gaga Movement Ltd. prevents some of the more critical analytical inquiries. I rely on Meghan Quinlan's extensive research as presented in her doctoral dissertation *Gaga as Politics A Case Study of Contemporary Dance Training* (2016) and her published articles "Gaga as Metatechnique: Negotiating Choreography, Improvisation, and Technique in a Neoliberal Dance Market" (2017) and "Freedom to Compete: Neoliberal Contradictions in Gaga Intensives" (2018). Quinlan offers rigorous critical perspective on Gaga in the context of Israeli politics, and Gaga as a physical training practice in the context of neoliberal political and economic frameworks. I build upon Quinlan's research by expanding the paradigm of contradictions and addressing Naharin's choreographic work, which is largely absent from Quinlan's research. Following Susan L. Foster (1986), who argues for the importance of examining movement in a performance context, I provide close analysis of some of Naharin's choreographic works including *Naharin's Virus* (2001),

Max (2007), *Last Work* (2015) and *Echad Mi Yodea*. Examining Gaga as it informs Naharin's choreography, as well as his choreography in its own right as an artistic product is a significant part of what distinguishes this dissertation from current existing scholarship. I also acknowledge the research of Einav Katan (2016) in *Embodied Philosophy in Dance: Gaga and Ohad Naharin's Movement Research*. As an approach to Gaga as an embodied philosophy, Katan's work falls outside the scope of my project methodologically. However, I build upon the foundation she establishes for the Gaga body as a critical, thinking entity.

Naharin was the subject of two documentaries by Israeli filmmaker Tomer Heymann: *Out of Focus* (2007) and *Mr. Gaga* (2015) which aired on the popular streaming platform Netflix through 2020.¹⁰ I attended a screening of *Mr. Gaga* as a part of the Gaga summer intensive in Tel Aviv in 2016. Seeing the film in the context of the intensive and talking to fellow participants about it greatly informed my impression of the film and my perspective on Naharin himself. I subsequently attended a screening back in New York City in 2017 and attended a talkback with the director. Naharin is also the subject of an episode in a new Netflix documentary series entitled *Move* (2020). I engage critically with these documentaries as sources of background information on Naharin, footage from his rehearsal processes, as well as how he desires to be portrayed to the public.

Dissertation Structure

¹⁰While *Out of Focus* was available for viewing on YouTube for several years, it is currently not accessible on that platform. *Mr. Gaga* is also no longer streaming on Netflix.

Chapter One, *Articulating the Contemporary*, examines the various definitions and critiques of the contemporary in concert dance in order to contextualize Naharin's contribution to and significance within this category. This chapter presents perspectives put forward by San San Kwan (2017), André Lepecki (2012, 2014), Ramsay Burt (2004), and Mark Franko (1995) who have elaborated upon the development of dance genres in relationship to historical time: specifically the ontological intertwining of dance, movement, and modernity. I also consider dance scholar Rudi Laermans' (2015) discussion of contemporary choreography as a deconstructive theory of virtual presence. I present the implicit challenges to ideas embedded in those definitions raised by dance scholars Ananya Chatterjea (2013) and Nicholas Rowe (2009) to trouble the accessibility of contemporaneity for non-Western artists and styles.

Interventions by Chatterjea and Rowe also establish globalization as a dominant framework within which to understand the relationship between contemporaneity and movement. Scholarly literature on globalization by Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (1998), Zygmunt Bauman (2001), and Rustom Barucha (2000) addresses the flow of people, goods, information and capital aided by modern technology, and provides a vital framework within which to understand Naharin's success and impact. I also rely on the sociological work of Uri Ram (2007) who considers Israel as a microcosm for examining how globalization manifests within and impacts national social, economic, and political systems.

To examine how Naharin's work reveals and critiques the contemporary, I explore how Gaga embodies and exemplifies four traits and thematics that I argue distinctively characterize the contemporary moment: disclaiming, survival, revival, and

the role of the popular. The remaining four chapters elaborate upon these key thematics which I argue characterize the tensions of the contemporary evident within the artistic work of Naharin and Gaga as a movement language.

Chapter Two, *Disclaiming as Choreographic Politics*, focuses on Naharin as an Israeli artist and his choreographic work in its geopolitical context. I examine Naharin's rhetoric of disavowing politics in his work within what he has publicly stated or published about his movement philosophy, and the public and scholarly discourse surrounding Naharin as an Israeli artist. I contextualize this analysis with scholarly work on the state of Israel (Rosenthal 2007; Abu-Lughod 2007; Barghouti 2011; Azoulay 2011; Azoulay and Ophir 2013) as well as within the history of dance in Israel (Eshel 2003; Aldor 2003; Brin Ingber 2011; Spiegel 2013; and Galili 2012, 2013, 2015). I illustrate the aesthetics of political disavowal through close analyses of three of Naharin's works *Naharin's Virus* (2001), *Echad Mi Yodea* , and *Last Work* (2015) as a way to understand how politics manifests choreographically.

Chapter Three, *Never Stop Moving: Gaga as Survival*, offers a response to a critique of dance as movement in contemporary choreography. This discussion places the extreme physicality that Gaga produces and demands in conversation André Lepecki's argument for stillness as the ultimate critique of the medium of dance (2006). This chapter also deals with Gaga as an improvised practice. Using the work of Danielle Goldman (2010), I engage with the implications of the excessive, continuous movement Gaga produces for dance's capacity for meaning.

Chapter Four, *A Toolbox for Revival: Availability as Universality for Contemporary Ballet and Modern Dance* addresses Naharin's impact on other dance

styles and the resulting paradoxes. I discuss how Naharin positions Gaga as a “toolbox,” and how this approach revives contemporary ballet and modern dance, as genres struggling for relevance in the wake of the contemporary demand for “the new.” I use the case studies of former Batsheva Dancer, Gaga US coordinator, and choreographer Danielle Agami to examine the merging of Gaga with ballet, and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s performance of Naharin’s repertory to explore the benefits and limitations of Gaga’s “toolbox” on historical dance genres in the contemporary moment.

Chapter Five, *Contradictions of Ownership and Authority: Contemporary (Re)articulations of Popular in Gaga/people* addresses the significance of Gaga’s non-professional manifestation. Like the contemporary, the category of the popular is contested and slippery. In this chapter I examine Gaga/people through the lens of popular dance. I rely on popular dance scholarship put forward by Sherril Dodds (2011) and others (Malnig 2001; Cohen-Stratyner) to address the significance of distinguishing between “dancers” and “people” and the ways in which a manifestation of Gaga for non-dancers signals Naharin’s desire to reach beyond the world of concert dance. This chapter also uses Anthea Kraut’s (2015) work on copyright respect to issues of authorship and ownership as Gaga circulates outside the world of concert dance.

Ultimately, I examine Naharin as a commercially and artistically significant, popular, contemporary figure whose work contains significant contradictions. In doing so I reveal some of the most pressing paradoxes of the contemporary with respect to concert dance in the early twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 1

ARTICULATING THE TERMS OF THE CONTEMPORARY

Ohad Naharin is a choreographer from Israel, discursively situated as “contemporary” with a globally circulating movement practice and distinctive aesthetic style. In this chapter I explore the complex label of the contemporary as it identifies and describes concert dance practices in the early twenty-first century. Weaving together dance scholarship on the contemporary and critical theory, I contend with this fraught label as a way to contextualize Naharin discursive reputation, as well as his work and its circulation. I examine how Naharin and his movement language Gaga are uniquely positioned to articulate and critique contradictions around historical time, geopolitical place, and stylistic genre that arise through the category of the contemporary as a signifier for dance practices of the present moment. As an internationally recognized choreographer, I also engage with scholarship pertaining to globalization in order to understand how Naharin is positioned within a fluid, hybrid system of international exchange.

A Contentious Equation of Time and Genre

A basic dictionary definition of “contemporary” is that which is current in historical time or sharing the same historical period (m-w.com). Yet, when it comes to dance, meanings and implications of contemporaneity prove slippery. On the one hand, the contemporary can signal anything that is current. On the other hand, much like the signifiers of modern and postmodern dance, with respect to aesthetic practices the label of the contemporary also marks certain styles or traits that may become fixed. Thus, the

contemporary, much like the modern and postmodern, is simultaneously a structure of time and a signifier of concrete, material practices with defining stylistic qualities. Like the contemporary, Gaga also slides around definitions as well as movement possibilities. The modes of embodiment Gaga produces, its surrounding discourse, and the way it both influences and refracts the broader field of concert dance reveal the mechanisms by which the contemporary functions.

Dance scholar San San Kwan's (2017) essay "When is Contemporary Dance?" was responding to a moment of confoundedness regarding the classification of modern and contemporary technique classes being offered in her department. Historical modern techniques such as the Graham technique were still being taught as foundational training for all dance of the present moment, even though the dance department had evolved beyond this technique as central or foundational. This evolution reflected the innovations from emerging choreographers in the field, as well as the fact that due to the passage of time, these older forms were no longer of the present time. Thus, the term "modern" no longer seemed accurate. Further complicating the issue, the term "contemporary" was not a completely appropriate replacement for "modern," because while it denotes the present, the term is also associated with discrete styles of dance like lyrical dance and competition dance which are not part of the department's curriculum. This revealed to Kwan the multiple contexts for understanding contemporary dance, and, importantly, "that the term is not fully translatable across those contexts or even within them" (2017, 38).

Furthermore, "[d]espite, or perhaps because of, these contextual differences, there remains anxiety over the need to identify specific aesthetic markers under the category 'contemporary'" (38). The anxiety surrounding the temporal and stylistic categorizations

of modern and contemporary dance indicates an identity crisis for the styles and institutions they classify in the current moment. Kwan's questions about what the contemporary signifies and modifies poise it as a highly contentious term.

Social theory scholar Rudi Laermans (2015) describes the contemporary as a poststructuralist plurality that exceeds an all-encompassing theory. "The field's internal heterogeneity," he offers, "conditions the possibility of an active but unavoidably multiple theorizing, vainly in search of the ultimate object it discursively addresses and co-constructs" (26). For Laermans, the contemporary is, on the one hand, too fractured and diverse to be totalized, but is, on the other hand, created and defined by the act of its own labeling. Laermans' conceptualization suggests that as a plurality, the contemporary constantly (re)creates itself and (re)defines itself on its own, endlessly differentiated terms. As I will argue, Gaga is a practice perfectly poised to fulfill this definition, as it is designed to perpetually (re)create movement. Laermans (2015) offers that contemporary dance is ultimately an "empty category or signifier that is repeatedly used in strikingly divergent ways to indicate, examine or contest what is at stake" (73-4). In this sense, the contemporary label points to issues of the moment as a position of criticality.

Dance scholar Ann Cooper Albright (2010) defines contemporary dance as practices tied to the historical period of the early 2000s, rooted in Euro-American modern and postmodern dance. Although Albright claims that the work of the contemporary "takes on the hybridity of contemporary culture," she echoes Laermans in that she names contemporary culture as that which is "at once deconstructionist and visionary" (191). In other words, insofar as contemporary culture uses and discards the past, the contemporary both interrogates and reimagines itself as an outgrowth of the past, as well as something

unique. As I will argue later in this dissertation, Gaga's structure as a "toolbox" exemplifies this paradox of claiming and disclaiming historical past.

The now well-known debate between dance scholars Sally Banes and Susan Manning captures the problem of conceptualizing dance practices as strictly historical, temporal designations (Manning 1988). Manning famously problematizes Banes' (1987) portrayal of the postmodern as that which naturally developed out of modern dance, in line with a teleological cycle of rejection of the methods and approaches of what came before and the inevitable institutionalization of radical practices.¹¹ Indeed, the trajectory of modern dance was also framed as a process of moving away from representation and external references "in order to create an increasingly abstract 'pure dance'" (Burt 2004).¹² Manning focuses on the radical methods for questioning conventions of choreography by the artists of the Judson Dance Theater (1962-1964) and argues for the ways in which their contributions should not be conceived of as extensions of the modernist teleology.

That Naharin's dancing and choreographic career began in the American modern dance context is significant for understanding his intervention in the conversation about dance and the contemporary. Naharin started his formal dance training at the age of twenty-two with Martha Graham during her time creating a new work for The Batsheva

¹¹Modern dance became ubiquitous as a term due to its usage by *New York Times* dance critic John Martin, writing about Martha Graham in 1933.

¹²Mark Franko also discusses the historical progression of modern dance in this way (1995).

Dance Company.¹³ Under Graham's direction Naharin created the role of Esau in *Jacob's Dream* (1974) and subsequently moved to New York to dance for Graham in her company.¹⁴ Naharin left Graham's company after only six months, presumably to broaden his technical experiences and eventually to devote time to his own choreographic projects.¹⁵ Despite Naharin's relatively short stint dancing in Graham's company, the impact of her influence on his technical training and choreographic sensibility cannot be underestimated in terms of how her modernist style is both present in and rejected by Naharin. The extent to which Gaga serves modern dance companies in the contemporary moment will be elaborated upon in Chapter Four. Suffice it to state here, Gaga comes out of and is practiced in the context of its modern dance lineage, in which innovative ways of moving reject perceived limitations in dance's capacity to convey so-called authenticity or individual expression through movement. Gaga also follows the legacy of American postmodern dance, which deconstructed both movement and choreography in its questioning of the relationship between meaning and movement (Banes 1987; Manning 1988; Reynolds and McCormick 2003; Morris 2009). Following a historical phase in which both modern and postmodern philosophies operated (following the

¹³Martha Graham was the artistic advisor from 1963-1975. Jane Dudley served as artistic adviser from 1968-1969. Graham was one of many American choreographers and choreographers primarily working in America who would set work on the Batsheva Dance Company including Donald McKayle, Pearl Lang, Jerome Robbins, José Limón, Anna Sokolow, Paul Sanasardo, Paul Taylor, Mark Morris, David Parsons, Doug Varone, Elisa Monte, Elizabeth Streb, Doug Elkins, Barak Marshall, William Forsythe, and John Jasperse.

¹⁴Graham choreographed *Jacob's Dream* for Batsheva dancers in honor of the Batsheva Dance Company's ten-year anniversary.

¹⁵While in New York Naharin also studied ballet at Juilliard, Butoh, and Limón technique.

Judson-era of the 1960s through the late 1980s when Naharin began making work), the development of Gaga appears noteworthy as a practice that responds to the ongoing sense of crisis with respect to the expressive capacity of movement and the possibility of presence that marks the contemporary moment in dance.

Dance scholar Ramsay Burt transitions this critique to the contemporary with respect to the postmodern in his lecture “Undoing postmodern dance history” for a colloquium on “Constructing Contemporary Dance” in 2004. Burt argues that postmodern dance was no longer useful term for describing that which is new or innovative by young dance makers. The term “contemporary” had taken root earlier, but became ubiquitous in the 1990s, serving as a neutral term for encompassing what was happening in the present. Burt characterizes this obsession with the present as, “a dialectic of exhaustion and reaction whereby dancers, having found an older style boring and unfulfilling, have turned instead to find something new” (Burt 2004).¹⁶ Far from indicating exhaustion with movement or a rejection of motion’s possibilities for the new, Gaga presents the opposite: a (re)turn to and embrace of movement.

Indeed, as critical acclaim evidences, one of the reasons Naharin has received the amount of attention he has is for his approach to generating movement that looks and feels “new.” Without a systematic order, predetermined combinations of movements, and as improvisation highly personal and idiosyncratic, Gaga is theoretically an engine for producing new movement. Indeed, one of its core principles is concerned with preparing the body to constantly morph and change in its dynamic qualities. As I will argue,

¹⁶The ways in which Gaga confronts tropes and trends of exhaustion are the subject of Chapter Three.

however, even these qualities do not prevent Gaga from being a discrete, recognizable style. Further, in the way that it is marketed to circulate, Gaga also claims to be a neutral practice available to anyone and everyone regardless of experience in its formation as Gaga/people. Yet, as I will show, this formation has thus far been limited and remains associated with Naharin as a living figure to the extent that it cannot be totally neutral. Thus, Gaga exemplifies the paradox of the simultaneous possibility and impossibility for the new and the neutral promised by the contemporary.

The Contemporary as Criticality

André Lepecki's 2014 definition in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* designates the contemporary not as a set of static practices, a modifier of what is current, or even as the next wave of artistic rejection of its historical antecedents, but rather as a critical attitude and intellectual practice within choreography. Lepecki follows philosopher Giorgio Agamben's (2009) theory that the contemporary artist is in a unique temporal position, "out of joint" with their present time (2014, 41). For Agamben, what is immediate cannot be apprehended, and the contemporary artist's fractured position with the present, simultaneously within time and removed from it, is thereby able to offer critical perspective. Contemporaneity thus has a paradoxical relationship with time as "that [which] adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism." For Agamben, the artist, with a perspective on his or her current moment, is slightly out of his own time. With this paradoxical relation to their own time, the artist is able to use the past to illuminate the present. Lepecki follows Jacques Rancière's assertion that this fractured

positionality, a contorted twisting toward the past in order to more clearly see the present, is a paradox contained within the notion of the contemporary.

Lepecki locates contemporaneity as a choreographic approach or strategy that allows the artist to “present to [its] audience, reflectively, the very social, political, corporeal, and representational conditions for dance to exist” (41). In other words, what makes a choreographer contemporary is the ability to take as her subject the apparatus of choreography itself, and deconstruct it as such. The contemporary work is not necessarily a dance that happens to be created or performed in the current moment, but one that takes a critical attitude about the history and ontology of dance itself. Importantly, this trait spans time, and can be identified in works of both past and present. Lepecki attributes this sensibility not only to choreographers of the current moment such as French conceptual choreographer Jérôme Bel,¹⁷ but also to choreographers formerly associated with Judson Church movement and the postmodern era of the 1960s and 1970s who challenged modernist approaches to movement, such as Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Trisha Brown.

Lepecki quotes dance scholar Randy Martin to argue that choreography becomes contemporary thanks to the critical act of affirming dance as “a disruptive other to the fixating powers of representation” (2014, 41). Thus, for Lepecki, contemporary dance is that which deconstructs and plays with established traditions of meaning making through movement to destabilize the singularity of representation. By exposing how choreography works in order to ask what dance might be, the contemporary’s critical

¹⁷Lepecki also mentions Brazilian choreographer Lia Rodrigues, and Austrian choreographer Michael Kliën.

leverage enables a grasp on an otherwise unreachable understanding of present; contemporary dance is that which plays with the past to deconstruct its present, revealing conditions of the “now,” both radically present and always already haunted by its past.

By Lepecki’s definition, Naharin would be excluded from the category of the contemporary, as his work does not explicitly or critically engage with dance’s past. His work does not operate conceptually in conversation with dance’s history in the same manner as those choreographers Lepecki recognizes. I argue, however, that Naharin’s work does the very opposite. Unlike the Judson postmodernist deconstruction of the process of making dances, or Lepecki’s contemporary artists, Naharin’s choreography and his method for generating movement, Gaga, embrace radical presentness and the *act* of, rather than the *art* of moving. Without claiming that Naharin’s choreographies are devoid of or lack deeper meanings (I argue for the impossibility of totally disclaiming meaning in Chapter Two), I assert that his works, particularly those choreographed in the 2000s onward, especially engage the act of dancing itself. In this way, Naharin offers an example of contemporaneity as emphatically embracing movement. Further, as will be discussed in chapters two and three, Naharin’s unwillingness to directly engage critically becomes his particular means of critique.

The first work of Naharin’s I saw live was the Batsheva Dance Company’s performance of *Max* (2007) at the Brooklyn Academy of music in March of 2009.¹⁸ The ten dancers are dressed in simple, unembellished, dark colored tank tops and shorts, tight to the skin like leotards. There is no set, only dramatic shifts in the color of lighting that

¹⁸As a dancer and avid spectator, I attended the performance without knowing anything about Naharin or the Batsheva Dance Company. This piece played a significant role in leading me to write a dissertation about Naharin and Gaga.

mirror the extremes of dynamics and tone in the dancers' movement. The piece itself is sixty minutes of extreme shifts between movement dynamics. *The New York Times* critic

Gia Kourlas (2009) writes of one particularly striking section:

In one repeated image, the dancers are arranged in a triangle. It's a thrilling high-speed sequence, but there is also a soft, yielding approach as they pull their arms into their chests and thrust them out; raise their elbows and jiggle their heads; cross their palms on their chests; and raise their faces to smile. This marks the only time they give in to such an ordinary expression, but their grins are almost maniacal.

Kourlas captures the mix of gestures the dancers execute clearly at break-neck speed. Making the sequence even more exhilarating to watch is that, although there is intense, rhythmic music, they execute these movements in perfect unison against the beat of the music. Unceremoniously, the lights fade to black on their exaggerated smiles, as if to foreclose a deeper reading of emotion in this moment.

Another striking moment is a duet between two women. The women move about the stage in a corporeal conversation, alternating turns moving. Some movements are exaggerated or warped versions of social dance phrases like the Charleston, other movements made the dancers look more like chickens bobbing their heads. These moments that gesture toward popular dance moves or animalistic behavior appear in many of Naharin's works, and have the effect of pointing to the absurdity of the distinction between dancing and human (or animal) behavior. Duets on stage are often read as relationships or communication, yet this duet is about neither. Just as any almost-recognizable word in the soundtrack of the piece turns out to be gibberish, the lack of "meaning" in this duet points to its embrace of movement as meaning. The duet ends with a rare moment of contact between dancers in *Max*, the women pressing their pelvises together with their torsos bent away from one another, but continuing to peck

their heads toward each other's faces, moving closer and closer until it looks as though they will smash the other's nose if either of them makes a false move. The image is simultaneously absurd and thrilling. All of the extreme movement in the piece is performed without artifice. As critic and dance writer Deborah Jowitt (2009) notes,

It interests me that no matter how unusual the movements, the performers never look bi-polar or neurotic or wacky. Nor do they call attention to their prowess. Unlike those executing the trendy, willfully peculiar, yet overtly virtuosic steps in a work by, say, Jorma Elo, Naharin's dancers look as if everything they do is an extension of who they are.

Jowitt's impression captures Naharin's attitude toward the power and function of dance to connect to, as the press notes state, "the pleasure and pain of being alive" (quoted in Kourlas 2009). In this way, Naharin's work positions contemporary movement as radical presence: without emotion, reflection, or the (de)construction of representation and meaning. Through extremes of speed, size, intensity and figuration, Naharin's movement language contorts the familiar in order to draw focus onto dancers dancing, thereby calling attention to the act of dancing. In this way, Naharin critiques dance as movement, rather than the act of choreography in the way that Lepecki defines it.

Articulations of Place

Being out-of-time is not simply a being-in-the-past. As dance scholar of contemporary performance practices Noémie Solomon (2015) suggests, the contemporary makes connections across time, people, and movements to imagine what is to come. Contemporary dance, she claims, "carries within it heterogeneous temporalities, places, and identities. Never just here and how—or simply what we think we see—the dancing body seems to travel near and far, across divides and intervals" (7-8). The contemporary is a choreographic tactic and mode of performative presence engaged in a

play with time: making connections both across time, and between disparate people and places (2015). Solomon's extension of Lepecki's definition loops the issue of place into the contemporary's scope, making it a structure of time across space. Indeed, Lepecki's conception is troubled by dance scholars who foreground the issue of place as a critique of the accessibility of the contemporary. Notably, Lepecki's examples include mostly Western artists at the helm of contemporaneity at the exclusion of artists creating choreography from outside the West.

Dance scholar Ananya Chatterjea's 2013 article, "On the Value of Mistranslations and Contaminations: The Category of 'Contemporary Choreography' in Asian Dance" troubles Lepecki's 2014 definition by problematizing the universality of contemporaneity when it comes to location on the global map. Chatterjea argues that on global stages, the contemporary label seems to apply to dances created in the global North and West, and follow in the lineage of Western concert dance traditions. When it comes to choreographies produced outside the West, however, the contemporary label is modified by its attachment to geographic location and thus limits that location to a contemporaneity still somehow lagging behind. For example, dances created in India today are labeled as contemporary Indian dance rather than contemporary dance, and presented as in conversation with their tradition. They are therefore seen as updating a tradition, rather than being new or critical. Because of India's marginalized position in global modernity, its dance practices are not afforded the same kind of distance from their traditions, precluding them from being contemporary in the same way that Western styles can. While Western concert dance has the privilege of being received as new and innovative, concert dances from the global margins are caught in a double bind between

the imperative to modernize and a demand for authenticity. The realities of Western hegemony inevitably complicate a universal relationship between dance practices, modernity, and contemporaneity as the possibility of critical distance. In other words, although globalization promises universal modernity, it is only Western dance that is afforded the privilege of being contemporary.

The history of the West's hegemonic control over notions of modernity was formulated by anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983), who charted the troubling realities of cultural exchange between Western anthropologists and their subjects. Fabian developed the concept of "denial of coevalness" whereby peoples and cultures geographically distanced from the industrialized West are not considered to be operating on the same trajectory of modernity and thus not sharing the same chronological time as their observers. This necessarily positions certain cultures as fixed with unchanging traditions, and equates geographical distance with difference and otherness. This perception marginalizes their modernity and has troubling consequences for the categorization and evaluation of cultural practices from the fringes of globalization even in the current global moment.

The foreclosure of tradition and the past in contemporary dance echoes Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) critique of historicism. Chakrabarty explains the Western tendency to make "modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global *over time*, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it" (7). This "'first in Europe, then elsewhere' structure of global historical time" for Chakrabarty is the erasure of local histories by a Western conception of the singular, linear, forward progression of history that makes certain institutions, practices, and

beliefs of the past appear anachronistic in modern times (7). As dance artist Fabian Barba (2015) argues, historicist perspectives reify the past and turn it into an object of knowledge. Moreover, “the frontiers between what properly belongs to ‘the past’ and what to ‘the present’ are also being policed’ in terms of geo-cultural location” (7). It is thus a historicist understanding of history as a single linear progression that allow us to understand how the present of one geo-cultural location can be understood as the past of Europe, the West, or the global North. Similarly, it is this perspective that, as Chatterjea argues, allows contemporary dance to replace traces of pastness in order to affirm itself.

Nicholas Rowe (2009) has also discussed the limitations of the contemporary as a descriptive category. Rowe focuses on dance from the Palestinian territories as an example of a non-Western geographic region considered to be out of step with its modernist course. He argues that labels like contemporary, modern, and postmodern fail to account for the specificity of a local context that can offer both cultural and political significance to dances made in the present that still have a relationship to traditional forms.¹⁹ Chatterjea (2013, 12) also mourns the loss of aesthetic diversity and specificity of meanings that results from a lingering hierarchicalization of Western aesthetic values despite a dominating rhetoric of globalism promised by the notion of international exposure and access. She exposes the contradictions between the universalist rhetoric and actual practice:

While the idea of the ‘global’ seems to offer the promise of a range of aesthetics and a range of bodies from different contexts marking widely different understandings of beauty and power, the reality of what materializes on stage

¹⁹The example of Palestinian dance is particularly relevant in this context insofar as dance from Israel is charged with a history that obscures Palestinian influences. Meghan Quinlan (2016) discusses the ways Israel’s national and cultural identity was in many ways predicated upon the coopting and erasure of local dance practices.

seems to suggest that there are some unspoken conditions for participation on the global stage that ensure some kinds of conformity. ... Slow and steady erasure of difference in the name of globalization.

Chatterjea emphasizes that this erasure of difference comes from a demand for a Western standard of innovation (specifically, the unique voice of the individual artist genius) that comes into conflict with the role of tradition in non-Western dance cultures.

Indeed, the contemporary as a status is highly contingent on geo-cultural context. Both Rowe and Chatterjea compellingly argue that dance from geo-culturally marginalized places are excluded from the contemporary because of a perceived inadequacy in Western modernist terms. This not only limits how these dance practices can be received aesthetically, but also actively blunts their ability to be critical in the sense discussed above. By limiting them to the maintenance of their traditions or relegating them to the stage of “still developing” and on the path to “full realization of modernity,” the label of contemporary actually precludes them from “doing” the same kind of political-aesthetic work as contemporary dance from the West or, per Chatterjea’s classification, the global North.

Connecting/Collapsing Time and Place: Globalization

A crucial dimension of the context for the contemporary is globalization. As one of the most defining phenomena of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that names and describes the contemporary moment, globalization is difficult to capture as a totality. It refers to the seemingly boundless flow of information, goods, capital, images, ideologies, people, and cultural practices across the planet, all made possible by modern technology and media. As literary and political theorist Fredric Jameson explains, “[T]he

concept of globalization reflects the sense of an immense enlargement of world communications, as well as of the horizon of a world market, both of which seem far more tangible and immediate than in earlier stages of modernity” (Jameson & Miyoshi 2004, xi). The large-scale movement of information and capital also has social and cultural implications: globalization is produced by, reflected in, and embodied by the movement of people and their creative practices.

Jameson uses Roland Robertson’s formulation of globalization as “the twofold process of the particularization of the universal and the universalization of the particular” (2004, xi) to describe the means by which the local (geographically contained with historically contextualized cultures) has access to and can be accessed by the global (geographically fluid, far-reaching, and imbued with a dangerous rhetoric of universal adaptability or translation). Importantly, Jameson identifies this multi-directional configuration as a *space of tension* between the binary structures it seems to produce between the specificity of the local and the inclusivity of the universal. This dual process becomes global culture’s central feature, what Arjun Appadurai (1996, 27) describes as “the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another and thus to proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular.”

Indeed, as the category of globalization is complex and ambiguous, the possibilities for global dance practices are similarly unstable and amorphous. In terms of cultural practices, globalizing forces have paradoxical effects: local culture is both exposed *to* influences from ‘far away’ or the ‘outside’ and is simultaneously exposed *by* these ‘far away’ places. With this increased exposure to diverse aesthetics, the rhetoric of

globalism revolves around inclusivity, tolerance of diversity, and the celebration of dance as a universal language. Rustom Barucha (2000) has argued that this process of exchange, both interculturally between national borders and intraculturally within national borders can be fraught with blockages, ruptures, and breakdowns. Many of these same tensions come to bare on global dance practices and its surrounding discourses. This space of tension between the impossibility of the universal and the local/particular is key to understanding a tension of the contemporary in dance, as well be elaborated upon in Chapters 2 and 4 of this dissertation.

Zygmunt Bauman (2011) has described the fluidity that characterizes the globalized world as heralding a new kind of modernity. Bauman argues that on the political level, the phase of history focused on the building of nation-states and solidifying “sovereign territories with impermeable borders” has passed. In its place, modernity is now ‘liquid,’ “with its fuzzy and eminently permeable borderlines, the unstoppable (even if bewailed, resented and resisted) devaluation of spatial distances and the defensive capacity of the territory, and an intense human traffic across all and any frontiers” (428). Irreducible to any one category of study or singular mode of comprehension, globalization has economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions that constantly intersect, blur, and (re)configure one another. Like the plurality of the contemporary, globalization is irreducible to any one category of study or singular mode of comprehension, and has economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions that constantly intersect, blur, and (re)configure one another.

Gaga is a product that is informed by and circulates within and this liquid, globalized cultural marketplace. As a form not only developed by an acclaimed choreographer of the current moment but designed as a system that can continually reinvent itself, Gaga has the potential to always carry the cache of the new: a highly valuable commodity in a constantly moving and changing environment (Bauman 2007) saturated with images and information (Baudrillard 1983). As a quality of Western concert dance, which has historically valued a close relationship between novelty and creativity, Gaga exemplifies the demands of the contemporary for newness, global circulation, and universal appeal with individual and local signatures.

Conclusion

The contemporary in dance is a complex category that escapes efforts to pin it down. The contemporary is defined by its paradoxes: of a particular temporal moment and any present moment; untethered to geographical space and entrenched in the dynamics of power of its place of origin; seemingly neutral and universally accessible and highly individual or local; novel and always already in relationship to the past. As a practice that embodies these paradoxes, Gaga is the example par excellence of a contemporary practice.

The chapters that follow elaborate on the ways Gaga produces, embraces, and embodies these paradoxes: at the level of bodily practice (in the language of Gaga as a method designed to hold and articulate contradiction in the body), at the level of its conceptual arrangement as choreography, its proclaimed neutrality and undeniably political valence, its claim on the new while bound up with the past (its relationship to

classical ballet and modern dance), and in terms of the nature of its mass appeal and global circulation (Gaga/people).

CHAPTER 2

DISCLAIMING AS A CHOREOGRAPHIC POLITICS

Naharin's artistic work does not address these topics directly, however, his connection to Israel as a citizen making work within and, in some cases, for the state is unavoidable. Indeed, I argue that Naharin engages Israeli politics precisely through indirectness: rhetorical and choreographic tactics of disclaiming. This chapter explores the ways in which the political manifests in Naharin's work through disclaiming and as an embodied state of survival. Gaga is Naharin's movement language and thus the foundation for his choreographic aesthetic. It therefore offers an embodiment of "Israeliness" as a holding of contradiction in the body. Further, I assert that Israeli politics is an unavoidable context for interpreting meaning in Naharin's choreography. As Naharin denies politics in his work, the very notion of disclaiming and the negation of politics itself thus becomes the mode by which the political functions in his choreography. Thus, disclaiming becomes a choreographic politics for Naharin as a choreographer living and creating in Israel.

In what follows, I first contextualize the relationship between concert dance in Israel with Israel as a geopolitical place and lived space to make a case for how "Israeliness" informs Gaga as a choreographic method. I rely on the work of dance scholars who have focused on dance in Israel such as Deborah Friedes Galili (2012, 2013), Gaby Aldor (2003), Ruth Eshel (2003), Brin Ingber (2011) and Nina Spiegel (2013), and Meghan Quinlan's (2016) work on the ways in which Israel as a modern state relied on cultural production to assert its power as a political entity. The remainder of the

chapter is structured around the context and content of three of Naharin's choreographic works. I will utilize the movement description and close analysis to engage with these works and I rely on journalistic and media discourse to contextualize these close readings. First, I explore the scandal surrounding a scheduled performance of *Echad Mi Yodea* (1993) for Israel's 50th anniversary celebration in 1998. I discuss this incident to establish the inextricable, yet fraught, relationship between the Batsheva Dance Company and the Israeli state: a relationship that can also be read within the choreography of this piece. I then engage with *Naharin's Virus* (2001) as a work that expresses the limitations of language (spoken, written, and embodied) and how, by resisting the possibility of representation, Naharin choreographs a mode of resistance as a politics of disavowal. Last, I analyze *Last Work* (2015) to illustrate how Naharin's explicit disclaiming of politics manifests as shared affective tension. It is amidst this tension, generated by the dancers and experienced by both spectators and performers, that produces a feeling of survival that characterizes Israel's ongoing state of conflict with its Arab neighbors and Palestinian inhabitants. In each case, I assert that the political is present through conceptual disclaiming and disavowal.

Dancing Israel as a space of contradiction

One of the most fundamental and complicated aspects of contemporaneity in concert dance concerns space. I deploy space in this context in Michel de Certeau's sense of space as "practiced place ... constituted by a system of signs" (de Certeau 1984, 117). For de Certeau, while a place is defined as an area designated by the physical existence of and proximal relativity between elements, space is place in action: defined by those who

move and function within a place to create meanings in relationship to it. In terms of contemporary dance, space refers to not only the geographic origin of a choreographer but, more importantly, the local and geopolitical contexts in which work is created, received, and circulated relative to the particular history of dance in its specific cultural context. As discussed in Chapter One, contemporaneity, like modernity, has become a privileged temporal and stylistic status afforded to choreographers from certain parts of the globe, mainly the West.²⁰ The country of Israel, in its complex geopolitical and cultural situation as an outpost of Western political, economic, and cultural values within the Middle East, provides a unique lens through which to understand how local context informs global readings of dance.²¹ It follows that it is of paramount significance that Ohad Naharin was born and raised in Israel, trained in Israel in Western movement traditions by Martha Graham, studied dance in the United States and Belgium, and makes work in Israel with a company of international dancers. In other words, Israel as a political and cultural environment is the primary context for the creation, development, and critical interpretation of Gaga as the foundational movement material for Naharin's work, as well as for Naharin's choreography. Furthermore, Israel's relationship to modernity and contemporaneity as both temporal and aesthetic categories sheds light on the ways in which Gaga offers an articulation of contemporaneity as a politics of "refusal to claim."

²⁰Here I refer to the West as the geographic regions of North America and Europe, but also in the sense of The West as hegemonic political and cultural powers seeking an exclusive claim on temporality (see Fabian 1983) and control of cultural narratives (see Said 1978).

²¹Israeli Sociologist Uri Ram discusses the way global capitalism and democracy have developed and impacted Israeli modernity (2007).

Israel, as a political entity and lived space, cannot be separated from the context of conflict. Israel's very ontology as a modern state is predicated upon the concept of survival: as a homeland for Jews, formed by the United Nations in 1948 in the aftermath of the Holocaust; as a state constantly threatened by violence and war from surrounding Arab countries from the moment of its inception through the present day; and as a state that both incites and inflicts violence from within its borders as it threatens the survival of the Palestinians who have been physically and culturally displaced and oppressed by Israeli government policies (Rowe 2009; Abu-Lughod 2007; Azoulay 2011; Azoulay and Ophir 2013; Barghouti 2011).

Yet, as artistic director of the Batsheva Dance Company as it has come to represent and is in part funded by the government, Naharin cannot escape an association with the Israeli state. International performances by Batsheva are frequently protested, mainly by supporters of the Boycott Divest Sanction (BDS) movement for cultural boycott of Israel for its violations of human rights of Palestinians. In cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Edinburgh, Paris, Wellington, and London, protesters have picketed outside theaters carrying signs, waving Palestinian flags, playing drums and performing Palestinian *dabke* dances (Eshel 2003). Canadian and Italian publications have also opposed Batsheva's performances, citing fiscal sponsorship by the Israeli state. In some instances, protests are met with counter-protests in support of Israel. In Israel itself, there are no direct protests of Batsheva for this reason. However, Batsheva has offered Gaga classes in support of The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI). Eight hundred people attended the Gaga class on May 27, 2018 which took place in a large aircraft hangar. Naharin denies explicit political meaning in his work, in spite of critical

interpretation and public reception. When pressed, Naharin publicly sympathizes with the Palestinian cause, but disagrees with boycotting/protesting outside his shows.

Responding to boycotts during world tours in 2012, Naharin (quoted in Iyer 2015) stated:

Batsheva is an example of a group of people whose activity, philosophy and work methods represent the potential for change...I would support the demonstrations and boycott if I thought this could help the Palestinian problem. ...If I thought this could help advance a solution to the Palestinian problem, I would disrupt my own performances.

Even without explicit political content, Batsheva's performances are contextualized as Israeli, and Batsheva's inextricable linkage to the Israeli state contextualizes any international performance in a conversation with Israeli politics.

Historically, concert dance in Israel has been intimately connected to the experience of living on and within the land itself. In the early twentieth century dancers living in Palestine, influenced by and often trained in German expressive dance (*Ausdruckstanz*), created dances and moved in ways that reflected life in a land that offered a new topographical terrain and a multitude of cultural influences (Aldor 2003; Brin Ingber 2011; Spiegel 2013). As dance scholar Gaby Aldor (2003) explains, early dancers and choreographers combined their European training and expressive sensibilities with the ideals of Zionism: "a split with the past, the building of a new society and a new attitude toward the body ... *a new approach to movement and space*, and, in the case of Zionism, the creation of a 'new Jew,' spiritually and *physically connected to the land*" (82, emphasis added). For Jews who came from the diaspora, where the Jewish body had been long associated with negative stereotypes, the freedom to express a new identity in a new land manifested as an embodied sense of pride, strength, and robustness of a body that was physically engaged with working and

cultivating the land (Brin Ingber 2011; Rossen 2014). Choreographically, this resulted in dances that took up space, with large, sweeping, indulgent movement and joyous leaps into the air.

Yet, as Aldor (2003, 83) argues, a sense of conflict between the modernist spirit of the times and the sociocultural realities of the place itself was already evident in the newly forming Israeli culture:

The attempt to grasp in modern terms what was considered local and authentic created an asymmetry. Israel was not the developed, homogenous industrial society against which the German body-culture rose, but rather a poor land, exotic to the European eye, bound by religious traditions, its borders negotiable.

Dancemakers of the early-twentieth century negotiated a unique set of issues: these concerned representations of local, “authentic” cultures; the role of religious identity intimately tied to the existence of Jews in this geographical space; and a sense of a body in an ambiguous space, both in terms of its physical borders as well as its cultural identity. The mix of a European modern aesthetic philosophy, with a Western modernist attitude of searching for perceived authenticity within local cultural forms, formed the specifically Israeli character of these early dances. Thus, dance makers were always already navigating an ambiguous line between the possibility of a “new Israeli” identity, formed by a new way of life in a new country, and its simultaneous impossibility, informed by the inevitable ties to the cultures that Israelis had both inherited and displaced.

During the 1950s and 1960s concert dance in Israel shifted its interests. With funding from the Baroness Batsheva de Rothschild, the Batsheva Dance Company was founded in 1964 as a repertory company for mainly American modern dance. Martha Graham served as its first artistic director, and the company trained in Graham technique

and performed many of her works.²² In the 1960s through the 1970s Batsheva performed works by significant American choreographers such as Donald McKayle, Talley Beatty, José Limón, Pearl Lang, Sophie Maslow, and Jerome Robbins (www.batsheva.co.il). This shift was significant, as it indicated a move away from the voices of local choreographers (although these voices were not entirely absent) and an effort to legitimize Batsheva by way of American concert dance. Moreover, Batsheva's formative years as both outpost and repository of American modern dance points to the ironies around the separate constructions of both "Israeliness" and "Americanness" in dance. While American choreographers staged their works on Israeli dancers as a way of solidifying their own relevance and universality outside the United States, Batsheva adopted the formal and subjective concerns of American choreographers in an effort to legitimize their existence as an Israeli company.²³

This conflicted sense of connection to Israel as a space remained an undercurrent in the choreography of Israeli dancemakers throughout the decades.²⁴ As Israel developed

²²Americans Jane Dudley and Paul Sanasardo also served as artistic directors after Graham. Significantly, Batsheva was the only other company aside from Graham's at that time that could perform her works. As described on the Batsheva Company website: www.batsheva.co.il. Accessed May 13, 2021.

²³A full discussion of the history of the construction of Israeli cultural identity is covered by Meghan Quinlan' (2016) work. She writes, "The blurring of East and West, old and new, and religious and secular was a strategic undertaking by the Zionist politicians...which connected the political project to the land and history of Palestine while also aligning the political movement with European values, modernity, and progress" (124).

²⁴This conflicted sensibility about the relationship between space, aesthetics, and Israeli politics also manifests in the field of architecture. Similar to architecture in Israel, which has implications in real space, dance in Israel has real implications of real bodies living and moving in Israel. See "Borderline Disorder" (Efrat 2002).

over time, choreographers continued to reflect and refract the increasing and relentless anxiety and violence that characterized Israel's existence as a Jewish nation. When dancers sought to break away from the influence of American modern dance that had prevailed during the 1950s and 1960s, to assert a uniquely Israeli choreographic voice and vision, the sense of space shifted radically from openness to a sense of intense, frenzied containment: insecurity about the existence of the body in space (Aldor 2003). Choreography began to turn inward to local concerns, and reflected the pains of a growing nation afflicted with an awareness of the precariousness of life in a country constantly threatened with violence. By the 1990s, Israeli concert dance had shifted from unbounded celebration of the new, natural land to work with "unstable form, constantly negotiated space, people made vulnerable in their attempts to fix space, bodies that constantly undermine themselves" (2003, 82). Naharin's choreography was among those Israeli choreographers whose aesthetics reflected this sense of a conflicted awareness of the body in space, bodies that at once are free to express the quotidian human experience, while simultaneously evidencing an anxiety around the permanence of that freedom. Thus, Naharin's choreography converses with Israel as a geopolitical nation, and as a state of being informed by an environment of conflict.

Gaga as Embodied Contradiction

This conflicted relationship with/in Israeli space also manifests at the level of the body: the movement that informs Naharin's choreography. As a corporeal training and choreographic tool, Gaga serves as the aesthetic foundation for Naharin's work. I argue that Gaga is both shaped by and rearticulates the negotiation and embodiment of concrete

realities about Israel as a lived environment charged with conflict and contradiction. Sociologist Marcel Mauss' (1935) concept of techniques of the body is useful here to conceptualize the way in which cultural frameworks consciously and unconsciously shape and inform embodied habits. In other words, the specific way the body executes universal human tasks is actually extremely local. As a technique of the body, Gaga cultivates a specific way of moving that claims to be neutral, yet inevitably embodies Israeliness in the way it centers around managing a state of dynamic contradiction in the body and cultivates a readiness to react.

Indeed, the entire method and its delivery are based on accessing extremes and making immediate, radical shifts across opposing states. The movement prompts in a Gaga class are wrought with binary dynamic contrasts. A directive to “feel oneself floating in water” is contrasted with a feeling of readiness to explode at any moment. One may be instructed to feel a supple, snakelike quality vertically in the spine while simultaneously holding the bound tension of a bodybuilder horizontally across the shoulders and upper back. One may be instructed to indulge in the pleasure of feeling a soft, cool air touching one’s face, and then be asked to slap one’s own skin and to welcome the overwhelming stinging sensation. A consistent practice is to be told that one is only working at a small percentage of effort and to ramp up that effort of movement, or “volume” as it is commonly designated, until one has reached a more fully engaged expression. Gaga instructors constantly ask practitioners to sustain moments of physical intensity, often working around the pain of injury through the discomfort of exertion to

find pleasure.²⁵ This mode of being able to simultaneously activate contradictory dynamic principles, as well as the ability to make sudden shifts between dynamic extremes requires a certain mode of availability in the body, which is Gaga's goal and pedagogical essence.²⁶

Practicing Gaga produces a physical contradiction of reality and representation in terms of how sensations are activated, deployed, and expressed. Sensations (for example, floating or warm lava flowing through the body) are offered to the dancer to be felt and expressed through the body as though they are real. A scene in *Mr. Gaga* (2015) for example, captures a moment in an audition for Batsheva where Naharin asks a young male dancer to improve a hammering gesture. Naharin instructs him to execute the gesture as though that one motion was responsible for reviving a dying person: he has only one chance to save someone's life by hitting him as hard as he possibly can. Thus, Gaga attempts to avoid representing action, but rather strives to *be* the action itself. This energy and sense of immediacy is how Aldor (2003), Galili (2012), Spiegel (2013), Eshel (2003), and others have defined "Israeliness" in dance: as a readiness that reflects a hyperawareness of environmental extremes and an uncertainty with regard to space. In this way, Gaga is aligned with a more general concern of contemporary dance in Israel with borderlines: between body and space, the visible and invisible, pleasure and pain, and status quo and instability.

²⁵I observed and experienced these prompts concepts presented in the numerous Gaga classes I have taken in New York City, as well as the Gaga intensives I attended in New York City and Tel Aviv. These concepts are also publicized on the Gaga website, and in the documentary *Mr. Gaga* (2015) by Tomer Heymann.

²⁶I elaborate on Gaga's goal of availability in Chapter Four.

Thus, politics are nowhere explicit in this method. However, the intensification of extremes, sudden shifts in intensities, and the cultivation of an awareness of one's own potential to move through space all serve to ready the body to respond. Without claiming this as a political position, Gaga nonetheless reflects political conditions. As the building blocks of Naharin's work, Gaga thus infuses his choreography with these intensities without resolving them.

Locating Naharin's position: *Echad Mi Yodea*

The relationship between Naharin's choreography to the state of Israel is inevitable. Yet Naharin resists nationalistic or political readings of his work. This double bind is exemplified through an analysis of his iconic choreography, *Echad Mi Yodea* in its performative context. In what follows, I argue that, in spite of Naharin's disavowal of the political, the movement and choreography are intimately tied to the geographic, cultural, and political landscape in which they are created.

Echad Mi Yodea, a section of the evening-length work *Anaphase* (1993) that has subsequently become its own entity, is perhaps the most widely recognized piece of Naharin's choreography. It is a consistent staple of *DecaDance*, a constantly evolving hybrid piece that features different sections of Naharin's choreography. Batsheva performs *Echad Mi Yodea* frequently both in Israel and internationally (Steinberg 2021). It is also one of the most frequently commissioned pieces by Naharin to be set on other companies, such as the Nederlander Dance Theater in 2015 and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 2013. This particular section has been performed by the Batsheva Dance Company to mark several important occasions, such as the 50th

anniversaries of the Batsheva Dance Company and of the state of Israel itself. It has therefore garnered status as an iconic work that represents both Naharin as choreographer and artistic director, and Batsheva as a quintessentially Israeli company (Sulcas 2007).

An event that illustrates the strong connection between Batsheva under Naharin's artistic direction and the state of Israel was a performance slated for Israel's jubilee celebration on May 14, 1998. The Batsheva Dance Company was to perform as part of a variety show celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Israel's independence. The extravaganza was to be internationally televised, and Israel's political elite and many foreign dignitaries were in attendance. The title of the show, *Pa'amoney Hayovel*, or "Bells of the Jubilee," had important connotations. In the bible, the jubilee year marked the release of the enslaved and forgiveness of debts: a celebration of freedom. In 1998, the state of Israel had become a rapidly modernizing, industrializing, and democratic state in the Middle East. As Ram (2007, 32-33) explains:

In fewer than five decades, Israel ha[d] experienced in condensation the full path of modern industrialization of the past two centuries, from the mechanical and textile revolution in the first third of the nineteenth century...through the chemical and electrical revolution centered in Germany and the United States in the late nineteenth century, to the electronic and then digital revolution that developed initially in the United States and spread to western Europe, Japan, and Southeast Asia in the second half of the twentieth century and at an intensified pace since the 1990s.

After fifty years of fighting wars and struggling for economic and political stability, the 1990s signaled a shift in Israel's sense of stability as a state, as well as its integration into the globalized marketplace. Ram (2007, 69), citing an advertiser, comments on the struggle around maintaining an Israeli identity versus integrating into a global (American economy) for economic survival:

Who is my enemy today? My corporate rivals. So this is not Americanization. Each one of us may find themselves a consumer or worker under some global framework...It is sad but inevitable...are we so devoted to America? Are we losing our Jewish identity? Where are our pride and independence? We tried to postpone the end. It is a tough decision but an inevitable one. If we are not integrated we will not survive. Maintaining independence spells suicide. So by the time we lose our identity completely, it will be of little concern. It is a tough process but an inevitable one.

Here, Ram reflects the growing pains of a country facing a crisis presented by modernization: to assert its independence and strength as a nation that can stand alone from its benefactor, or to engage with the global market at the expense of that independence. Ultimately, Israel, however exceptional the circumstances of its existence as a modern state, must become a part of the global exchange.

The 1990s also marked a significant moment for contemporary dance in Israel, and particularly for the Batsheva Dance Company. Between the opening of the Suzanne Dellal Center for Dance and Theater in Tel Aviv's historic neighborhood of Neve Tzedek in 1989 and Naharin's appointment as Batsheva's artistic director and choreographer in 1990, Israel signaled a desire to foster a unique dance culture reflective of the Israeli experience. For *Pa'amoney HaYovel*, Batsheva was prepared to dance *Echad Mi Yodea*. This seemed a particularly fitting selection for the celebration of a country undergoing a transition from fledgling Jewish democracy to modernized society. Set to a rock version of a traditional song from the Passover Seder, this piece of choreography fuses images of the traditional and the secular, while featuring Naharin's distinctive movement style.²⁷

²⁷Passover is a Jewish holiday that occurs in the spring, commemorating the release of Hebrew slaves from Egypt and celebrating freedom. The Seder is a ritual retelling of this biblical event.

The seven-and-a-half-minute piece begins with the dancers (ranging in number depending on the particular performance) in a wide-legged stance in front of a semi-circle of folding chairs. They hold their positions, motionless, while a disembodied voice slowly articulates the phrase, “*The illusion of beauty, and the fine line that separates madness from sanity, the panic behind the laughter, and the coexistence of fatigue and elegance.*” This epigraph describes a state of holding contradiction, pointing to the precarious border between the hidden and the visible. It summons simultaneously psychological and physical precariousness. It suggests that things are never what they seem on the surface, or rather that extremes are never as far apart as one might want.

In his text *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (1998), Randy Marin argues for the political and dance as complex and constantly shifting. Given that the political significance of dance is equally complex and multifaceted,

it becomes possible to notice a proliferation of political activity throughout the social fabric and not simply confined to what are formally considered to be political institutions. ... dance is encumbered with political significance beyond a given tactical stance toward a particular issue, commitment, or moment. (2)

Martin’s argument, that neither dance nor politics has to enact a singular message, supports the possibility for a contradiction of meanings and ties to the politics of Israel within Naharin’s work.

An intense, rhythmic drumming begins. In perfect unison, the dancers sink slowly into their chairs, settling into a seated position. Their torsos are hunched over yet hold a visible amount of tension, arms resting on their thighs, heads slightly hung, although not completely released. They seem, at once, alert as though could be waiting for something to happen, and dejected at the possibility that nothing will. They remain seated and still through the first verse of the song:

Echad mi yodea? (Who knows one?)
Echad, ani yodea (I know one)
Echad Eloheynu (One is our god)

While the word *Eloheynu* repeats four times, the dancer on the end of the semi-circle suddenly bursts from her chair, forcefully thrusts her pelvis forward, and throws her torso and arms into a deep backbend. This motion ripples rapidly down the line of dancers until it reaches the last dancer on the right end, who throws himself onto the floor, faced down. He remains laying while the rest of the dancers reclaim a wide-legged stance and shout the final line of Hebrew: “*Sheh ba’shamayim u’va’aretz*”(Who is in heaven and on earth) before sinking back down into their seats. Their tone is serious, both controlled and desperate. They use the full force of their voices, which vibrates their upper torsos and shoulders, yet their bodies remain still, containing the force of their vocalizations.

The structure of the choreography reflects the song’s cumulative structure, with movement phrases adding on to the chain as the lyrics count up from “Who knows one?” to “Who knows thirteen?” For each phrase the dancers add a series of movements: thrashing arms, legs, heads and torsos in and around their chairs. The distinctive aspect of this piece is that the dancers thrash and flail together as a group, almost entirely in unison, a difficult feat considering the extreme full-bodied movement on and off of the chairs to the fast pace of the rhythm with no fluid transitions from one movement to the next. The group unison is punctuated by short moments when an individual breaks away from the group. Notably this occurs during the sixth verse when a dancer shoots himself up to stand on the chair while the others cower on the floor, and the last dancer in the line who throws himself on the floor at the end of every round. Although the movement that each dancer executes is frenzied and explosive, each dancer always remains tied to his or

her chair, and they remain contained within the structure of the rote system. Even in the moments that sparked the scandal, when the dancers tear off their suits and haphazardly throw them into the center of the semi-circle, it is controlled chaos.

Any audience member could watch the dance, hear the song, and recognize this structure, yet there is likely added significance for Jewish audiences. Named for its soundtrack, *Echad Mi Yodea* is performed to a Hebrew song from the Passover Seder. In a talkback following the New York premiere of *Mr. Gaga* (2015), Israeli director Tomer Heymann expressed that this song had particular significance for Jewish Israelis.²⁸ For many secular Israelis, the Passover Seder is one of the only explicitly religious rituals in which they participate. Heymann was clear that this song would have been recognized by Israelis in this context: that no matter the level of religious affiliation, it would have significance to Israelis as the time of the year to be with one's family, seated around a table, singing this particular song. Not one of the traditional melodies, *Echad* is instead performed to a rock version by the Israeli band Tractor's Revenge. This juxtaposition of secular music to traditionally religious lyrics speaks to one of Israel's fundamental contradictions of being a secular and religious place (Rosenthal 2003). Nevertheless, it is likely that many Jewish audience members from Israel or in the diaspora would recognize the song and relate it to the same traditional event.²⁹ Thus, the reception of the piece in its

²⁸The documentary was completed and had been screened internationally prior to its premier in New York City on January 12, 2017 in the Walter Reade Theater at the Film Society Lincoln Center. Heymann mentioned that they had made changes and final edits to the film just before the New York screening. I attended the 2017 screening and had also seen the film in Tel Aviv in 2016. Though I had only seen each version once, the 2017 version seemed to cast less criticality on Naharin as a figure, whereas in the previous version Naharin appeared to be a bit more calculated in his interviews.

²⁹Mass popularization of Gaga which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

local context is one that implicates a relationship to Judaism, however enigmatic and conflicted.

Aside from the soundtrack, it would be difficult to interpret any of the movement as explicitly Jewish: there are no identifiable representations of Jewish symbols or embodied gestures. Indeed, although many critics have associated the costumes with Orthodox Jewish men, when performed by other companies the costumes are often described as business suits. However, as dance scholar Rebecca Rossen (2014) argues, Jewishness in dance cannot be reduced to essentialist representations. Rather than deploying the term “Jewish dance,” she opts for “dancing Jewish” to convey a process of identity formation in constant dialogue with existing tropes and structures. Although the role of Judaism in Israeli identity exceeds Rossen’s scope of American modern and postmodern dance, it is clear that Naharin intentionally choreographed this piece to this song for reasons beyond its structure. The dance, therefore, conjures a specific relationship to religious Judaism, albeit avoiding an explicit message about it one way or another. Indeed, it is the resistance to a clear relationship to the religious context that is the driving force of the piece: it expresses the inescapability of the tension between group conformity and individual freedom. The audacity of the piece is that the frantic, explosive movement executed by each dancer is contained by the exact unison of the group. The dancers do not interact with one another; there is no dialogue, there is no acknowledgement of any other dancer on stage. Yet, they move, shout, and disrobe as a group. Moreover, the moments of individuality are static: one dancer shoots up onto his chair, standing statuesque and still above the rest, or fallen and splayed onto the ground.

Aldor (2003, 90-91) interprets this as an acknowledgement of a “terrible linkage to the Tribe, a bondage that holds you tight” and, as such, “the work did not *represent* a problem, it *was* the problem.” Aldor’s interpretation makes clear that as a piece that is structured as a working-out of a question of identity, *Echad* is a puzzle without resolution.

The piece ends at the end of the thirteenth and final verse. All dancers have stripped down to tank-tops and underwear, their clothing and shoes strewn about the stage, save the one dancer on the end who remains fully clothed, faced down amidst the physical clutter and residual energy of what has just occurred. The remaining dancers stand solemnly in front of their respective chairs, looking simultaneously exhausted from a long and arduous process and somehow still maintaining a sense of readiness and anticipation of what might happen next. The resulting effect is that which feels unsettled and unresolved.

What became most significant about this particular performance of *Echad Mi Yodea* on May 14th 1998, however, was that it never took place. As recounted on the podcast “Israel Story,” (Harman, 2016) and in a filmed testimonial on YouTube (Heymann 2018), the day after the dress rehearsal *Pa’amoney Hayovel*’s producer, Shuki Weiss, called Batsheva’s then Co-Artistic Director, Naomi Fortis, in a panic. He informed her that a religious woman observing the dress rehearsal had been offended by the costumes, and had subsequently contacted the government to voice her concerns. The woman was apparently less bothered by the costumes the dancers wore for the majority of the piece: black pants and suit jackets, white collared shirts, and black hats, reminiscent of the ultra-Orthodox male’s traditional clothing. Rather, she was scandalized

over the fact that the dancers aggressively strip off these articles of clothing over the course of the piece, revealing their bare limbs (Harman 2016). Not only was this considered immodest, but as dance scholar Judith Brin Ingber (2011, 387) has explained, it was scandalous for the act of undressing to have occurred while singing a “religious” song in which the name of G-d is mentioned. This, according to the audience member, was an inappropriate representation of Jewish values on a stage for the celebration of a Jewish country.

When Naharin was asked to change the costumes, he insisted that his choice was purely artistic, and was not intended to be provocative in that particular way. The conflict worked its way up through government ranks, and Naharin was called into in a meeting with Israel’s then-president, Ezer Weitzman, who threatened to defund the company unless Naharin agreed to change the costumes. Naharin found himself in the position of being responsible for the company’s reputation and survival at the expense of his artistic freedom. He agreed to change the costumes, but threatened that he would resign as artistic director of Batsheva immediately thereafter. In support of Naharin, the Batsheva dancers ultimately refused to perform for the *Pa’amoney Ha’Yovel* event. According to dancer Adi Salant, after failing to garner support for their boycott from the other performers in the show, the Batsheva dancers left the theater just as the Israeli anthem began to play.

This event signified more than an exercise of resistance to censorship: the “*Gatkes* scandal,” as it later became known, sparked a culture war in Israel that reflected the

country's growing pains as a modernizing Jewish democracy.³⁰ That Naharin and his work were at the forefront of this movement has important implications for the complex, often contradictory, positioning of Naharin and his work in relation to the country of Israel and its controversial politics. The Israeli government's involvement with Batsheva, and Naharin's adamant distancing of his work from a national agenda or set of values both reinforces and challenges the relationship between the two entities. Despite Naharin's insistence that his work is apolitical, the *Pa'amoney Ha'Yovel* incident places him in a conflicted, yet undeniable, relationship with the authority of the Israeli government.

Upon closer analysis, however, the issue of the dancers stripping down to their underwear is far from the only potentially political dimension of this work. I argue that *Echad Mi Yodea* stages the conflict that characterizes Israel's identity crisis as a Jewish Democracy: as that which is free to express itself as a modern state while ontologically bound to the limitations of its founding principles. Thus, the political can be read in the fabric of the work, rather than merely the fabric worn by the dancers. *Echad* deals in the tensions between freedom and confinement, as well as becomes an ideal emblem for the contradiction that is Naharin's non-positionality as an Israeli choreographer. Naharin has consistently denied overt or specific political messages in this piece. However, with *Echad* he has choreographed a struggle around conformity and freedom that, within an Israeli context, has undeniably political connotations. As critic Anna Kisselgoff (1998) noted, "The incident underscores how dance, because it evokes rather than states, can

³⁰Weitzman purportedly suggested that the dancers wear *gatkes*, the Yiddish term for long underwear.

become part of a political agenda.” Ultimately the piece addresses the struggle between the identity of the individual, and the place of the individual within a group. Naharin is less concerned with solving the puzzle than highlighting and dwelling in the space of the conflict and ambiguity. Like the epigraph at the beginning of the piece suggests, there is a contradiction in every state of being. *Echad* epitomizes this contradiction.

Naharin's Virus: Between the Personal and the Political

Batsheva's non-performance of *Echad Mi Yodea* in 1998 raised the question of how to interpret the political significance of, as well as potential political meaning within, Naharin's works. Despite Naharin's adamant denial of intentional activism and insistence upon the neutrality of his artistic expression, however, the controversy around the valence of freedom in terms of artistic expression within the specific Israeli cultural context, only solidified a relationship between Naharin and the Israeli state. It is this paradox, the negation of engagement with politics that ultimately reifies its presence, which defines the nature of the political in Naharin's work. In 2001, Naharin created *Naharin's Virus*, which perhaps most exemplifies how this paradox operates within his choreography. On the surface, the title suggests the romantic subject of art itself: the source of the individual artistic genius and that which inspires Naharin to move and choreograph. Upon close analysis of the choreography, however, the content of the work suggests how the personal is always already politically conscious. Furthermore, the political for Naharin as an Israeli artist functions as negation: the refusal to claim itself as such. It is with *Naharin's Virus* that Naharin offers his artistic signature, literal and metaphorical, on an ambiguity

of meaning that allows Naharin to negotiate his identity as an Israeli artist working in a country that cannot escape the conflict at the heart of its ontology.

Naharin's Virus is Naharin's interpretation of Austrian playwright Peter Handke's 1966 play, *Offending the Audience*. The connection between the dance and Handke's play is crucial for understanding how Naharin creates meaning through movement, as well as how the political operates through negation within and around Naharin's choreography. Handke's avant-garde work, which is difficult to categorize, has been described by theater scholars as an anti-play as it intentionally announces, and thus renounces, the conventions of theatricality and representation. For Handke, the purpose of exposing the mechanisms of theater was to make audiences more engaged with what theater could do, and thus become more aware and active in the "real world" (in Joseph 1970). *Naharin's Virus* includes much of the play's text, spoken by a performer in a suit standing atop a wall at the back of the stage. In addition to spoken text, *Naharin's Virus* utilizes writing, movement, and music as texts, which together engage the blurred line between the representational and the real that embodied expression offers as a mode for negotiating the personal and the political.

The first visible "body" in the work is not human, but rather a figure made of a flimsy material attached to a fan at its base. As air blows through the tubes of material, the human-like apparatus inflates and deflates, appearing to be undulating rhythmically to the song playing over a speaker; a Middle Eastern-sounding rhythm with Arabic lyrics, composed by Arab Israeli musician Habib Allah Jamal. Of course, the motion of the cloth is completely random: determined by the pressure of air passing through it at varying intervals. Yet, as it sways "to the music," it appears as though it has its own internal drive

in response to the rhythm. The contradictions this image offers set the tone for the entire piece. The reality of the figure is that it is not a real body, but rather a plastic, malleable, empty vessel, filled with and manipulated by air. The effect is that the figure is and is not dancing; and what moves the figure is and is not intentionally meaningful. I will return to this latter point shortly.

The contradictions continue in the form of spoken text, recited by a performer in a suit standing atop a wall at the back of the stage. The first section of text includes the following lines:

*This piece is a problem.
You will hear nothing you have not heard before.
You will see nothing you have not seen here before.
You will see nothing of what you have always seen.
You will hear nothing of what you have always heard here.
You will see no spectacle.
Your curiosity will not be satisfied.
You will see no play.
There will be no play here tonight.
You expected something.
You expected something else, perhaps.*

By negating theatricality and its promises, Handke emphasizes the ambiguous line between reality and representation of a theatrical experience in a proscenium space. In the context of *Naharin's Virus*, exposing expectations in this manner does not change them, so much as it heightens attention toward them. In promising no spectacle or surprises, Naharin blends theatricality (a façade) and transparency (reality). This strategy charges the theatrical space with a sense of ambiguous subversion as this is a performance about the act of performing. As such, he offers potential for the piece (that is, in most other aspects a conventional, formal concert dance work) to pose questions about how movement creates meaning, rather than offering definitive answers. I define formal

concert dance work in this context as a performance by a trained dance company, on a proscenium stage, which is conventional in terms of its choreographed structure, frontal staging, dancers wearing theatrical costumes, lighting, and music. In other words, the work does not, in its formal structure, challenge any conventions of theatrical performance or concert dance. Using Handke's play text as scaffolding, Naharin implicates and questions dance's ontology by naming and negating conventional expectations for what a dance *is*, or at least what it promises to do in terms of offering meaning.

There are many other moments of the work that point to, and question, what a dance is and what it can do. As the above text is read, for example, a dancer enters from stage left, holding a piece of chalk. She traces the path of her body moving across the back wall, which has become a chalkboard. She leaves a trail of her movement in the form of a carefully drawn, yet abstract, squiggled line: a marker of the memory of her movement, yet in no way a representation of the movements her body has actually executed. She breaks this line to write the Hebrew word *atem*, which translates as the plural pronoun *you (all)*: her writing mirrors the spoken text which directly addresses the spectator's presence. Writing accumulates on the chalkboard throughout the work: dancers doodle, scribble, and write words in their native languages, too small to be read by audiences in a proscenium setting.

In *Naharin's Virus* the act of writing materializes the metaphor of movement as language and mode of communication or expression.³¹ Materializing the traces of

³¹The ontological relationship between choreography and/as writing, has been theorized by scholars such as Mark Franko (2018) and André Lepecki (2004).

ephemeral movement shows both movement as the effort to communicate, as well as its failure to have a singular or universal meaning. Poststructuralist Jacques Derrida's (1988) concept of *différance*, as both difference and deferral of meaning challenges the notion that written language has immediate and singular signification, but rather that meaning can be destabilized, postponed, and played with. Derrida's notion points to the instability of the relationship between language and meaning. Naharin plays with signification through his use of movement, as the author of that movement, to communicate something highly personal. That meaning is communicated by spreading to other dancers' bodies like a virus. Naharin also seems to be suggesting that no matter what, dancing is always highly personal. Even if the virus as the need to dance originated with Naharin, each dancer is ultimately expressing themselves as individuals, aligning with the indefinitely postponed temporal nature of meaning.

The significance of the act of writing in *Naharin's Virus* becomes most apparent when, after a long section of solos performed downstage consisting of dancers executing continuous motion informed by Gaga, the lights come on upstage on the chalkboard to reveal the word *PLASTELINA*, written in large capital letters. At first glance, the word unmistakably appears to be the transliterated Hebrew word for Palestine. In her review of the piece, "Ambiguity as Text: A Blackboard as Backdrop," American critic Anna Kisselgoff (2002) even mentions, "the word Palestine is intentionally misspelled." The actual word, however, is the Hebrew word for plastic. The confusion is intentional: the signifier does not actually declare that the subtext of the work is political (in that it might be about the awareness of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict). Yet, the intentional misspelling does what Handke's text intends: to summon the idea without actually explicitly

engaging it. In other words, Naharin summons a political context, without having to claim it is a work about anything other than a meditation on what it means to express oneself through movement.

The only explicit mention of conflict and violence that appears in the work is during a solo performed by a female dancer. A disembodied female voice coming from the speakers recounts a memory of waking up on the morning of her bat mitzvah (the Jewish event signifying a girl becoming a woman and a participating member of her religious community), and realizing that “god is a human invention, like pizza.” This moment points to the act of taking the illusion or magic out of a convention. When she shares this revelation with her mother, her mother beats her. Upon discovering that she enjoys the pain, she seeks to incite her mother’s beatings, ultimately finding that her mother particularly angers to her dancing while naked. While the text is violent, the dancer’s movements are sensuous and indulgent. Thus, the dancer’s actual movement belies the description of how movement feels: an active contradiction between what the spectator is told to see and what is actually happening in the body. This contradiction is precisely what makes the work meaningful as both a meditation on what motivates Naharin to move, as well as what inevitably shapes outside readings of his choreography.

The piece ends with the entire group of dancers moving in unison: each dancer circling around him/herself for several minutes as the suited man atop the chalkboard wall shouts a barrage of insults at the audience, ranging from cruel, to crude, to comical. Like the deflation of the meaning of God, the slew of insults effectively erases their meanings, indicating Naharin’s position that broad, general meanings are ultimately empty. Eventually the text ends and the dancers continue rotating slowly to the final

repetition of the same Arabic song. Unlike the initial image, the cloth figure billowing and undulating to the music, the human dancers look mechanical while executing the carefully calculated circles. The piece ends as the dancers repeat these mechanical circles with no distinguishable pattern. The overall effect of the Arab song playing over the seemingly jaded dancers is that the tension cannot be ignored. Just as the writing is literally on the wall, the metaphorical message provokes the audience to hold the tension of the moment without finding resolution.

Within the work, modes of representation are being constantly built and then immediately exposed and destroyed. The work does not try to represent or name a problem or the specific conflict that dominates Naharin's life as an Israeli citizen. With the spoken text, he evokes the outside world; with written text he disassembles it. He only names himself, only claims to be himself, an artist independent of any motive or agenda other than his desire to move and create through movement. Rather than blocking or subverting interpretation, Naharin creates a space wherein the inscription/writing with and by the bodies demands interpretation. It seems to send a message that movement is the only way to endure the harshness of the insults, to reconcile contradiction, and to exist in the presence of constant (political) conflict. *Naharin's Virus* makes the case for how Naharin's approach to creating choreography is a survival mechanism: both on a personal level (as a human being who needs to express himself, and as an Israeli citizen) and for movement itself. The dance is a meditation on the question of existence: what it means to dance, which, for Naharin, is what it means to be.

The *Last Work*, That Wasn't

Finally, I argue that Naharin's piece *Last Work* (2015) exemplifies the aesthetic manifestation of this political apositionality as affective tension.³² In *Last Work* Naharin solidifies his tactic of disclaiming politics by creating an affective environment that serves as both metaphor for and experienced reality of what it means to live in a state of constant conflict and violence.

Naharin's rhetorical refusal to claim his work as political or engaged with Israeli politics is a position in and of itself: a paradoxical position of disclaiming. While *Naharin's Virus* functioned as way to point to the political as absent presence, *Last Work* (2015) goes further to exemplify how Israeli politics presents within Naharin's choreography as the felt tension of living within and in relationship to a state in constant conflict.

At the time of *Last Work's* debut, Naharin was at an apex of recognition: he had held the position of artistic director of Batsheva for twenty-five years; his movement language, *Gaga*, was being taught in cities all over the world; and *Mr. Gaga* (2015) had just been completed and was about to be released in international cinemas. The suggestion of finality from the title *Last Work* draws attention to the dance with the expectation that it could be his last creation. The title invites a weighted significance to the work as the artist's culminating idea: an overarching message that perhaps summarizes his total contribution as a choreographer. As such, the "threat" of this piece

³² Although Naharin would likely align his work with Brian Massumi's (2015) version of affect as a Deleuzian pre-conscious, pre-linguistic intensity, I use affect in Sarah Ahmed's (2004) sense of constructed emotion already circulating as real social and political encounters.

as his last solicits a sense of anticipation, tension, and urgency without clear resolution that permeates and defines this piece. I argue that this tension, present on choreographic and embodied levels, serves as Naharin's response to the constant state of conflict in his home region. It is tension between space and time, violence and pleasure, and the mundane and the extraordinary that epitomizes the embodied experience of living in Israel that Naharin negotiates in and through his choreography.

One of the most striking and significant conceptual components of *Last Work* serves as both choreography and set piece: a dancer wearing a long blue dress and sneakers runs on a treadmill at a brisk pace. Located upstage right, the runner's presence provides a background soundtrack and visual constant. She runs for the duration of the seventy-minute dance: her mundane effort becoming virtuosic. The effect is intermittently unnerving (the spectator is made to wonder for how long she will run), comforting (the constant hum of the machine and her steady footfalls serve as a reassuring metronome), and forgotten (the audience's awareness of her presence waxes and wanes). Although she exerts effort for over an hour, she makes no forward progress. The symbolism of her seemingly futile effort provides the dominant tone of *Last Work*. The tension created by the runner, caught in place through time, oscillating between energetic peaks and exhaustion, epitomizes the predominating effect of sustained tension through embodied contradiction.

Indeed, the overall thrust of the piece concerns building tension without a clear message or resolution. *Last Work* consists of a seemingly random series of movement phrases, shifting from one to another without clear rhyme or reason. In groups small and large, the dancers move through opaque, enigmatic formations: slowly, almost

imperceptibly building in intensity. Critic Brian Siebert (2017) described the abstract choreography with simultaneous detachment and puzzled fascination: “The dancers float on their backs like fetuses in the womb. They act like machines. They cover their faces in mesh; they seem to daven in religious-looking robes; they ride one another with suggestions of kinky sex.” Siebert’s observations capture the ebb and flow of recognizable pedestrian movement and the suggestion of recognizable symbols with a dissipation (and, hence, denial) of meaning that might arise from them. The impact of this flow in and out of strange and provocative images is, as critic Lauren Warnecke (2017) describes, a palpable shift in the balance between order and disorder: what is first simple and straightforward becomes knotty; what is familiar becomes strange. The piece never seems to come together coherently, such that one could grasp a singular meaning, theme, or purpose. The cumulative effect is one of intensely heightened tension, the slow building of expectations for clarity and meaning, only to be undermined by a lack of closure. As such, *Last Work* undermines itself: its patterns, codes, and signals for concrete meaning are built-up, only to be abandoned.

What makes the accumulation of affective tension without resolution political becomes legible at the end of the piece. Amidst an energetic climax of movement, four men station themselves upstage. One aggressively waves a large white flag: a gesture more of demand than surrender. He eventually hands the flag to the runner who holds it as she runs for the remainder of the work, emphasizing the futility of her forward motion. Another dancer screams loudly and incoherently into a microphone adding violent aural to the increasing energetic intensity. The fourth dancer has his back to the audience and shakes as though he might be sobbing or furiously masturbating. A burst of

confetti explodes from a hidden source as a crude climax. He turns around to reveal that he is polishing a rifle that, aside from the white flag, is the only other explicitly warlike symbol. A dancer constructs a pyramid structure with brown packing tape, and then proceeds to wrap and, consequently, subdue all the other dancers on stage in a web of tape, including the runner who, unlike the other dancers who are seated and motionless, continues to run despite being bound.

This moment of supposed resolution of the chaos and intensity, however, is (intentionally) unsatisfying. Indeed, the choreographic climax creates more contradictions: it asks more questions than it answers about the nature of these moments of resolution. In *Last Work*, tape binds the group of dancers as they sit on the floor, their bodies static while frozen in dynamic positions. Not unlike the effect of the contrast between the individual versus the group in *Echad Mi Yodea*, *Last Work*'s audience is left unsure as to whether this group binding is, as Siebert suggests, "benevolent or sinister" (2017). For Naharin, addressing politics takes the form of presenting choreographic contradictions and creating an overall affect of unresolved tensions. The paradoxes of impossibility resulting from possibility, violently intense moments of embodiment punctuating slow sustained choreography, the effect of heightened tension without resolution, and Naharin's refusal to solve any of the puzzles he has presented through these choreographic contradictions thus form the aesthetic of the political in Naharin's work.

The political valence of *Last Work*'s affective tension can be understood in terms of critical theorist Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of "cruel optimism." For Berlant, a relation of cruel optimism is when the thing one desires becomes an obstacle to happiness

or flourishing: when the object or site of desire creates a sense of possibility that, impedes transformation. Further, a relation is cruel,

insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of that relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation or profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming. (2)

This paradoxical relation characterizes an entrapment: a failure of expectations for what Berlant terms the “good life” promised by capitalism and democracy. Berlant writes about this phenomenon as it manifests in Western democracies, primarily post 1980s United States and Europe, where political and cultural neoliberalism have, as she argues, made daily life untenable. However, Berlant’s conception of how coping with the failed expectations for the “good life” can be applied to Israel as a democratic state moving rapidly toward modern capitalism while entrenched in a state of violent conflict. Indeed, to live in Israel is to both find normalcy amidst as well as to normalize sustained tensions created by political conflict and constant violence and threats of violence.

Last Work evokes the task of persistence and survival amidst the realities of daily life in a cruel system. To cope with this state of being seems to be the overall effect of *Last Work*, the vast majority of its choreography resting upon the magnification of one of the major principles of Gaga: to find the pleasure within the pain of intensely sustained, physically extreme movement. In this way, the predominating slowness of the movement in *Last Work* resonates with critical theorist Jacques Rancière’s notion of the distribution of the sensible. As Rancière explains, “The way the body slows down what’s going down helps to clarify the relation of living in ongoing crisis and loss” (quoted in Berlant 2011, 5). Berlant incorporates Rancière into her notion of cruel optimism as a dynamic of its shared affect. The assertion of futility of intensity, forward progress, and the slowing

down of motion afforded by Gaga in *Last Work* seems to force both dancer and spectator to dwell in the space of the present, or what Berlant termed, a radical contemporaneity.

Berlant argues:

Discussions about the contours and contents of the shared historical present are therefore always profoundly political ones, insofar as they are about what forces should be considered responsible and what crises urgent in our adjudication of survival strategies and conceptions of a better life than what the metric of survival can supply. (4)

Last Work seems to deal in this suspended space of examination: a way of coping with an environment governed through violence.

This tension also speaks to Naharin's relationship to the category and signifier of the contemporary in its desire for atemporality and detachment from place, while being inescapably bound to geography in the present historical moment. Intentionally, there is no concluding answer. Just like naming a dance as a last work without the intention of it being his final work, Naharin intends to be cryptic.

Conclusion: holding tension without resolution

I have argued that the choreography and performance of *Echad Mi Yodea* establishes the complex connection between Naharin, as the artistic voice for Batsheva Dance Company, and the Israeli state. *Naharin's Virus* crystallized Naharin's signature style with respect to how the political manifests in the space between representation and reality in his choreography. *Naharin's Virus* addressed the limits of language, and thus the futility of making both rhetorical and embodied claims about what a dance can "do" or represent. Further, Naharin utilizes a contradictory tactic of conceptual and rhetorical negation (apositionality) as a form of acknowledging or claiming.

Last Work was not the finale of Naharin's choreographic pursuits. This fact, perhaps more than anything, signals *Last Work* as engaged with more than Naharin's artistic career. Indeed, the piece, *Naharin's Virus*, does more to defy or undermine expectations, rather than fulfill them. In terms of the relationship between geographical location and eligibility in the category of the contemporary as a geopolitically specific designation, Naharin's refusal to claim his place is his political, and therefore geographical, stance. His distancing shows his desire to be outside of a closed category, so that he is not beholden to defined boundaries for receiving his work.

Naharin relies on the privilege of having this option (as an Israeli, simultaneously Western and non-western) and thus his disclaiming is a tactic that serves him and allows for his work to benefit from being personal to him, yet also meaningful in that he doesn't have to take sides or engage with political controversy. By disavowing politics, Naharin leaves his work to seem universal, not partisan. And yet, as *Echad Mi Yodea* instructs, binding to the group is inescapable for better or for worse.

CHAPTER 3

NEVER STOP MOVING: GAGA AS SURVIVAL

As discussed in Chapter 1, globalization has had an undeniable impact on the circulation of dancers and dance practices around the turn of the twenty-first century. With increased ease of long-distance travel, and a rising ubiquity of visual communication technologies such as YouTube, Skype, and Zoom, as well as social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and SnapChat, dancers have become exposed to, if not inundated by, a plethora of dance techniques, styles, and choreographic trends. Over/exposure to seemingly infinite options for ways of moving and, importantly, ways of imparting meaning through movement has created what dance scholars such as André Lepecki (2014), Susan L. Foster (2015), Anusha Kedhar (2014), and Priya Srinivasan (2011) have, in different ways, identified as a paradox in European and American concert dance in terms of the ways movement can be deployed to signify meaning. Some choreographers and performance artists have veered toward the conceptual power of physical stillness, or the fatiguing of movement as a way to resuscitate meaning (Lepecki 2006). Other choreographers have become popular for the opposite extreme: intensive physicality which values the spectacle of physical virtuosity as a precondition for its intrinsic meaning.³³ Both trends, the rejection or exhaustion of

³³European and American companies that focus on movement include STREB Extreme Action Company, and Pilobolus, and, arguably, the companies founded by former members of the Batsheva Dance Company and the Batsheva Youth Ensemble that have garnered critical attention including Andrea Miller (Gallim), Hofesh Schechter, Lee Scher and Saar Harari (LeeSaar), Danielle Agami (Ate9), Sharon Eyal (L-E-V), and partners Bobbi Jene Smith and Or Schreiber. Choreographers whose aesthetics favor minimal movement include Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, and Trisha Brown.

motion and an indulgence in motion, seem to reveal an anxiety about dance's viability in terms of its ability to signify meaning through choreographed motion.³⁴ Thus, amidst saturation and the threat of its erasure through stillness, dance as movement can be conceived to be suffering from a crisis of its own survival.

In what follows, I consider how Gaga, Naharin's system for generating movement, for sustaining constant motion, creating choreography, training the body to perform on stage (Gaga/dancers) and function in an embodied way in everyday life (Gaga/people), becomes a practice of survival. I frame survival as an emphatic (re)turn to a notion that movement can be meaningful as motion and away from movement as a vehicle for representation. Firstly, I engage Gaga, as a practice Naharin developed partially as a response to a personal injury, as a mode of survival for the dancing body in terms of its physical longevity and how it recuperates the body's potential for motion. Secondly, as a method that places value in physicality at its extremes in terms of intensity and duration, I examine how Gaga's philosophy reinforces an ontological relationship between dance and motion, challenging contemporary critiques that relocate meaning in stillness, specifically in the work of André Lepecki (2006). I use Susan L. Foster's (2015) work on hyper-physicality and Ariel Osterweis' (2013) work on virtuosity to situate Gaga among discourses on the ways extreme movement signifies meaning in the contemporary moment in dance. Thirdly, as an improvised practice, Gaga both hones and demands constant invention. Following the work of Danielle Goldman (2010) I examine the

³⁴It is impossible to generalize "meaning" in dance, but for the purposes of this chapter I define meaning as the response to the question of "why choreograph a dance?" which each choreographer answers individually and differently. Moreover, following the work set up in Chapter One with regards to the paradox of universality and individuality/locality, meaning will be different in every context.

implications of these demands as defining the conditions for artistic survival as well as the contemporary condition for hyper-motion demanded of dancers in the current professional field.

Survival of the Body

For Naharin, dancing has afforded him survival in two respects. First, as a young soldier in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), Naharin danced in an army troupe that would entertain soldiers (Heymann, 2015). As a soldier during the Six Day War in 1967, it is certain that Naharin encountered violence and death.³⁵ Without suggesting that dancing was what spared his life during this conflict, Naharin clearly links the opportunity to dance during this time to his ability to endure the state of a war he was required to fight.³⁶ Like the United States' United Service Organizations Inc. (USO) which entertains and fosters morale among soldiers, the IDF dance troupe uplifted soldiers and encouraged a sense of individual and communal connection to the national cause.³⁷ Thus, dancing was more than mere distraction for Naharin: it became synonymous with a capacity to survive and even thrive amidst destruction and constant threat to national and individual existence.³⁸

³⁵Naharin mentions witnessing violence, destruction, and death in this clip of *Mr. Gaga* (2015) without discussing any details of his experience or his specific role as an IDF soldier.

³⁶With exceptions for ultra-religious Jews, Druze, and Arab-Israelis, army service is mandatory for those physically and psychologically capable in Israel.

³⁷ See USO website, www.USO.org, accessed 17 May 2021.

³⁸The connection between Israeli nationalism and dance in Israel is discussed in Chapter Two and in depth by Megan Quinlan in her 2016 dissertation. I do not suggest

Without ever explicitly or directly linking Gaga to what it is like to endure war, violent conflict, or be a soldier, instructors encourage Gaga practitioners to navigate and sustain movement across extremes of intensity. For example, an instructor will give the practitioner ten seconds to transition from standing upright to lying on the floor. This exercise can feel leisurely and interesting as the mover navigates their limbs and joints to softly, gracefully, and strategically move from vertical to supine. The exercise successively decreases the number of seconds to get to the floor (nine seconds, eight, seven, and so on) until there is only one second to become completely horizontal or vertical. With the tempo becoming increasingly faster, the body must adjust from sequential falling to embracing a full collapse or a full recruitment of energy to stand back upright. Due to the count-down structure, the practitioner knows what is to come, and therefore must negotiate any fear of moving between full collapse, which can be intimidating, and standing up over and over in the course of a second becomes exhausting and exhilarating. Enduring this exercise despite any fear or discomfort becomes part of the experience. Instead of using movement to ignore or transcend one's present moment of experience, Gaga promotes embracing the discomfort of effort, pain, fatigue, and even fear. Gaga is, in this sense, a training in radical presence in movement.

Second, according to his public personal narrative, Naharin sustained a debilitating spinal injury as a dancer in New York in the 1980s (Perkovic 2014; Heymann 2015; Schaefer 2017). The nature of his injury both limited him from dancing the way he had previously been able, as well as precluded him from warming up his body for

here that Gaga is explicitly nationalistic, although I have described and noted critical readings of the militaristic qualities in Naharin's choreography in Chapter Two.

dancing using more standardized methods like a traditional ballet barre. In many published interviews Naharin claims that he developed his personal approach in order for him to access his own body through, around, and despite pain, as well as to move outside the confines of conventional methods. Recuperating from this injury so as to salvage his body's ability to move and, thus, resuscitate his professional career, served as the impetus for generating his unique approach to dancing.

The trope of male discovery of dance or invention of a movement technique is not unique to Naharin. Early American modern dance pioneer Ted Shawn, for example, fell in love with dance after taking physical therapy lessons to rehabilitate paralysis of his lower body following a bout with diphtheria at the age of nineteen (Reynolds and McCormick 2003; Scolieri 2019). Founder of the now ubiquitous Pilates method, Joseph Pilates, also a war veteran like Naharin, dedicated his adult life to designing a method of exercising and training the body as a response to treating several childhood illnesses (Rincke 2019). Although Naharin was already dancing professionally when he began developing his method of rehabilitation and self-training, the presence of this origin story in most of his published interviews and other modes of discourse suggests that, like Shawn and Pilates, his body's survival was dependent upon his particular movement method. In other words, movement was critically necessary for healthy bodily longevity, rather than for entertainment or aesthetic indulgence.

When Naharin returned to Israel to serve as the artistic director of the Batsheva Dance Company in 1990, Naharin offered his method to the company dancers as a supplement to their daily ballet class. "Ohad's class," as it was known among the Batsheva dancers, eventually became known by its shorthand title: Gaga. When asked,

Naharin always denies a specific meaning in the word “Gaga,” joking that the repetitive syllable was just more efficient than constantly referring to it as “Ohad Naharin’s movement language.” The gibberish word, however, connotes a state of simplicity: a return to a basic, instinctual, infantile state as a way of reaching one’s fullest potential for movement capability. The suggestion of a relationship to basic instincts speaks to survival as a state of stripping away that which is unnecessary or superfluous in order to endure.³⁹

Importantly, Gaga was designed as a method for moving around, through, and with weakness and pain in the body, rather than a treatment for pain or a strategy for eliminating pain in order to move. In other words, Naharin designed Gaga to locate the pain or exhaustion that would restrict or minimize motion and transform it into pleasurable sensations so as to be able to continue to move. Gaga became a system for Naharin’s physical longevity and thus his survival as a dancer and choreographer. These desires for survival in spite of pain and restrictive weakness are embedded in Gaga’s terminology and major concepts. A particularly illustrative example of this is a command common in a Gaga class to activate, or awaken one’s “dead flesh.” This can be achieved many different ways including imagining a warm, glowing ball of lava or magma travelling through the body’s interior, allowing the practitioner to activate dynamic sensation in spaces that cannot necessarily move on their own, such as the armpits, groin, or back of the knee. Another frequent command is to imagine being immersed in a

³⁹While the term “authenticity” is not officially present in the Gaga lexicon, the notion of moving from such a stripped down, raw place summons the modernist trope of authenticity. This idea will be explored in Chapter Four.

freezing cold shower, or a boiling pot of water. The effect of this prompt is to activate the body internally through the imagination of extreme temperatures, and to respond with the whole body, not just a limb or trunk that could more obviously move on its own. It is not uncommon to be asked to slap one's own skin, to experience actual, rather than imagined, full-body activated sensation. In an intensive workshop held in Tel Aviv in the summer of 2016, participants were tasked with pairing up and slapping one another's bodies. Enduring being slapped on one's exposed skin required an acceptance and, further, embracing of the physical intensity and discomfort. That instructors use of the term "dead flesh" supports a lexicon of vitality and aliveness that permeates Gaga's intention. That the practitioner has to endure varying degrees of physical intensity, or even pain, introduces the component of survival: that one has to "survive" the intensity of the physical experience in order to become a fully activated body, and thus a body ready to bring its utmost potential to dance.

The way that Gaga functions by activating imagined sensations also serves to activate and warm up the mind. Training the body to move through the exhaustion and pain that comes from weakness is also a mental exercise. In this sense, Gaga challenges weak or lazy modes of perception, as well. For example, during periods of intense movement where the body has to sustain constant motion at a high speed and degree of intensity, Gaga instructors will offer the suggestion that one has "all the time in the world" to explore these sensations, the effect of which forecloses opportunities to stop, and, instead, consider ways to embrace the pain or exhaustion in order to continue moving. Inversely, particularly intense periods of moving can be signaled toward a conclusion with a countdown from ten. Instructors ask practitioners to count out loud.

The effect of adding the voice is to provide a supportive burst of energy to keep moving at a high speed and/or intensity without gradually winding down. Shouting while moving adds to the intensity, rather than calming it, while mentally reassuring the practitioner that they can, in fact, continue to move despite feeling physically exhausted or overwhelmed.

The goal of survival of the body through movement becomes most apparent in an iteration of Gaga class available explicitly for non-dancers, which are open to individuals of any level of dance experience. Gaga/people classes offered at Batsheva's home base, the Suzanne Dellal Center in Tel Aviv, are heavily populated by elderly participants who are not there to become professional dancers, but rather to expand range of motion and improve the capacity for movement, as well as enjoyment of that motion in their aging bodies.⁴⁰ Gaga has also been offered to young patients with physical limitations due to musculoskeletal illnesses. A scene in *Mr. Gaga* (2015) where members of the Batsheva Dance Company do Gaga with, and at times physically hold, sick and wheelchair-bound children appears toward the end of the film. Edited to appear at the film's culmination suggests that Gaga as rehabilitation and the survival of the physical body is one of its most valuable attributes. Gaga therefore becomes the method by which individuals can reach an idealized state of physicality. Further, in this context, Naharin positions himself as a Messianic figure with the knowledge and power to "save" the weak and uninitiated.

After assuming his position as the artistic director for the Batsheva Dance Company, Naharin began to offer this method to the company's dancers in addition to

⁴⁰I elaborate on the significance of Gaga's iteration as a popular form in Chapter Five.

their daily regimen of ballet classes, as well as a format for generating movement for Naharin's choreography. Gaga therefore served as a warm up and training mechanism for the Batsheva dancers. As the principles for moving developed, becoming more specific and nuanced over time and through their application by the dancers' bodies, Gaga also evolved into a linguistic and kinetic shorthand as way for Naharin to communicate specific movement qualities and dynamics to his dancers to be reproduced for his creative purposes. Gaga thus became the building blocks, the basic elements that constituted the basis for, the existence and survival of Naharin's choreographic ideas.

Survival of Dance as Motion

In his 2006 monograph, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement*, André Lepecki addresses a trend in contemporary choreography of the 1990s through early 2000s of stillness and the interruption of flowing movement. He argues that this radical rupturing of modern dance's most fundamental elements, movement and flow, has significant ontological and political implications. Lepecki's argument for movement and flow as the ontologically foundational properties of dance follows critic John Martin's conception of what is modernist about dance from his lectures at the New School for Social Research in New York City (1931-1932) in which he states that "dance finally 'discovered' its 'actual substance,' or distinctive element: movement" (Martin cited in Lepecki 2014, 6). Lepecki (2014) uses Martin's 1933 declaration of movement as the definitive trait of dance's modernity to argue that, as dance's exclusive feature, movement "guarantee[s] dance's autonomy within the arts," and "validat[es] [dance's] claims to modernist ideals of aesthetic self-containment." Thus, as dance's primary

medium, motion has meaning unto itself as an aesthetic category and a mode of producing aesthetic meaning. Lepecki (2006) emphasizes the sense of crisis that came out of the challenge of stillness to dance's essence. "[T]he intrusion of stalling hiccups in contemporary choreography" he warns, "threatens dance's own futurity" (1). If continual motion is what gives dance its ontological status and therefore the critical leverage to comment on itself, stillness challenges what dance is, how dance produces personal and social meaning, and, without it, whether dance could continue to persist as such.

In his 2014 definition of the contemporary Lepecki again cites stillness as one of the markers of the contemporary in choreography. Lepecki argues that stillness allows dance to critically confront itself and play with the possibility of its existence as an artistic discipline. Gaga, as another hallmark trend under the label of contemporary dance, complicates this depiction of contemporaneity with the opposite tendency: hyper-motion.

The way that Gaga produces hyper-motion is perhaps most encapsulated by the prevalent command in Gaga to "never stop moving." The command exemplifies the demand for and value of constant corporeal action. In response to this directive, the practitioner must endure beyond physical and creative fatigue, ultimately accessing ways of moving that are beyond the practitioners' habits. Thus, constant motion also produces movement invention, or that which is new to the practitioner. Moreover, moving continuously without stopping prevents moments of reflection outside of movement, rather, it requires reflection to occur in the body, through more movement. As a result, the body increases its range of extremes and hones the ability to activate these extremes

with shorter moments of transitional time. Thus, in terms of meaning making, the body critiques itself.

In Gaga classes, each new prompt that practitioners are asked to explore is intended to layer on top of already established sensations, without cancelling them out or minimizing them. Instructors also encourage a feeling of constant readiness to “explode” or instantly change movement dynamics at any moment, resulting in a constant full-body engagement even when exploring the most subtle or delicate of embodied sensations such as floating in water, feeling air on one’s skin, feeling sand beneath one’s feet, or tracking an imaginary, small, molten ball of gold as it travels through the inner space of the body.⁴¹ Naharin confirms that the objective of Gaga is to awaken dormant muscles and energetic spaces within the body and to unlock the endless possibilities for movement.

Several dance scholars have discussed the current desire for extreme physicality and technical virtuosity in dancers. Susan L. Foster (2015) has discussed the recent proliferation of dance in the popular media, specifically reality television dance competitions, as hyper-affective labor in her essay “Performing Authenticity and the Gendered Labor of Dance.” She emphasizes the problems around the physical expectations for dancers negotiating demands for spectacle and entertainment while performing perceived emotional authenticity. Foster reveals an important rupture that performed authenticity establishes between choreography as legible representational meaning and meaning that is generated or perceived by spectators through the dancer’s physical effort and performed emotions. This has particular significance in relationship to

⁴¹These observations were made from my ongoing research in Gaga/dancers classes held in New York City from 2011 to 2016.

Gaga in terms of how it purports to create meaning through movement. As a form that results from responding to imagined sensation, emotions are only an after-effect or a residue. In other words, Gaga never demands movement that comes from a place of felt emotion, it is only in conversation with physicality. Therefore, physicality does not equal emotion, and emotion is not necessarily what is valued as authentic physical expression. Rather, it is the physicality itself that expresses authenticity.

Ariel Osterweis (2013) also discusses the contemporary demand for stylistic and physical range in dancers in her article “The Muse of Virtuosity: Desmond Richardson, Race, and Choreographic Falsetto.” Osterweis theorizes technical virtuosity to assert that it “exemplifies a cultural practice of consumption” at the nexus of gender, religion, capitalism and individualism (54). Osterweis focuses on virtuosity as “improvisatory prowess” or the “capacity for tactical invention” (54). This display of invention as choreography points to the increasing value of movement for its own sake, exceeding representational or narrative function. Thus, invention as value carries inherent meaning in contemporary conceptions of virtuosic choreography. Gaga, as an improvised practice that encourages continuous motion and invention, becomes consumable and legible as valuable for the way it generates this kind of virtuosity.

Never Stop Moving: Improvisation as Survival

The structure of both Gaga/dancers and Gaga/people classes is always a guided improvisation. Instructors draw upon Gaga’s ever shifting, refining, expanding, and contracting arsenal of concepts and tasks to guide participants through individual movement research. Although some classes may focus on one concept more

predominantly than another, there are no pre-designed sequences for exercises or choreographed phrases to learn. This differentiates Gaga from traditional ballet class where there is a specific order of exercises to be performed in a specific order or many modern dance technique classes that use dynamic principles to design movement sequences to be learned and performed in each class. The research and hence the design of the movement happens live, in the moment of the class, and the movement generated responds to itself, rather than a preconceived idea of what it should look like. Although instructors almost always start with exploring floating for the sake of warming up the body slowly and gently, the instructor can explore whatever dynamic or sensational idea they choose over the course of the session, generally working up to more vigorous principles .

As dance scholar Cynthia Novack (1990) asserts, in many types of improvisation classes improvising is a goal in and of itself. Sometimes practitioners are given directives to explore for the sake of sparking their imaginations and are encouraged to let their imaginations guide them to any way of moving in which they are interested.

Improvisation can also be about the act of choice-making and learning how to respond to other bodies in the same space making individual choices. Contact improvisation involves exploring the physical dynamics of what it means to make contact with other bodies: weight sharing, the physics of lifting other bodies, and the ways two bodies can encounter one another without a predetermined sequence how to maneuver another person's body.

What most distinguishes Gaga from these other types of improvisation classes is that it does not encourage participants to develop their own dynamic or qualitative ideas

and take them too far in an individual direction. Rather than letting the improvisation develop in an organic way for each individual, the directives for research are specific and renewed frequently, often layering new ideas on top of one another, thereby eliminating the possibility for exploration to stray too far from the initial Gaga directive. This method encourages deep physical attention and responsiveness to sensations rather than performing “moves” or familiar gestures. Further, Gaga does not encourage contact among participants. There is no contact in Gaga/people and only in rare situations in Gaga/metodika and Gaga/dancers classes when practitioners use partners to more deeply investigate a sensation. For example, sometimes a practitioner is asked to vigorously slap a partner’s body in order for them to experience pain and study how to absorb and endure that sensation.

Seemingly counterintuitive in a practice that hones attention to imagined, internal sensations, participants are specifically instructed not to close their eyes in order to more intimately attend to a sensation they are being asked to research.⁴² Naharin argues that keeping the eyes open invites more sensory input and therefore places the mind-body in a state of active engagement of sensation, rather than a passive one. Active attention to generating sensation and movement based on that sensation implies that movement is not inevitable, but rather must be constantly created.

Crucially, the directive is formulated in the negative, which acknowledges that there is both real potential and desire to stop. It resists the moments that improvisation affords when movement seems like it has nowhere else to go, that an idea has become

⁴²In many other kinds of movement, somatics, and improvisation classes I have taken in my training as a dancer, closing the eyes is encouraged as a way to focus on a felt sensation or to block out external distractions.

stagnant, lazy, and potentially habitual. Indeed, this is one of the critiques of improvisation within the postmodern idiom. As dance scholar Danielle Goldman (2010) argues, in spite of the rhetoric around spontaneity and democracy of movement in improvisation, it is more so a practice informed by and responding to constraints and limitations rather than an act of total freedom. The negative formulation of the command signifies a resistance to inertia and actively pushes against it. In this way it insists on movement and the futurity of movement as the ontological condition for dance. Although not in direct conversation with Lepecki, Naharin's attitude about the body's infinite capacity to move rejects Lepecki's conceptualization of dancing as a melancholic practice: that which mourns its own disappearance (Lepecki 2006). In the command to "never stop moving," Gaga espouses an ethic of constant and continual invention and reinvention. As an improvisation method, Gaga movement is not so much a practice of achieving motion toward a predetermined goal or image, as an ongoing process of (re)discovering ways to move.

As previously mentioned, Goldman conceptualizes improvisation in dance as a practice of freedom in response to real world constraints. Goldman considers the social, political, and economic constraints that determine conditions under and by which improvisation can take place. Importantly, for Goldman, "improvisation does not reflect or exemplify the understanding of freedom as a desired endpoint devoid of constraint. On the contrary, it actively resists it" (Goldman 2010, 3). Thus, Goldman rejects a teleological trajectory for improvisation as a mode by which one achieves complete freedom. Deeming this kind of freedom impossible, Goldman instead poses freedom as a negotiation, a process of finding ways to move within and around conditions of

constraint. Ultimately, within this framework improvisation becomes both an artistic value (in terms of the ethic of a practice) as well as an aesthetic value (improvisation as a legible and desired way to structure movement and choreography).

As a kind of improvisation Gaga resonates with Goldman's treatment of improvisation as having real context with real-life stakes. On a basic level, Gaga always acknowledges itself within its social context. Rejecting a pedagogical convention of many styles of dance training, a Gaga class must take place in a space without mirrors. Without the option of gazing at oneself during a Gaga class, the practitioner is forced to watch other movers in the space. Further, as previously mentioned, Gaga practitioners are instructed to keep their eyes open while moving. This directive emphasizes that Gaga is both about the felt experience of the individual in her own body, as well as about generating visible movement choices that are meant to be seen by (and perhaps copied or absorbed by) others in the class. Indeed, the instructor situates himself in the middle of the group and actively participates in the movement research along with their fellow participants. This structure suggests that improvisation in Gaga is always already a shared social experience, and always already about creating movement that is meant to be seen by others.⁴³

Gaga as a social practice of constant re/invention of motion resonates with Goldman's resistance to conceiving of freedom as an achievable goal. The problem with "freedom-as-achievement," Goldman (2010, 3) explains:

[I]s that it encourages and idealizes what is in effect a hardened stance to an inevitably changing world. It mistakenly suggests that if one could overcome a

⁴³A broader discussion of the implications of Gaga as a social practice will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Five.

particular set of oppressions, all would be well, thereby eliding the fact that there are always multiple and diverse strictures in the world.

Thus, Goldman emphasizes that in improvised dance, freedom of motion is not a destination to be reached, but a constant demand amidst real world circumstances that shape daily life and are constantly in flux. Further, to ignore these constraints would be, for Goldman, “to deny improvisation’s most significant power as a full-bodied critical engagement with the world, characterized by both *flexibility* and *perpetual readiness*” (5, emphasis added). Indeed, Goldman’s monograph is entitled *I Want to be Ready: Improvisation as a Practice of Freedom*. The title summons the states of desire, readiness, and acknowledges that freedom is an ongoing practice, not a final state. Improvised dance, Goldman argues “involves literally giving shape to oneself by deciding how to move in relation to an unsteady landscape” and, further, “to engage oneself in this manner, with a sense of confidence and possibility, is a powerful way to inhabit one’s body and to interact with the world” (5). Goldman acknowledges the way in which improvisation reacts to changing conditions, as well as the way that the body responds with power to the changing world. Gaga is improvised dance that specifically develops and promotes a heightened state of readiness in the body. In its commands to switch suddenly from one extreme dynamic quality to another without visible or prolonged transition; or its terms “to snap,” “to be ready to explode,” or to move from the floor to standing in the span of less than one second, a Gaga practice trains the body to have a full range of speeds and dynamic qualities to recruit and mobilize at any given moment to respond to changing conditions. In this way, movement survives because it is

closely attuned to what is needed in any given situation for dance, and also puts the dancing body in a position where it can do anything asked of it choreographically.

Demand for responsiveness as flexibility in terms of the body's ability to achieve a broad range of motion as well as the dancer's capacity to relocate geographically in order to dance, and perpetual readiness as an energetic state, resonates with Anusha Kedhar's (2014) perspective on these dynamic states as necessary for contemporary dancers to survive as professionals in the field of dance. Gaga not only promotes physical flexibility and increased range of motion, but it does so as both a style unto itself as well as a method that promises to prepare dancers for the uncertainty of the demands of the dance field. Indeed, Naharin resists classifying Gaga as a definitive style, promoting it as a "toolbox" for optimizing dancers' physical and sensational capacities for any kind of choreography or dance technique.

The demands made on dancers to move - how to move, where to move, and under what real world conditions - place dancers in a mode of survival that does not assume a futurity. Rather, it makes dancing a practice of contemporaneity in that it can only be done in response to the immediate, present moment. Although Gaga's internal principles for producing movement are responsive in this way, Gaga's demand for motion makes it a practice that works toward its own futurity. Further, as I will take up extensively in the following chapter, the codification and institutionalization of Gaga beyond the training of Batsheva dancers indicates Naharin's desire to make a lasting influence on dance aesthetics beyond his impact as a choreographer. Not only does Gaga provide a way to sustain Batsheva as a relevant and influential company beyond Naharin's tenure as artistic director of company, but its formalization reifies the ontological relationship

between dance and motion in a way that positions contemporaneity as an extension of modernity in dance.

Conclusion

This chapter engages Gaga as a movement practice and its relationship to dance as movement. More than simply a somatic practice that offers longevity for the body or an alternative method for preparing the body to dance, Gaga engages the ontological relationship between dance and motion. I situate Gaga within a paradigm of survival for the way it affirms the relationship between dance and movement in a moment when this relationship has been challenged. This (re)turn to movement through Gaga becomes a means by which dance can “save” itself as a meaningful medium facing the threat of its own exhaustion. I also discuss Gaga as a practice of improvisation. Gaga’s unique approach to invention and individual exploration not only differentiate it from other kinds of improvisation practices available in the current market, but also offers a distinctive embrace of constant and excessive motion as a way to ready the body and generate new ways of moving. As such, Gaga as a movement research practice engages with the demand for newness and invention in and as the contemporary.

CHAPTER 4

A TOOLBOX FOR REVIVAL: AVAILABILITY AS UNIVERSALITY FOR CONTEMPORARY BALLET AND MODERN DANCE

Naharin's repertory is in particularly high demand among contemporary ballet companies and modern dance companies in the United States and Europe, which speaks to his celebrated status as a choreographer and a prevalent demand for his particular style among dance institutions in the present moment. With Gaga as the foundation for Naharin's choreography, outside companies and dance institutions must take on this new approach to movement, which may come into conflict with the techniques in which dancers are trained. Although Naharin frequently describes Gaga as a mode for stripping the body of limiting techniques, he has adjusted his rhetoric to allow for Gaga to cooperate with ballet and modern techniques and, as I will argue, revitalize both. This chapter explores one of Gaga's core principles, availability, and to what effect this concept maps onto ingrained techniques of ballet and modern dance.

For contemporary ballet, I use the example Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, as a quintessential contemporary ballet company, to reveal important paradoxes at work in terms of claims of availability and universality in dance. I also offer a case study of a lecture/demonstration presented by Danielle Agami, whose research investigates the possibilities for blending Gaga and ballet technique. I examine the ways in which Agami's research speaks to ballet's need for revival as well as what the implications of the particular compatibility of these forms reveals about Gaga. For modern dance I use the example of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater as a company that represents the model conundrum of survival in the contemporary moment and with unique ties to

Naharin. I engage the company's performance of Naharin's work *Minus 16* (1999) to examine the ways in which Gaga's trope of "availability" serves as a contemporary manifestation of the modernist value of universality.

Becoming available

Every participant in the Gaga intensive workshop held at the Suzanne Dellal Center in Tel Aviv receives a brightly colored t-shirt featuring the word "**available.**" printed in English, in a large, bold font. Since the intensive occurs in Israel, and Hebrew is Naharin's native language, the significance of "available." written in English and not in Hebrew speaks to Gaga's intended widespread, international appeal. More than just a provocative promotional idea, availability is one of Gaga's driving concepts. As discussed previously, the work of Gaga is ultimately to prepare the body for a full range of physical demands in the context of any style of choreography (Gaga/dancers) or in everyday life (Gaga/people). Availability marks Gaga as an active process of optimized readiness for any corporeal demand. Contradictorily, the significance of the period after "available" suggests that availability itself is a discrete, attainable goal in and of itself, even though conceptually "readiness" is a perpetually unrealized action.

I attended the summer of 2016 intensive in Tel Aviv and the Suzanne Dellal Center. Daily offerings included Gaga/dancers classes taught by current and former company members, sections of Naharin's repertory, and sessions called Gaga/Methodika (Methodics), a Gaga class that focuses more deeply on specific qualitative and sensory concepts. For example, a methodics class might focus entirely on the concept of "moons." Corporeally, moons refer to the pads of the feet and palms. Kinetically, this

might involve sensitizing the moons by focusing on sensations of the pads of the feet as they softly palpate the floor and noticing how this sensation travels up the legs and informs the quality of movement in the torso. Focusing on the moons of the hands could involve moving the hands and arms slowly through the air and allowing the delicate feeling of air on the moons to inform the way the arms move. It could also mean feeling energy from inside the body travelling outward through the moons and allowing the intensity of that motion to inform movement in the rest of the body.

The intensive I attended also facilitated nightly improvisation jams in which participants are invited to improvise with one another. In my experience, these jams largely became opportunities to apply what students were learning during the day in a circumstance where they were could make their own choices. Students were broken up into small groups and only one group would dance in the jam on any given evening, leaving the other groups to observe. Many of these jams ultimately resulted in students “performing” movements with the same shapes that come from Gaga classes, but without the subtle qualities that would indicate a real change in habit. This suggests that even if Gaga does inspire dancers to explore movement in a different way than they are used to, it still produces a distinct style that can be replicated rather than generating from a more organic place. The contradiction of being available and performing availability signals an important paradox surrounding Gaga as an increasingly ubiquitous practice being taken up by students and dance companies outside of the Batsheva Dance Company.

The ideal of availability resonates with another term Naharin frequently uses to describe Gaga in his public discourse: as a “toolbox” with which to purportedly make the practitioner aware of their embodied habits, sharpen their responsiveness to embodied

sensations, and generate more and different ways to move. The “toolbox” is therefore poised as a set of skills which theoretically apply themselves beyond Gaga to enhance any other style or technique. By giving the dancer these “tools,” Gaga thereby professes to enliven any dance form a Gaga-trained mover might be asked to perform. Importantly, Naharin actively resists calling Gaga a technique, poising it as a function rather than a codified system. In published discourse around getting in touch with and working past habits, desires, proclivities, and idiosyncratic tastes, Naharin denies that Gaga serves his aesthetic, and instead claims that it produces a body ready for multiple styles of movement (gagapeople.com).

The toolbox paradigm resonates with the contemporary demand for dancers with highly trained bodies capable of producing any choreographic task. This idea aligns Gaga with what Susan L. Foster identifies as a requisite of dance in the contemporary moment: a hyper-flexible body-for-hire (Foster 1997). Foster describes a body that is flexible in the physical sense in terms of a wide range of motion, and flexible in its ability to learn and perform multiple styles of dance. Anusha Kedhar (2014) also touches on the notion of flexibility and the role it plays in the condition of the contemporary landscape for working dancers. Kedhar discusses not only the physical demands on dancers who work as freelancers for multiple companies, but also a flexibility required to navigate the more administrative and bureaucratic aspects of life as a dancer moving around geographically without the stability or benefits that come from a full-time position in a company. For both Foster and Kedhar, a contemporary body-for-hire is capable of performing virtuosic movement, and inventing movement in any stylistic idiom in order to contribute to a

creative process. Gaga professes to create this kind of dancer, placing Gaga in conversation with other forms of dance.

Further evidencing of Gaga as a relevant practice in the contemporary moment can be seen in its strategic marketing to dance training institutions in Europe and the United States. In addition to the classes, workshops, and multi-week intensives available in cities across the globe (see Chapter 1), Gaga is also taught at major dance festivals such as the American Dance Festival and at preeminent Western institutions of dance training such as Juilliard. During Juilliard's spring 2021 virtual semester, for example, Naharin created a new work, *Session I-II* (2021), for the entire dance division of eighty-eight students. According to the Gaga Movement Language social media account, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic restrictions, dancers rehearsed individually from their dorms, apartments, or Juilliard studios during the six week-long creative process. Under the advisement of Naharin and Gaga instructors, they created their own solo movement for the piece. As one of the world's most preeminent dance training institutions, Juilliard's selection of Naharin to set the culminating work on its entire class of students signals his revered status in the field of concert dance, as well as the relevance of his aesthetic. Moreover, that students largely worked alone to create the material for the choreography also speaks to the role that Gaga as a movement generator plays as a recognizable and desirable stylistic method for dancers poised to enter the professional field.

As a toolbox for availability, Gaga purports to effectively neutralize dancers' technical habits to prepare them for optimizing any kind of choreography. Yet, it is clear that contrary to Naharin's claims, Gaga produces a distinctive style. Thus, Gaga presents

a paradox in its simultaneous embracing and rejecting of aesthetic legibility and ossified technical structure.

Ballet Going Gaga

Since he began making work in New York in the 1980s, and throughout his tenure as artistic director of Batsheva from 1990-2018, Naharin's choreography has been in steady demand by many North American and European ballet companies including Ballet Frankfurt, Staatsballett Berlin, Opéra National de Paris, The Royal Danish Ballet, Les Grands Ballet Canadiens, Cullberg Ballet, Finnish National Ballet, Balé da Cidade de São Paulo, Nederlands Dans Theater, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, and Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet (now defunct), among others. Dance writer and critic Wendy Perron captures a prevalent state of confusion over how to define ballet in the contemporary temporal moment:

Anchored in the old, hungry for the new, contemporary ballet is a style that remains ambiguous. It allows the body to careen off balance and the stage relationships to shift. It's possibilities. But is contemporary ballet any ballet being made today? (Perron, 2014)

Perron's evocation of ballet's ontological ties to its historical past in terms of technical principles such as uprightness and its conventional structures of presentation such as narrative, symmetry, proscenium presentation and so on, indicates a crisis of identity for a form with such a long history.

Indeed, ballet has experienced many aesthetic and structural shifts over the centuries from the royal courts during the Renaissance, to romanticism in the nineteenth century, to a reinvention of the classical form by Balanchine in the twentieth century. It remains a form that incorporates the aesthetic developments of emerging historical

moments (Jowitt 2010; Homans 2010; Au 1988). Yet Perron suggests that ballet's amorphousness as a discrete form has reached new levels in the twenty-first century. Although Perron refers to contemporary ballet as a genre of ballet unto itself, her question of whether any ballet that gets made in the current moment can be considered contemporary suggests that preexisting ballets and ballet companies that have existed for a long time must also grapple with their identities in relationships to their pasts. Considering this conundrum for ballet in the contemporary moment, it seems fitting that Gaga, a method that produces both an available body and a body capable of Naharin's signature style, has become widely recognized as a requisite for aesthetic relevance in twenty-first century contemporary ballet.

It is common, if not standard, for ballet companies to perform both traditional repertory and commission new works from different choreographers, many of whom create outside the classical idiom. Indeed, as dance historian Beth Genné (2002) has argued, the Western ballet company of the twentieth century was an invention designed to simultaneously create and preserve a ballet canon with traditional, classical repertory in addition to new works. Thus, the ontology of a ballet company is that which creates its past, present, and future by maintaining old works as well as actively pursuing new ones.

That so many ballet companies have sought after Naharin's works in recent years seems particularly strategic for maintaining relevance, not only due to Batsheva's increased international visibility and Naharin's de facto popularity, but because as a toolbox, or a collection of tasks, directives, and concepts designed to be used differently in each session for the sake of surprising the body rather than mastering specific

movements, Naharin's method is designed for the purpose of constant reinvention of movement.

Naharin's distinctive movement aesthetic, fundamentally engendered by Gaga, demands new movement vocabulary and new codes for corporeality that would seem to exceed the scope of, if not outright contradict, classical ballet technique and the aesthetic values that define the classical ballet idiom. As Susan Au explains, because ballet evolved out of the royal courts of France, uprightness and decorum were essential tenets of this mode of dancing. Dancers in the royal courts and, eventually, professional dancers were "expected to display ease and effortlessness and to conceal physical exertion. Elegance and harmony were the hallmarks of good dancing" (Au 1988, 26). Furthermore, although ballets have changed in format, there is a long-established tradition of following a specific system of training using a set vocabulary. As G. Léopold Adice stated to Blasis in 1820, "Such was the lesson of the past—this is what is called tradition. In keeping with it, we fulfilled these exercises religiously each day, without change or variation" (quoted in Cohen 1974, 77). In this way, ballet is in many ways defined by its disciplinary adherence to these specific structures of training.

While classical ballet favors verticality in posture and energetic drive, Gaga encourages a flexible, often contorted spine and an energetic connection to the horizontal. Connecting to horizontal forces can be understood as an attention to taking up energetic and physical space on the lateral plane as opposed to a vertical plane. While ballet movement actively works to appear resistant to gravity, Gaga encourages the body to display its yielding to its own weight, albeit without ever losing complete control of one's

core engagement.⁴⁴ Classical ballet alignment requires working from the center of the body outward to the limbs, creating a singular textural dynamic with each gesture. Gaga produces multiple options for centeredness by layering dynamics and textures of movement on top of one another. Aided by the mirror, the classical ballet form and figure are achieved by replicating predetermined angles and shapes. In Gaga, the absence of mirrors focuses dancers' attention on internal sensations and impulses. In classical ballet, skeletal alignment is determined in order to facilitate the extension of limbs from a solid, upright torso. This equates to a limited range of shapes and lines that can be made from the arms and legs emanating from the torso. By contrast Gaga practitioners are encouraged to move based on the imagined possibilities of impossible anatomical alignments (for example: a directive might be to "move from your heart which is located in the palm of your hand").⁴⁵

Yet, despite these clashes, Naharin has argued for the ways in which Gaga and ballet compliment and serve one another. In the documentary *Out of Focus* (2007) Naharin explains that Batsheva Company dancers eventually replaced classical ballet as their daily warm up with Gaga. According to Naharin, he had been offering his own warm up to the dancers as a supplement to ballet, but over time,

Gaga was refined and the dancers reached emotional and physical maturity. They understood that Gaga does not ruin their technique, but actually improves it. Gaga doesn't go against ballet it just supports the ballet we already know.

⁴⁴The principle of keeping the core constantly engaged amidst horizontality and attention to the body's real weight is encapsulated by the term *lena*, which Gaga instructors use to steer attention to the space between the navel and the pubic bone.

⁴⁵Susan L. Foster has documented the standard components of a traditional ballet class as well as the classical aesthetics in "Dancing Bodies" (1997). Selma Jeanne Cohen's work *Dance as a Theater Art* ((1974)1992) features a curated collection of manuals that evidence the long history of standardization in ballet training, as well.

In an interview with German publication *Tanzraumberlin* (2015) on the occasion of setting work on the dancers of contemporary ballet company Staatsballett Berlin, he states that ballet and Gaga share more commonalities than differences:

If we think about clarity of form, delicacy, about explosive power, speed, musicality, and multi-dimensional tasks: Gaga really encourages that. If you go beyond ballet as a style – the French or Russian schools will have a lot of arguments I suppose-, but see it as a technique, if you think about balance, a healthy body, the flow of energy, then the toolbox of Gaga ...is not contradicting ballet, it is actually helping ballet.

Here, Naharin positions Gaga as a system designed to reinvigorate, or revive dancing without completely dismantling its ontological structure, serving instead as a wellspring of inspiration that helps the ballet dancer more fully realize and execute its traditional kinetic values. That is to say, according to Naharin, Gaga re-activates ballet's ability to express emotions or convey textural dynamics beyond its own technical capacity within a contemporary context, giving ballet the capacity to evolve and adapt to choreography that exceeds the classical language.

Naharin is certainly not the first choreographer to expand classical ballet technique. For example, twentieth century ballet choreographer George Balanchine modernized and "Americanized" European ballet by incorporating Africanist dynamic principles into the classical vocabulary such as motion in the pelvis, thrusting the pelvis off center, and flexed wrists and ankles (Dixon Gottschild 1996). Balanchine, following the Avant Garde experiments of the Ballet Russes and along with other modern ballet choreographers of the early twentieth century such as Antony Tudor, also turned away from direct narrative and emotion as the explicit content of dances, preferring intricate patterns of dancers in space and allowing angles and lines not previously seen in

Classical or Romantic ballets (Au 1988; Chazin-Bennahum 1994). Balanchine's style was labeled neoclassical as a way to categorize an update to the classical vocabulary and style without discarding it in its entirety. Over the course of his career in the United States (1934 through his death in 1983) teaching at the School of American Ballet and creating works for the New York City Ballet and Ballet Society, Balanchine modernized ballet in a way that allowed it to showcase itself as a geometric and technical form.

This is perhaps most apparent in Balanchine's "leotard ballets," such as *The Four Temperaments* (1946) and *Symphony in Three Movements* (1972): abstract ballets that "form the core of the master's repertoire and aesthetic" (Tobias 2011). Not only did dancers wear minimalist costumes resembling the practice uniform of leotards and tights, but the works themselves were performed "coolly, sleekly, sometimes dazzlingly, but without fervor and without subtext" (Ibid.).⁴⁶ In other words, Balanchine was interested in exploring and expanding the form of ballet and the dynamics that could come from its traditional technical structure more than its explicit storytelling or emotive potential.

American choreographer William Forsythe has also significantly impacted ballet as a technique through his career in Europe with Ballet Frankfurt (1984-2004) and The Forsythe Company (2005-2015). Like Balanchine, Forsythe works within the existing idiom to expand its possibilities for expression, though he far exceeds Balanchine in pushing beyond ballet vocabulary and classical forms. In Forsythe's work, "balletic formality is jettisoned in favour of a wild, off-kilter theatricality that rethought conventions even as it held them up to the sharp, bright light" (Crompton 2015). His

⁴⁶The qualities of performative "coolness" while executing virtuosic movement is also aligned with Africanist aesthetics as described by Brenda Dixon Gottschild (1996).

dances *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* (1987) and *One Flat Thing Reproduced* (2000) demonstrate how Forsythe extends traditional ballet figures producing contorted forms that make the dancers look more like creatures than humans.⁴⁷ For example, “By shifting the alignment of positions and the emphasis of transitions,” Forsythe explains, “the enchainments begin to tilt obliquely and receive an unexpected drive that makes them appear at odds with their origins” (Forsythe quoted in Crompton, 2015).

Forsythe pushes ballet even beyond the boundaries of genre, integrating ballet with visual art and other modes of multimedia. Forsythe also used ballet vocabulary as a foundation for innovating digital systems of choreographic invention and score generation. He created several digital platforms for generating movement and creating choreography. He created computer applications “Improvisation Technologies: A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye” in 1994, “Synchronous Objects” in 2009, and “Motion Bank” as a research platform for creating online digital scores. Beyond pushing the boundaries of ballet, his innovative approach places ballet in a conceptual conversation with itself as a language for kinetic and visual communication.

While Naharin expands the range of dynamics a ballet dancer might be able to access, he differs from these innovators in terms of his formal relationship to ballet. Naharin does not claim to choreograph ballets as such, nor does he work from a classical vocabulary. Rather, he positions Gaga as a supplement to ballet training or a practice with which ballet dancers to enhance their abilities to perform any type of ballet, classical or contemporary.

⁴⁷*In the Middle Somewhat Elevated* starred a young ballerina, Sylvie Guillem, who became famous for her extreme hyperflexibility and how her ability to exceed traditional lines, also pushing ballet’s traditional angles and formal figures.

Naharin's collaboration with the Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet of New York City exemplifies the way a contemporary company took on Gaga and Naharin's repertory. Cedar Lake was a strictly repertory company, without its own resident choreographer, Crystal Pite. As such, Cedar Lake's dancers were trained to be open, malleable, and available. As a company with dancers highly trained in ballet and ready to take on any choreography, I argue that it was poised to be a neutral company: an entity without a resident choreographer and therefore without stylistic identity of its own. As such, it was also poised to be the vehicle for the new. Yet, despite its popularity and contemporary appeal, Cedar Lake only survived for twelve years (2003-2015). Technically its failure to endure was its financial unsustainability resulting of the company's founder and sole benefactor pulling their funding (Cooper 2015).⁴⁸ Its closure perhaps also speaks to the necessity of historical ties to the past in terms of style for ballet's longevity and its challenges navigating contemporaneity as the new.

The Cedar Lake dancers' rehearsal process for learning Naharin's repertory is a central part of filmmaker Tomer Heymann's documentary *Out of Focus* (2007) much of which focuses on capturing Naharin's creative process and demonstrates how Naharin teaches Gaga to ballet dancers in order to perform his work. The film shows Naharin coaching the Cedar Lake dancers in Gaga and in learning repertory sessions. He uses Gaga prompts such as "feel your bones floating," "imagine a box in the middle of your chest and now cancel the box," "give in, give in more," "connect to your sense of humor," and "connect to the sense of what gives you pleasure as you dance." The

⁴⁸The company was founded and funded by Walmart heiress Nancy Walton Laurie.

dancers, standing in the middle of the studio without the ballet barres or the mirror, float and twist their arms away from their torsos, they balance on one leg with their torsos off-center. They undulate in slow motion. There is softness in their chests and sternums. These clips are juxtaposed with the dancers doing a warm up at the barre in a studio with mirrors, the standard protocol for a ballet class (Foster 1997). The tone of the film is such that it makes their routine *pliés*, *développés*, and one-legged balances seem mechanical and uninteresting, if not outright boring.⁴⁹ In filmed interviews, dancers contrast the structure of ballet classes with Gaga saying that while ballet is formal and impersonal, Gaga is about researching and discovering, it is personal, and it is fun.

One dancer offers an account that without mirrors, she doesn't get locked into how she looks, and thus she approaches moving from an internal place as opposed to fulfilling an imagined image: a difference between executing the actions "stop and turn" and "drop down and turn from your back" (Heymann, *Out of Focus* 2007). When she demonstrates the difference her ballet "stop and turn" looks mechanical while her Gaga "drop down and turn from your back" is slow, sequential, gooey and suspenseful, as though she is an animal who senses something behind her before she turns to see it. Her demonstration reveals the ways in which sensation driven Gaga movement can add nuance, texture, and depth to a simple combination of actions. Historically, the foundations of ballet positions and steps came from Baroque court dancing. Of the hundreds of manuals that were created to document the proper way to perform these

⁴⁹A *plié* is the standard first exercise of a ballet class: it involves bending the knees to warm up the joints. A *développe* refers to the motion of sequentially unfolding the leg outward away from the body, either to the front, side, or back. Balances on the dancer's toe are also practiced at the barre.

dances, Thoinot Arbeau's *Orchésographie* (1588) and Pierre Beauchamp's system documented, published, and popularized in 1700 by Raoul Auger Feuillet as a text called *Chorégraphie* endure as the most prevalent notation systems. These manuals contain diagrams and descriptions of the ballet positions, as well as notation signifying the gender of the performer, their position in space, which body part moved, and the type of action that body part took (Cohen 1992; Au 1988). Importantly, these diagrams offer little information as to *how* one moves from one position to another. Rather than focusing on performing the correct actions of getting from one pose to another, Gaga offers ways to move between poses.

Another example for understanding the relationship between ballet and Gaga is the experimental research conducted by Danielle Agami, a former Batsheva dancer and rehearsal director, General Manager of Gaga U.S., and Los Angeles-based choreographer of her own company, Ate9.⁵⁰ In the spring of 2018 Agami utilized a fellowship with the Center for Ballet and the Arts, affiliated with New York University in New York City, to explore Gaga's relationship with ballet. According to their website the aim of the fellowship program is to promote research around ballet:

The CBA Fellowship Program awards residencies to artists and scholars across disciplines to work on projects that expand the way we think about the history, practice, and performance of dance. Applicants are not required to be experts in dance but must have an interest in engaging with the art form.⁵¹

⁵⁰Gaga U.S. is a branch of Gaga instruction taught in the United States. Instructors are trained and approved to teach Gaga by Naharin and other former members of Batsheva under Naharin's direction.

⁵¹<https://balletcenter.nyu.edu/fellowships/#about>

That Agami received this fellowship not only speaks to her notable place in the field as a choreographer, but also attests to the invested interest the world of contemporary ballet has in Gaga. While ballet terms and exercises are often used in the context of a Gaga/dancers class as a way for dancers to practice Gaga principles while executing ballet forms, Agami’s research centered around the inverse application. In a live demonstration of her research, Agami showcased a model of how a traditional ballet warm-up at the barre might incorporate Gaga principles, allowing the two forms to “meet in balance.”⁵² Using the classical structure for warming up the body progressively, one exercise at a time starting with *pliés*, Agami encouraged the dancers to explore their inner sensory experiences while moving using prompts and principles from Gaga. For example, during the *tendu* exercise, where traditionally a dancer brushes the floor with their foot while stretching it into a pointed position away from the standing leg, Agami incorporated the Gaga principle of “moons,” where one focuses delicate attention on each of the pads of the toes where they meet the ball of the foot. In another moment, Agami asked dancers to attend to their relationships to the barre itself. Normally used only to stabilize the dancer while they work on one leg at a time, in Agami’s demonstration the barre became a partner in the act of exploring stabilization. As opposed to just standing adjacent to the barre, or barely holding onto it to quickly check balance, some dancers chose to lean their full weight into the barre, hang off of it, or explore the negative space underneath the barre. Some dancers even chose to pick up the free-standing barres and

⁵²I attended the culminating event of Agami’s fellowship: a lecture/demonstration held at the Center for Ballet and the Arts facility in Cooper Square in New York City in May of 2018. <https://balletcenter.nyu.edu/fellows/danielle-agami/>.

use them as weights and points of counterbalance, inverting the way balance is researched by a dancer at the barre. Although Agami described the class as still-ongoing research, the demonstration offered concrete examples of what Gaga principles and philosophies look like in a ballet class, as opposed to what ballet exercises look and feel like within the context of a Gaga class.

Gaga's disruption of ballet can be found in its emphasis on, as it is referred to in Gaga classes, *horizontal forces*. In both stationary and locomotive actions, Gaga instructors frequently attend to an energetic directionality on the transverse plane of the body. Whereas classical ballet produces a sense of lightness through verticality in terms of energy, posture, comportment, shape and line, Gaga's movement value is in the drive of the horizontal (Foster 2007). Naharin explains that with Gaga, the steps that do move in the horizontal plane, such as a *tendu*, *chassé* or *bourrée*, "become more beautiful, more substantial, more textured" (Naharin quoted in Tanzraumberlin 2015). Here, Naharin claims to enhance the textural qualities of these steps, offering the dancer a new approach to their execution beyond just their action. Further, Naharin acknowledges his deep affinity for ballet as a genre, suggesting that his own movement aesthetic is not a rejection of classical ballet but rather that Gaga offers a way to approach ballet from a different dynamic and textural perspective. Indeed, when I interviewed Naharin I asked him why, when every other term used in Gaga is invented, he used ballet terms in Gaga/dancers classes. He simply responded that he "just liked (ballet)," without elaborating further or offering criticality (interview with author, 2016). "[I]f you know how to sublimate vertical forces into horizontal movements, to put the classical form into animal instincts," he states, "you become more efficient and more virtuosic"

(Tanzraumberlin 2015). In this statement, Naharin claims three ways in which Gaga modifies the ballet-trained body: activating its animal instincts, increasing its efficiency, and unlocking its virtuosity. By claiming to enhance a dance form already considered virtuosic, Naharin imbues his method with a superior status, as a kind of key that could unlock ballet's potential to be even more impressive. Further, by claiming to draw out a ballet dancer's animal instincts, Naharin differentiates between ballet dancers and animals. In doing so, he upholds an entrenched elevated status for ballet that implicates its moral superiority.

Therefore, more than simply directional differences, verticality and horizontality uphold distinctive values in terms of morality and power. With its origins in the royal courts of France, ballet performance was a means by which the monarchical hierarchy was simultaneously represented, physically manifested and performatively reified. Many dance scholars such as Mark Franko have historicized and theorized the verticality of ballets and its moral values. French monarchs performed and negotiated their positions of sovereignty as both physical and conceptual positions (Franko 2018, 2003). Thus, ballet is intertwined with a corporeal and dynamic verticality, as well as a political structure of verticality in the form of a monarchical hierarchy.

Many of the major innovations of late-nineteenth and twentieth-century western modern and postmodern dance movements actively challenged the primacy of verticality in terms of movement dynamics, choreographic intent, as well as institutional structure (Morris 2006; Reynolds and McCormick 2003; Desmond 1997; Banes 1987). In *Exhausting Dance* (2006), Lepecki captures the radially subversive potential of horizontality in his discussion of a crawl series by William Pope.L, a performance artist

whose work implicates and critiques American racial dynamics. Lepecki argues that Pope.L's horizontal motion:

[K]inetically performs not only a profound critique of ... verticality and horizontality, but also a general critique of ontology, a general critique of the kinetic dimension of our contemporaneity, and a general critique of abject processes of subjectivization and embodiment under the racist-colonialist machine (2006, 88).

Although I do not suggest here that Gaga's investment in horizontality is actively engaged with the racial dimension of the critique of horizontality as Lepecki's subject does, I posit that in its active countering of vertical movement principles with horizontal ones, Gaga can be seen as in conversation with Eurocentric values of power, related to the monarchy and Judeo-Christian morality embedded within these directional forces of movement. Further, Lepecki suggests that it is not just Pope.L's position or motion that disrupts and critiques the vertical, but that his work shifts the foundation for this verticality, suggesting an "ontopolitical ground that is not stable or flat, but ceaselessly quivering and grooving" (Ibid.) The terms *quivering* and *grooving* Lepecki uses to capture the radical potential of Pope.L's horizontality are also important terms in Gaga. Although not explicitly political, or political in the same way as Pope.L, Gaga's quaking pelvis and its imperative to "find a groove" alongside strenuous or effortful movement speak to Gaga's radical countering to the ballet's hegemonic verticality.

The way in which Naharin positions Gaga to enhance and more fully actualize ballet as a form also seems to imply that ballet itself has become too cultivated; simultaneously too removed and too familiar. As such, it would seem to have lost its relevance as an art with the capacity to express something other than itself, and thus to be meaningful to contemporary audiences. Estranging the ballet body from its traditional

lines and shapes gives it animus - gives it life, which suggests that Gaga has the potential to be relevant beyond Naharin's choreography but part of a larger project to revive stagnant forms.

The significant effect of the estrangement of the body from the academic ballet form is that morphing ballet with and through Gaga produces an aesthetic that can be visually characterized as a morphing of ballet as such. For example, a hallmark trait of Naharin's choreography is thrusting the pelvis forward and throwing the torso backwards into a deep backbend, allowing the head to almost graze the ground. Although the backbend exists in codified ballet (*cambré*), the Gaga version that throws the rest of the body out of alignment can only be registered as extreme and shocking when compared to its classical counterpoint. Thus, Naharin reimagines ballet technique through Gaga, rather than dismantling it. Gaga maps so successfully onto ballet bodies because they have already been trained to find a large range of motion, move efficiently, and display a kind of virtuosity in the body that is legible to Western concert dance audiences.

Naharin discursively constructs a relationship between Gaga and ballet that is not one of total critique, but rather one of mutually beneficial codependence. Indeed, the compatibility between ballet and Gaga reveals the foundational principles of ballet that are already deeply embedded in Gaga. Evidence of this intertwining can be found in Gaga/dancers classes. For example, participants frequently find themselves going through classical ballet exercises such as *ténu*, *ronde de jamba en croix*, and *developpés* designated in these terms. Practitioners are often asked to explore the range of their *penchés* toward the end of Gaga classes when theoretically the body has been opened up and made available for larger range of motion. The presence of academic ballet terms

using the French vocabulary is noteworthy in that every other term used in a Gaga class is an invented term developed as a shorthand for the principles of Gaga movement (for example, *lena*, *pika*, *biba*, *tashi*, *tama*), is a made-up term that supports Gaga as a method for reinvention.⁵³ For a movement language that claims to be the undoing of other techniques, intentionally called “Gaga” as the most basic of child-like sounds without a fixed or predetermined meaning, the presence of ballet terminology can be jarring if not outright contradictory. Yet Gaga does more than just help ballet: ballet is also an intimate part of understanding and executing Gaga. Even though participants are instructed to approach these exercises and positions with and through the Gaga dynamic principles they have been researching, they are never far from ballet corporeally and pedagogically and, further, are able to most fully engage with Gaga if they are already fluent in ballet.

Ballet terminology is one of the only ways that Gaga/dancers and Gaga/people classes are differentiated from one another. Excessive jumping is one of the only other differences between the people and dancer classes, as well as another connection to ballet, as traditional ballet classes work the body up to jumping combinations towards the end of classes. Whereas in ballet jumping is a way to train in intricate patterns of hops and jumps that might be featured in ballet choreography, in a Gaga/dancers class, instructors may ask dancers to jump continuously and vigorously in order to explore the

⁵³*Lena* refers to the ostensible ‘center’ of the body in Gaga. *Lena* is an activation of the space between the navel and groin, and is supposed to be constantly engaged throughout the class. Instructors often describe the feeling as a light switch being turned on. *Biba* means feeling your flesh and energy pull away from your sits bones, *Tashi* brings attention to the soles of the feet, and initiating movement with the feet attached to the floor. *Pika* activates attention and energy from the space beneath the pubic bone. *Tama* refers to arcs and curves that can be formed from internal initiations rather than external shapes.

limits of their physical stamina. That the presence of ballet terms and variations on ballet exercises define the distinction between the position or category of “dancers” as opposed to “people” is loaded with significance, much of which will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Infusing Gaga into a ballet warm up inevitably altered the traditional balletic dynamics and shapes. Yet, it also revealed the degree to which Gaga relies on ballet’s aesthetic principles and a ballet trained body for its own articulation both verbally and corporeally. Agami’s dancers, all previously trained in ballet to varying degrees, had a standard of holding themselves in a classical way such that the sensations Gaga was encouraging them to discover were facilitated by a balletic posture and sense of alignment in the body. Although Agami’s research was presented as preliminary and in-progress, her project reinforced a relationship of interdependence, whereby ballet revives itself via Gaga, and Gaga benefits from ballet’s status as the baseline of movement training in order to support its ongoing validity and necessity. Thus, hegemonic aesthetic values of Western concert dance are still at work as a condition of possibility within Gaga as a contemporary dance form, despite its claim as the mechanism by which the dancing body can offer something “new.”

The interdependent relationship between hegemonic aesthetic values and “new” forms of dance has been problematized by dance scholars such as Kwan (2017), Marta Savigliano (2009), and Ananya Chatterjea (2013). As discussed in Chapter 1, the contemporary, as a term for the new is a privileged space for forms from the global North and West. The new has long been problematized within paradigms of colonialism. Savigliano has interrogated the proposition and possibility of newness in dance as a paradoxical, if not entirely misguided, enunciation. As Savigliano illuminates, the

category of “the new” contributes to a teleological framing of innovations in dance that places Western dance in a position to create new styles of dance and relegates dance outside the West to a separate category tied to unchanging forms (2009, 167). The notion of the new also rests within Savigliano’s broader discussion around the problematic category of World Dance. Forms categorized as “world” dance are considered “other” dances able to be assimilated into the dance field, “Exotic, and yet disciplined enough to be incorporated through translation into what counts as Dance” (2009, 167). Savigliano qualifies exoticism in this context specifically as what she calls virtuosic difference, or “an otherness capable of being appreciated within the Dance field’s parameters,” and discipline as “the actual or potential systematization of the dance form and its ensuing replicability and pedagogical implementation within the established parameters of the Dance field (Ibid.). In other words, non-traditional, new, non-Western forms of dance and systems for movement-making are only legible within Western contexts (and, indeed, they must be legible within Western contexts if they are to be popularized, valued, and included in the dance canon), if they are only different enough that they don’t completely dismantle Western values and can fit (back) into Western pedagogical structures. As Kwan (2017) notes, contemporary dance pulls from a range of other influences, but must have ballet at its core.

Agami’s research demonstrates that while Gaga has much to offer the traditional ballet format in terms of ways to access broader ranges of motion or more deeply nuancing dynamic qualities, ballet offers Gaga a validating platform for its virtuosic difference. Ballet has a long history of portraying “exotic” cultures in terms of narrative content, for example, Scottish fairies in *La Sylphide* and sections of *The Nutcracker* such

as “Arabian Coffee” or the “Chinese dance” (Jowitt 2010; Fisher 2008). As Deborah Jowitt describes of romantic ballet, portrayal of foreign cultures served as a form of escapism for working class audiences from their daily lives, yet the storylines themselves still reinforced normative social mores. In its modification of ballet, Gaga as an Israeli form gives a Western form an opportunity to seem exotic, without it being completely compromised. Gaga offers a different approach in that it targets the technique of the movement itself: ballet’s form as opposed to its content. Thus, Gaga achieves the dual status of being Other, while being predicated on underlying Western systems.

Kwan (2017) raises the issue that the concept of contemporaneity has a fraught relationship to “world dance.” “World” modifies specific regional forms from outside the West, and signals the “complex legacies and negotiations, distinctions and exclusions that postcolonialism and globalization have wrought on the taxonomies of dance” (43). Marta Savigliano’s (2009) qualification of virtuosic difference resonates with Susan Foster’s critique of the demands by and within contemporary dance for virtuosity as a defining quality of contemporaneity. As a toolbox designed to expand range of motion and amplify dynamic qualities, Gaga exemplifies what a system for virtuosity looks like in the context of ballet. It is therefore actively strategic for ballet companies to use Gaga to sustain themselves as companies, but also to revive the qualities and dynamics in the dancing itself. In the face of an unrelenting demand for “the new” in the fast-paced globalized world, Gaga invites a strangeness as newness: without completely challenging or dismantling the integrity of ballet as a medium for expression. With his movement language, Naharin thus articulates certain terms of inclusion into the contemporary, terms

which ballet companies are primed to adopt in order to survive within the continuously globalizing dance landscape.

Alternative Universality in the Contemporary Moment: Reviving Modern Dance

Similar to the struggle for institutional ballet for relevance as it ages aesthetically into the twenty-first century, the temporal and stylistic category of Western modern dance also faces a crisis of identity. Modern dance, as a form developed in the early twentieth century as an aesthetic style for individual expression, evolved into dance companies, movement styles, and technical principles intimately tied to individual choreographers (Morris 2006; Foulkes 2002; Franko 1995; Au 1988). Perhaps even more so than ballet, with a universal vocabulary and an enduring codified technical standard, many major institutions of modern choreography are ontologically bound up with the idiosyncratic style of their founders. In addition to his desirability among contemporary ballet companies, Naharin's choreography and movement language play a significant role in the revitalization of historical modern dance. The collaboration, in addition to resonating with audiences hungry for new repertory, exposes the interdependence between the modern and the contemporary. Like ballet, modern dance endures stylistically and temporally throughout contemporary dance.

Kwan (2017) addresses the predicament for techniques that once served as foundational standards for university dance departments and other training institutions that no longer maintain the place of relevance they once held. She addresses questions of and related to whether and how modern dances and companies maintain their identities as well as their relevance through time without the living, active creative presence of an

originating choreographer. Dance writer and critic Joan Acocella echoes these concerns in her article “Must the Show Go On?” (2019). Acocella characterizes modern dance companies as “almost always the creation of one person ... Everything comes from the founder: the training, the vision, the company’s distinctive movement style and technique.” She asserts that the deaths of major American choreographers that established some of the first major modern dance companies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, such as Alvin Ailey in 1989, Martha Graham in 1991, Merce Cunningham in 2009, and Paul Taylor in 2018, led to serious reckonings for the companies they left behind in terms of how to proceed without the possibility for the founding choreographers to create new works.⁵⁴ Without their founders, modern dance companies therefore face the threat of their own irrelevance as new choreographers and companies emerge.

Each of the aforementioned companies took different routes toward survival. Acocella summarizes the conundrum of how and whether to perpetuate legacies for modern dance companies of which the founders have passed away. In addition to the worries that closing companies would eliminate many job opportunities, Acocella argues that most critical is that without a structure to keep repertory alive, there will be no one and no opportunities to pass dances down through the generations, and the work itself would cease to exist. As one of the first of the major modern choreographers with an established institutionalized company to pass away, Alvin Ailey’s company has taken

⁵⁴Each company dealt with the immediate or impending death of the founding choreographer differently, however, all eventually shifted to models similar to ballet companies in their balancing of works created by the founder and inviting contemporary choreographers to create or set works on the company’s dancers.

what Acocella deems a survivalist approach, akin to the structure of a traditional ballet company which preserves the repertory of the founding choreographer, trains dancers using techniques that accommodate and serve that original choreography, while inviting select contemporary choreographers to set and create new repertory on the company. Acocella's article raises important questions around whether the identity of the choreographer is the work itself, the dancers' specific way of moving, or in the choreographer as a source of creative power. Thus, modern dance, aching to remain vibrantly relevant as it faces its own demise, attempts to morph into a contemporary manifestation in the twenty-first century.

Historical modern dance was, in various ways, the individual's search for authentic corporeal expressions. As Mark Franko explains, "The most salient trait of the modernist narrative is its progress from expression as spontaneity to expression as semiological system to the marginalizing of expressive intent" (Franko 1995, ix). Franko's work captures the drive for each generation of choreographers to reject the form of their predecessor, yet always in the pursuit of expression of authentic human experience. Authenticity was deployed in ways unique to the individual choreographer. For example, Isadora Duncan, one of the earliest figures of what was then called aesthetic dance in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, lacked a set technique which encouraged her disciples to corporeally interpret her choreography according to their individual connections. By contrast, Martha Graham, another "mother" of American modern dance, codified her method for training her dancers in order to shape their bodies and approaches to moving to replicate Graham's own corporeal forms and motivations (Au 1988; Franko 1995; Reynolds and McCormick 2003).

John Martin, a critic and one of the first to give literary voice and legitimacy to modern dance in the 1930s, defined authenticity in modern dance as stemming from the artist's ability to abstract from nature:

Armed with this advantage, the artist was able to give experience more value than nature itself... It was in this unique human ability to find and explore the roots of experience and to expose essential truths that the artist defied the power of a culture ever more oppressed by means-ends calculation. (Martin quoted in Morris 2009, 82-3)

Martin's statement promotes the notion that there are essential truths shared by humanity that modern dance artists were in the unique position to translate and transmit. His definition for the role of authenticity therefore connects to the possibility of universality, which became a defining ideology of the early modernists that continues into the twenty-first century despite being challenged by the postmodernists of the mid-twentieth century (Reynolds and McCormick 2003; Morris 2009).

In the case of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT), as an active modern dance company and institution for preserving Ailey's choreography, Naharin's repertory and style offers opportunities to remain relevant without disrupting the modernist tenet of universality. In choreographer Robert Battle's first season as artistic director of AAADT in 2011, he included Naharin's *Minus 16* (1999) in the company's repertory.⁵⁵ Only the second person to run the company after Ailey's passing (speaking to a desire to keep the company's connection to Ailey as intact as possible), Battle stated that performing Naharin's work, although perhaps unexpected for the Ailey repertory, was "[A]n important statement for our company as we take our next step into the future"

⁵⁵Naharin had also set his piece *Black Milk* on five male Ailey dancers in 2002. *Black Milk* was originally created in 1984 as a piece for five women and revised again in 1990 to be performed by casts of either men or women.

(Herschthal 2011). Battle's statement spoke as much to the necessity for AAADT to remain in touch with contemporary trends as it did to Naharin's status as the epitome of contemporary relevance. As a reporter for *The Times of Israel* remarked, Naharin's work may have initially seemed an odd fit for this company in particular, in that while Ailey's mission was to create opportunities for black dancers and to promote African American culture, Naharin stresses dance's universality and Gaga serves as a platform to enhance individuality (Herschthal 2011). Yet, their relationship is significant as a way to understand the trope of universality and how it functions in the modern and carries into the contemporary moment.

The connection between Naharin and AAADT goes back further and deeper than these more recent collaborations. Naharin's late wife and artistic collaborator, Mari Kajiwarra, was a principal dancer with Ailey from 1970 through 1984, serving as Ailey's assistant during her tenure. Naharin was married to Kajiwarra from 1978 until her death in 2001. From 1984 through 1990 they lived together in New York City where Kajiwarra was a dancer and rehearsal director for the Ohad Naharin Dance Company. Kajiwarra not only danced in Naharin's works, but also served as a translator, or liaison between a mercurial Naharin and his dancers. She would often help articulate Naharin's desires to his dancers when he became frustrated with an inability to communicate his aesthetic wishes (Heymann 2015). In this sense, Kajiwarra was perhaps the earliest iteration of what evolved into Gaga as the intermediate system that connected Naharin's embodied experience with another dancer. If Ailey's style and foundational technical training was also already encoded in Kajiwarra's body, it inevitably informed the perspective of physicality from which she translated Naharin's directives to the Ohad Naharin Dance

Company dancers. Kajiwarara moved to Israel with Naharin upon his appointment as artistic director of Batsheva in 1990 and died of cancer in 2001. Although Naharin had always been developing his style, Gaga only acquired its name and became codified as a training method over the years following Kajiwarara's death. In this way, Gaga's development has been, in part, an extension of Kajiwarara as a shorthand for Naharin and translation mechanism between him and his dancers.

Kajiwarara also performed in Naharin's early works, and the physicality which she brought to his choreography was already informed by her training with Ailey. For example, Ailey's style produced a bound, vigorous, and virtuosic physicality through clean angular lines, geometric shapes and crisp curves of the torso and arms. Dancers' energy is trained outward and reads as strong, confident, and boldly emotive. While the movement is definitively outside of classical ballet vocabulary, Ailey's dancers perform high extensions with their legs turned out and their feet pointed in keeping with classically balletic standards of line and geometry. As argued previously, Naharin's style values many of the same principles line, extension and virtuosic flexibility of ballet. Yet the defining aesthetic dynamics produced by Gaga abandon any semblance to clear geometric shapes or lines. Gaga produces a highly mobile pelvis, no clear center from which movement is initiated, wiggly contortions of shapes in the torso and arms, and generally exaggerates all lines and extensions of the limbs. Although Naharin's artistic research has been about stripping away the limitations of codified techniques and habits of movement, like its relationship to classical ballet technique, Naharin's foundations are also deeply interconnected to, as Anna Kisselgoff (2002) has described, Kajiwarara's "pure

modern style.”⁵⁶ By this Kisselgoff could mean Kajiwara’s ability to distill Ailey’s aesthetic, or, in line with Acocella’s definition, the specific aesthetic vision for whichever choreographer Kajiwara was working. Thus, the connection between Naharin and Ailey is not only sentimental, but the aesthetic dynamic resonates particularly with Ailey dancers.

In his comprehensive text on Ailey’s work, dance scholar Thomas DeFrantz captures the significance of the AAADT in the concert dance world. DeFrantz states that the Ailey company exemplifies,

how concert dance performance conveys meaning to its audience, considering bodily communication and the expressivity of gesture. Ailey’s choreographic success stems from his ability to communicate effectively with a broad audience. His dances confirm the durability of particular Africanist aesthetics, including a reliance on individual invention in the moment—the “flash of spirit”—and call-and-response connection to the gathered audience. (2004, xv)

DeFrantz points to Ailey’s distinctive Africanist aesthetics and principles for performance, while it simultaneously appeals to a racially diverse audience. The possibility for universality (or, rather, its false promise), as it is choreographed and expressed through black concert dance institutions like AAADT, has a particularly fraught history. Ailey’s seminal work, *Revelations* (1960), was a product of its time in terms of the respectability politics that determined what kind of content was palatable for white audiences. During this time, black dancers were seeking more opportunities to perform, and black dance makers were limited to the expression and representation of the black experience in terms of content. Ailey, following in the footsteps of choreographers like Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus made work about the African American

⁵⁶Kajiwara was also trained in ballet and Graham techniques.

experience informed by spirituality and the embodiment of the impacts of slavery and ongoing segregation and discrimination against black Americans (DeFrantz 2002; Perpener 2001; Dunning 1998; Fauley Emery 1988). *Revelations* was perhaps the epitome of this lineage in terms of its subject matter. Yet, while capturing the black experience in America, *Revelations* is not simply a “‘black work,’ ... but a dance that also “addresses itself to a universal expression of faith—in religion perhaps, in faith in art itself” (Kisselgoff quoted in Dunning 1998, 125).

Speaking to *Revelations*’ universalist appeal, historian Jennifer Dunning writes:

The spirituals to which *Revelations* is danced have a powerful, primal appeal. There is in the songs—and in the dance’s choreography and scenic and costume designs—a subtle interplay and juxtaposition of complexity and simplicity. Most of all...*Revelations* was and remains the work of a community, from the larger worlds of black Americans to the worlds of the individual dancers who helped create *Revelations* and passed it on to later generations. (Dunning 1998, 122-23)

De Frantz counters a simplified assessment of universality in modernism. In *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey’s Embodiment of African American Culture* (2006), DeFrantz examines the black dancing body as the site of modernism’s failure as a universal. He writes:

Although the actions and artistry of African Americans may indeed express “universal” truths, the black body itself never achieves this transcendence in any discourse of the West. Marked even before it can be seen, before it can even exist, the black body carries its tangled web of work and sexual potentials, athletic and creative resources, and stratified social locations into the stages of the modern. (2006, 19)

DeFrantz argues that despite the messaging of universality in the artistic work of black Americans, the black dancer does not enjoy the privilege of neutrality or universality. The black dancing body is thus a paradox of modernity: that which claims to express

universal truths and that which cannot share universal identification due to its specific history of experiences.

While contemporary ballet companies' performances of Naharin's repertoire reveal the deep foundations of ballet technique within Gaga, modern dance companies' adoption positions Gaga as a methodology for the universality it seeks. In many ways Naharin's body, and therefore his work, is marked by Israeliness in the same way (see Chapter 2). However, the differences that lie in the way his work is able to be universal as it maps onto other bodies reveals something about contemporary work, as well as the ways in which modernism's promise of universality is also a failure.

Critical reviews of Naharin's choreography performed by AAADT dancers declare an affinity between Ailey training and Gaga. Although Gaga purports to undo habits of training, the techniques in which the Ailey dancers train remain intact and, in fact, serve the execution of Naharin's choreography. *New York Times* dance critic Claudia La Rocco wrote that AAADT's performance of *Minus 16* was "A propulsive, voluptuous spectacle whose apparent differences from the repertory are merely superficial, it plays to the dancers' skills and wows the audience without rocking any boats" (La Rocco 2011). La Rocco notes the compatibility of Naharin's work and AAADT, adding that that the dancers appear to use skills they have already developed, as well as the fact that the piece does not stray too far conceptually from what Ailey audiences would expect. A review from the *LA Times* echoes this sentiment that *Minus 16*, "with its society of puckish, spiritually exhausted and devotional beings, introduced a welcome, fresh vision of the spiritual to a company that's staked its claim on that challenging territory" (Lenihan 2013). In other words, Naharin's choreography highlights

attributes of the Ailey company that make it distinct and Gaga does little to transform the Ailey dancers.

Watching the Ailey dancers perform the *Echad Mi Yodea* section, what stands out is their expert execution of the choreography. Because the movement sequence moves so quickly and requires the dancers to do large movements like getting up and down off of a chair in an extremely short amount of time, the dancers have to be extremely strong and efficient. The Ailey dancers muscle their way through these moments, with a bound energetic quality. For all of its power and exactitude, their performance lacks the subtlety and individuality of each dancer that comes through in the Batsheva Company dancers who are steeped in Gaga. Although one of Naharin's signature choreographic tactics is uncanny unison among the dancers, to watch Batsheva closely is to notice that each dancer is approaching the movement in their own way while staying connected to a precise timing and rhythm. The Ailey dancers on the other hand move through the steps almost too efficiently, clearly counting the beats to the music to the point where they are just shy of arriving early. What is stirring about the Ailey dancers' performance is that they perform emotion successfully. Ultimately, the Ailey version lacks the subtlety of the humanity that comes from the way the individual dancers interpret the movement.

One area in which Naharin's choreography does appear to evidence new skills from Ailey dancers is improvisation. Many of Naharin's work features moments where dancers are required to improvise their movement. The improvised movement is inevitably informed by the dynamic aesthetics that Gaga produces, making the improvised moments within the context of Naharin's choreography appear highly choreographed. *Minus 16* features a section whereby dancers invite audience members on

stage and lead them in parts of the dance, introducing an element of humor and lightheartedness not typically found in Ailey's traditional repertory. According to one critic writing about these moments, "'Minus 16' also succeeded in forcing the muscular troupe's hand with structured improvisation and audience interaction – areas you can't just power through" (Lenihan 2013). The observation implies that Ailey dancers, known for executing choreography precisely and with great strength and virtuosity, were challenged to improvise and to navigate such choreographic risks as direct audience engagement. Tinged with an undercurrent of limiting and mildly racist assumptions about the black dancing body, such as brute muscular force and a lack of nuanced ability to operate outside of a prescribed choreographic structure, this critique exemplifies the modernist tropes that persist through a contemporary choreographic undertaking.

Naharin's work, premised on Gaga, offers a new language that gets translated through the Ailey dancers in ways that reveal how they cannot escape the mark of modernity. La Rocco's (2011) article title, "A Propulsive, Stylized Spectacle, in Which Bodies Lurch Backward," captures the embodied contradiction of Naharin's movement: a body propelling itself forward energetically, while facing the direction from which they came. In a way it characterizes the state of contemporary dance: that which moves ahead in time yet remains connected to its historical past. The relationship between Ailey and Naharin is therefore one of mutual reification: Ailey performs Naharin's work as a means to revitalize itself and remain relevant in the twenty-first century; Naharin's work realizes itself through the dancing bodies of the Ailey dancers as they activate his choreography from a training deeply connected to Naharin's origins as a choreographer.

I have claimed previously that Gaga is wrought with contradiction: by claiming to be a set of tools to be used with and in addition to set techniques, while simultaneously creating a distinctive aesthetic and demanding specific technical standards that define Naharin's choreographic signature. As a toolbox it does not seek to dismantle the past, but rather honors and reifies it, allowing a modern dancer to use Gaga to adapt to relevant styles and trends. Gaga therefore presents another paradox as a contemporary form that claims to produce the new, while it revives historical forms and brings them along with it into the contemporary moment. Gaga's tenet of availability translates modernity's authenticity and universality into contemporary terms.

Ultimately, Naharin gave his method, "Ohad Naharin's movement language," its own name: Gaga. In removing his own name from his method, he gave Gaga the potential to survive beyond him. In this way, Gaga is perhaps Naharin's preemptive response to what will happen as Naharin ages: that Gaga can remain relevant as its own form and as a form that can modify any other form that might develop, thus remaining perpetually contemporary

Conclusion

This chapter addresses the implications of the demand for Naharin's choreography outside of the Batsheva Dance Company. As a method for availability, Naharin strategically positions Gaga as a mechanism for revitalizing other genres of dance seeking to maintain relevance in the contemporary landscape. Gaga, strategically positioned as a toolbox rather than a set technique or style, appeals to Western concert dance companies as it offers them new life without replacing their core identities or

rendering them irrelevant. I suggest that a paradigm of revival characterizes this mutually beneficial relationship between the twentieth century concert dance world and twenty-first century Gaga. In the case of contemporary ballet, the relationship with Gaga reveals ballet as a precondition of Gaga and thus reinforces the continued dominance of ballet technique and aesthetic values in Western concert dance. In the case of modern dance, I use the example of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to argue that Gaga exposes the crisis of modernism for twentieth century companies seeking identities beyond the lifespans of their founders, and offers availability as a contemporary replacement for the modernist promise of dance's universality.

CHAPTER 5

CONTRADICTIONS OF OWNERSHIP AND AUTHORITY: CONTEMPORARY (RE)ARTICULATIONS OF THE POPULAR IN GAGA/PEOPLE

This chapter examines a unique dimension of Gaga that broadens its significance beyond the scope of contemporary concert dance: Gaga/people. As discussed previously, Gaga exists in dual tracks, Gaga/dancers and Gaga/people. Whereas concert dance usually attracts professional level dancers, amateur circles of practice fall within a language of the folk, the vernacular, the social, or the popular. Given that Gaga has rapidly circulated as a fashionable dance practice for those with and without professional aspirations, it seems fitting to align it with the popular as a conceptual category. Therefore, I suggest that with its two iterations, Gaga is positioned in the realms of both the professional and the popular.

Considering Gaga through a lens of the popular reveals important tensions at work. This chapter explores how offering Gaga to “people” reveals the power dynamics at play within and between the categories of “dancers” and “people.” The distinction also implicates that Gaga straddles and negotiates the divisions of high and low art that arise when a dance practice is widely circulated through mass markets.

Additionally, the deployment of Gaga as a popular form raises issues around ownership and authorship that complicate the legacy of this movement practice in the contemporary moment. Part of the popular paradigm implicates the offering of a connection to the new (Dodds 2011). More than a fad or a trend, the way in which Gaga/people legitimizes itself through its connection to concert dance and simultaneously seeks enduring relevance beyond its professional function. I explore how Gaga/people

allows Naharin to strategically navigate the issue of ownership and maintain a legacy as a creator of artworks, as well as a movement practice that can outlast him and exist outside of the critical entrapments of art, time, and politics.

Gaga/people and the Paradigm of the Popular

The predominant literature in popular dance reveals that the popular is a slippery category and that while practices falling within the category may share similar characteristics such as being linked to everyday culture and quotidian practices, the way they circulate through, blend into, influence and are influenced by forms considered to belong to a separate, elite category of art (Malnig 2001; Cohen-Stratyner 2001; Dodds 2011). As many dance scholars have addressed, popular dance is a multi-faceted, complex category which, like the contemporary, defies a singular definition. Dance scholar Sherril Dodds (2011) posits that the popular is less a fixed or static set of practices than an approach to understanding social and cultural value systems. Dodds notes its slipperiness as a label, despite the fact that it is frequently used to define specific products and practices. For Dodds, the popular can be defined in several ways; as “a paradigm that makes it distinct from folk and art cultures; classifications that conceive it through theories of mass culture as a force of manipulation; and conceptions that articulate it through positions of power” (2011, 47). In other words, the popular can be used to describe practices as well as modes of dissemination, mediation and discursive frameworks. Thus, the popular offers a lens through which to understand how dances function under certain historical, social, and cultural circumstances.

Popular dance has often been used in opposition to concert dance, suggesting a popular dance as low art and concert dance as high art binary. Yet Dodds' definition makes clear that popular forms are applicable to high art forms that are popularized through mass dissemination. Julie Malnig (2001) similarly sees the popular through the lens of widespread dissemination, arguing for the porous nature of the intersections among categories of the popular, folk, and social dance. Using the example of *The Nutcracker* ballet, Jennifer Fisher (2008) also asserts as the most popular ballet in world, *The Nutcracker* links high art concert dance with mass circulation and adaptation within local cultures. Her work points to the ways in which the binary of high art and popular culture breaks down without completely dismantling the high art categorization of the ballet itself. So, too, does Gaga/people which links Gaga, a high art form by virtue of its association with Batsheva, into popular accessibility without losing its connection to the high art status afforded to Gaga by its affiliation with a concert dance company and choreographer.

A Gaga/people class is nearly identical to Gaga/dancers in length, structure, and content, with some key differences, on which I will elaborate in the chapter, in terms of some of the exercises or prompts offered, such as partnering with others and the absence of ballet vocabulary from Gaga/people classes. The operative difference is that Gaga/people is designated to appeal to "people:" theoretically anyone with any level of background in dance and without professional performance aspirations. Thus, Gaga can be a method for choreographic invention for the concert stage, a training technique for professional dancers, as well as a method for self-research or pure enjoyment for the layperson.

In many respects, the mere existence of an iteration of Gaga for “people” as distinct from “dancers” distinguishes it from other contemporary forms that either do not claim to be dance techniques or are dance techniques that can be offered to laypeople as forms of exercise or enjoyment. There is a plethora of methods currently available for individuals exploring movement or using movement to explore or rehabilitate themselves including Feldenkrais, Mind Body Centering, Ilan Lev Method, yoga, Pilates, and movement therapy of all kinds. Many dance studios also offer classes in a wide range of dance styles to those without professional performance aspirations. For example, most of the major dance studios in New York City where dancers take class to prepare themselves for performing and auditioning such as Broadway Dance Center, Peridance, Mark Morris Dance Center, and Gibney Dance, offer beginner levels of dance techniques like ballet, African, modern, and jazz in addition to their offerings for professionals and pre-professionals. Gaga/people differentiates itself in that it offers the same core experience to practitioners at any level and degree of relationship to professional performance, regardless of their prior relationship to movement, and that it is offered specifically as such. Gaga/people exists a separate class for “non-dancers” and does not advertise itself on a spectrum of ability, as a beginner jazz class, for example, would indicate that the practitioner was just starting but could improve their abilities to reach a certain level of proficiency. Gaga/people thus offers embodied research, lessons in stylistic exploration, and technical exercises all in one class.

The Contradictions of Gaga/people

Although Naharin had been developing his method of self-research throughout the span of his choreographic career and deploying it informally to choreograph on Batsheva dancers, several published accounts of Gaga's origins attribute Gaga's formalization to a "non-dancer" in 1998.⁵⁷ Naharin recounts a member of Batsheva's wardrobe staff approaching him to ask if she could learn what he was doing with the Batsheva company dancers. He agreed to meet her separately, and thus began a "parallel research process with the company's office workers, friends, and family" that helped Naharin solidify the driving principles, terms, and overall structure of the class that would become available to the public in 2001 and an official part of Batsheva's daily training in 2002 (gagapeople.com).

The notion of Gaga/dancers and Gaga/people being "parallel tracks" is true in structure.⁵⁸ Both versions of classes last approximately one hour, are meant to be practiced by those aged sixteen and older, require the same kind of informal dress (comfortable clothing in which one can move), and a willingness to actively participate (there are no spectators allowed). Gaga/people classes are taught by certified instructors.⁵⁹ Presently, Gaga/people differs from its counterpart in only a few key

⁵⁷This origin story is publicized on the Gaga/people website, in the *Move* (2020) episode on Netflix, and in the documentary *Mr. Gaga* (2015).

⁵⁸Gaga/dancers and Gaga/people are categorized as parallel tracks on the official Gaga website, Gagapeople.com, which is an independent page that can also be accessed through the Batsheva Dance Company website.

⁵⁹As of the writing of this dissertation instructors can only call themselves certified and teach under the label of Gaga if they have been approved to do so by Naharin himself or by Saar Harari, a former Batsheva company dancer and the head of Gaga in the United States.

respects: Gaga/people classes do not feature exercises that rely on ballet vocabulary as some Gaga/dancers classes do, and there is no jumping or partnering with others as these skills make demands on the body that might be harmful for inexperienced movers.

Gaga/people has also been offered to elderly practitioners who sit in chairs as well as patients with physical and neurological limitations such as Parkinson's Disease (*Move* 2020). The significance of these differences lies within the expectations for range of motion: an elderly practitioner or someone with Parkinson's Disease would get the same prompt as a dancer but would execute it on a different scale.

As I have argued in Chapter 4, although Gaga claims to be a toolbox for dancers to enhance performance any type of dance, it ultimately exposes its dependence on the Western techniques that continue to dominate concert stages. Moreover, despite many dancers' claims that Gaga has changed the ways they already approach movement, they tend to reproduce a specific Gaga aesthetic, positioning Gaga more as a technique than a toolbox.⁶⁰ When Gaga is not targeted at professional dancers or pre-professional students caught in the trappings of technique and performativity, however, it has an opportunity do some of what it actually claims. Through prompts combining imagined sensations (for example, feel yourself floating in water, feel like a strand of boiling spaghetti, feel as though your spine is made of seaweed) with impossible physical realities (for example, feel small explosions inside your body, feel your bones grow too big for your flesh, move your heart through the palms of your hands), Gaga/people gives the practitioner opportunities to move in ways beyond what they previously thought possible. One can be

⁶⁰As per my field work in a Gaga/dancers summer intensive in Tel Aviv in 2016.

asked to slap the bare skin of one's body as hard as possible. Instead of fearing the pain, practitioners are asked to embrace that sensation as a feeling of aliveness. Further, a practitioner would be asked to consider that because they endured that uncomfortable sensation, they might feel empowered to endure pain or physical discomfort they might encounter outside the studio. In this way, Gaga/people pushes practitioners beyond their perceived physical limits to a certain extent and extends range of motion. This is aided by asking practitioners to consciously acknowledge the pain or discomfort that comes from extended physical effort and asking them to reconceive those sensations as pleasure and enjoyment. Another concept that fosters enjoyment through movement is through silliness. Instructors commonly ask participants to put on a big exaggerated smile, or to manufacture a hearty laugh. In moving the face into a smile or contracting the diaphragm to produce a laugh, practitioners find that they are genuinely smiling and laughing.⁶¹

One of the most telling distinctions between Gaga/dancers and Gaga/people is the way Gaga/people creates enjoyment through movement is its embrace of personal “groove.” While music is not a dominating element of Gaga classes, there is always music played in the background. The movement prompts do not necessarily reflect the tempo or tone of the music. Typically, toward the end of classes, however, practitioners are sometimes prompted to experience a moment of personal “groove”: to tap into an individualized rhythm, that may or may not reflect the tempo or tone of the music, and that allows them to let go of active concentration on a specific sensation and let themselves move more “freely.” In Gaga/dancers classes, this moment of freedom often

⁶¹This effect is documented in the *Move* (2020) episode and I personally experienced this during my research, as well.

resorts to dancers using the opportunity to move in a contrived manner: moving quickly through dynamic qualities and exaggerated shapes seen in Naharin's choreography, for example: the exaggerated fourth position with pelvis low to the ground, or wiggling spastically in the pelvis and accenting the movement with a sharp outward gesture of the arm or leg.⁶² In Gaga intensives, this can also turn into a moment for dancers hoping to be hired into the Batsheva Dance Company to "show off" for the instructors. A personal groove thus becomes an opportunity to recreate Naharin's style. In Gaga/people classes, however, this moment for "grooving" gives participants the opportunity to embrace where they are in terms of movement and effort and to let go of preconceived notions of "dancing."

As I observed in filmed clips of Gaga/people classes as well as in Zoom classes that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, Gaga/dancers did not look polished or virtuosic in their "groove" moments. Rather, they appeared to be lost in their own worlds and taking the opportunity to have fun. Even though many slipped "back" into more habitual ways of moving their bodies, the pleasure of moving remained connected to their execution, rather than letting an image of what they thought they looked like come through. Replacing the notion of dancing with groove serves to liberate the Gaga/people practitioner from a sense that skill is required to move, or that there is a certain way to look while dancing, fostering a sense of joy and self-acceptance. Thus, it is the Gaga "person," the non-professional practitioner without a performance or technique-driven

⁶²Observed in Gaga intensives, classes in New York City, and currently in clips taken from zoom classes not publicized on Gaga.people.dancers social media platforms.

agenda, who can most authentically engage with and potentially benefit from Gaga's transformative offerings.

A published online account of a self-proclaimed "non-dancer's" experience in a Gaga/people class exemplifies the way an untrained mover can take to the Gaga material.⁶³ The author of "A Non-Dancers Diary of Dance" identifies as Tony, a middle-aged American male who, having some experience with yoga, dance classes and mixed martial arts, has not been extensively trained in dance, nor dances. Tony claims to "have no desire to become a dancer, yet there's something here for me," and states that he extended his otherwise brief stay in Israel to thirty days specifically to continue studying Gaga in its home at the Suzanne Dellal Center in Tel Aviv. His reflections contain compelling contradictions in the ways Gaga/people can have a significant and transformative impact on a non-professional, while it remains closely bound to Naharin and his particular brand of movement and dynamic aesthetics. As the only voice of a Gaga "person" available on the website, Tony's account of his experience inevitably aligns with the intentional messaging of Gaga/people. His experience uncritically supports the Gaga/people rhetoric of accessibility and transformation.

The online diary highlights some of Gaga's most distinctive elements as a toolbox for transformative movement research. Tony (gagadiary.com) expresses appreciation for the non-intimidating structure of the class in that there are no specific movement phrases to learn and execute:

People gather around [the teacher] loosely, and then begin to move too. On the outer edge of the room, I follow along. No choreography. That's a relief. In other "beginner" dance classes I've taken, I'm lost after the first ten minutes, making

⁶³The diary entries are partially published on the Gaga/people website and are accessible in full on the author's personal website, gagadiary.com.

the rest of the class pure agony. Here, the teacher seems to be improvising the class as he goes. He speaks as he moves, and we follow as best we can.

Tony takes comfort in just being able to follow the instructor's prompts to engage with sensory images and metaphors. He also comments on the casual use of music as ambiance but also as a tool to unite the people in the room in the reality of the space, making it so that everyone in the room can "speak the same language." Significantly, this observation suggests the appearance of a democratic design in Gaga's structure, seeming to place all practitioners and the instructor on the same level in terms of their relationship to movement, despite the reality that the instructor is an expert, heavily trained, and vetted by Naharin.

After some initial self-consciousness around some of the prompts, Tony recognizes that no one else in the class is looking at him or seems to care what he looks like, allowing him to feel pleasure and to express a wide range of emotions vulnerably, without external judgment. One of his most powerful insights about Gaga's efficacy in overcoming limitation comes from a realization around negotiating movements with contrasting dynamics simultaneously. He is asked to layer contradictory prompts on top of one another by shaking the upper body vigorously while maintaining a fluid, seaweed-like sensation in the lower body and then switching back and forth. He states: "The metaphors disengage the logic side of my brain. It gives my left brain nothing to hook into. That's a good thing" (gagadiary.com). Here, Tony elucidates that Gaga uses a tactic of dynamic confusion to facilitate connection in the body. After exerting energy and feeling burn of effort, Tony learns not to collapse into the exhaustion or feel overwhelmed by the intensity, but rather to feel energized and ready to exert even more

energy (which satisfies Gaga's goal of being "available for anything"). Further, Tony connects his research from Gaga class to his life outside the studio:

I've spent my life manipulating things, moving my hands from my hands, like they're implements attached to my body. For the first time, I feel my arms moved by an echo traveling through my body. Instead of forcing it, making it happen, what if I just allow it to emerge? Maybe that's the way I want to move through life (gagadiary.com).

By suggesting that Gaga's principles can be integrated into his life outside the dance studio, Tony exemplifies Gaga's blurring of art and everyday life that situates it in the realm of the popular. The way he is able to relate the Gaga principles to a useful way to be in the real world also seems to suggest that he will keep returning to class. As opposed to a Gaga/dancers class that would frame the embodied research as a way to approach other kinds of dancing, Gaga/people's practical applications appeal to return customers for Gaga/people classes. This appeal to markets beyond the scope of concert dance further supports Gaga's categorization as a popular form.

In spite of its discursive offering as a practice for anyone and everyone both in Israel and globally, Gaga is highly controlled in terms of who can take it and who can teach it. My first experience taking a Gaga/people class was in the gymnasium/recreational community space of Congregation Beth Elohim (CBE) in Park Slope, Brooklyn. CBE is a Reform Jewish synagogue located in a wealthy neighborhood. Although both Reform congregations and the neighborhood of Park Slope are technically accessible to anyone (CBE's website states that the congregation "welcomes seekers from all Jewish Movements and other faiths"), Park Slope is a wealthy neighborhood and CBE's religious affiliation inevitably create a barrier for mass attendance (www.cbek.org). While the makeup of class participants ranged in age (I was in my late

twenties and the oldest person looked to be in their mid-sixties), the class mostly consisted of presumably Jewish women who were currently or former dancers.⁶⁴ In September 2012, a month of Gaga/people classes were held in the JCC in the Upper West Side of Manhattan, another Jewish community space. Gaga/people as an entity has never claimed to be “for” any particular group of people, and neither CBE nor JCC are exclusively Jewish spaces. However, it is clear that those running Gaga/people in the United States utilized a small, niche community, likely appealing to the connection between American Jews and the culture of Israel, to get its foothold in New York City. The “people,” as Cohen-Stratyner (2001) has problematized, is a misleading generalization and another of Gaga’s contradictions as a form that purports to circulate among and accommodate the masses.

In more recent years, Gaga/people classes have typically been available only in dance studios, already elite spaces in terms of their relationship to high art, as well as their barriers to entry. Class rates depend on the price each studio sets for classes and, though not more expensive than a normal dance class, range from \$16 USD for students and seniors to \$18 for a normal slot. That the price is discounted for seniors in particular would seem to support the idea of availability for “the people,” though these seniors would have to be able to afford the cost and have the time and accessibility to attend. In January of 2012 Gaga U.S. became more organized and formalized and stopped being

⁶⁴I presume that the practitioners were Jewish because the class took place in a synagogue, although I recall that I was made aware of the class via an email I received after taking a class in a dance studio in Manhattan and signing up for a mailing list. I also presume that many of the other practitioners were dancers or former dancers based on their willingness to approach the movement and the way they held their bodies before sinking into the Gaga movement. They appeared as though they had training to coordinate their limbs and carriage.

available as regular classes in some studios like Peridance. Only more infrequent master classes, workshops and intensives have been available, costing more for per session due to their exclusivity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, like many movement classes formerly taught in person, Gaga/people classes moved online. The Zoom platform made Gaga/people more available than ever with classes offered daily in multiple time zones. Hundreds of participants from around the world logged in to take classes with Naharin and Gaga instructors, all teaching from their homes, also located all over the globe. Even on Zoom, individual classes cost \$18 USD and an unlimited monthly pass costs \$68 USD. Interestingly, the online format led to two additional offerings of Gaga: Gaga/seated classes, “for those who find it challenging to exercise while standing,” and Gaga/metodika, “for everyone seeking a dynamic exploration of Gaga’s essence” (gagapeople.com). While Gaga/metodika (methodics) had previously been offered as a part of Gaga/dancers intensives, the addition of this course indicates that an increase in Gaga’s general exposure via the online format resulted in Gaga spreading to more practitioners interested in developing their Gaga practice. Regardless of the broader appeal and scope of accessibility, the growth of Gaga does not negate the reality that despite being available to “everyone,” it is already a selective group that knows about, can afford, and has online access to Gaga.

In terms of teaching Gaga in any capacity, almost all instructors in Israel are current or former dancers with the Batsheva Dance Company and are approved by Naharin to teach. The few instructors from outside Batsheva have been specifically trained and approved by Naharin or, in the United States, by Saar Harari as a former

Batsheva Dancer. Anyone who participates in a Gaga intensive is required to sign a waiver stipulating that under no circumstance can they claim to be teaching Gaga or use Gaga in any course offering. This sense of propriety is characteristic of European high art and the perpetuation of the notion of a sole creative genius who has ultimate knowledge and expertise over the process of artistic creation. It is clear that despite being available for anyone to participate, Gaga is inextricably tied to Naharin and Batsheva, reinforcing their high art status and rendering moot any questions of ownership or authorship.

As of the writing of this dissertation there is an intensive teacher training available at the Suzanne Dellal Center in Tel Aviv that has been put on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The training includes a mandatory probationary period of two months, after which an “artistic team” invites the participant to continue with the training. The substantial fee for the training, 35,000 ILS (roughly \$10,700 USD) is non-refundable regardless of whether one is accepted into the training past the probationary stage. Significantly, applicants must audition for the training and are required to have strong backgrounds in dance and Gaga, and be proficient in English. That trainees need extensive background and teaching experience in dance speaks not only to Gaga’s relationship to dance and high art, but also establishes a barrier for access to mastery contradictory to Gaga/people’s foundational principles of inclusivity and availability.

The practitioner’s experience is deeply mediated through the relationship to their instructors. In his online diary, Tony frequently describes the physical appearances and dress of the Gaga/people instructors. He notes the casual dress and often pedestrian appearance of the instructors in terms of what they wear to teach, suggesting surprise at how they do not necessarily look like his preconceived idea of a professional dancer:

rather than tight leotards that show the lines of their bodies, they instead wear athletic shorts or t-shirts, baggy clothing, or sport disheveled hairstyles. Their pedestrian appearances suggest that they are on the same level as the Gaga/people practitioners - that there are no barriers in terms of appearance or uniform that would exclude anyone from the experience. Yet, he also notes how the appearances of the instructors seem to contrast with proficiency for executing the directives given to the rest of the class. By comparing his movement with the instructors, his observations distance him from the quality of the instructor's movements. He notes how his movement (and, as he observes, the movement of others in the room) fails to look like theirs or does not achieve the same embodied textures:

She moves beautifully in 3D. I move at right angles, 2D. I run out of unique positions after five seconds. Hing[ing] and unhing[ing] her joints, her unique positions seem to be infinite. I'm aware of the space around me, and of how little of it I use. (gagadiary.com)

His realizations idealize the instructor's abilities, making him feel inferior. Throughout the diary, however, Tony documents a gradual recognition of his ability to translate the prompts into his own body and have what he claims to be a transformative experience at his own pace. At play here is a common tension created by and present within popular forms between a status of expertise or mastery of the form and pedestrian adoption of and ownership over the same material.

The blurring of dance and everyday life is a compelling bridge that Gaga/people fosters among its participants, and is the way to ensure its relevance outside of the dance studio. Halfway through Tony's month-long study, he discusses a transformative moment when, after realizing the vulnerability of one of his instructors, he realizes that Gaga can serve as a tool to actively transform his experience of embodied reality. He recounts an

instructor coming to class “with something on her mind. She plugs in her phone into the sound system, and drops to the floor. When she takes her place in the center of the room, whatever heaviness she walked in with is gone” (gagadiary.com). Tony realizes that Gaga provides a process through which to shift inner and outer manifestations of stress or hardship. The Gaga/people class ultimately empowers him, making him realize that the lessons of Gaga translate beyond the classroom. “I’m not just an observer,” he notes, “I’m a participant. A co-creator. Together, we listen. We give into our fantasies. We co-construct our reality.” The realizations that he and his instructor are more alike than he originally considered, and that they can both use Gaga practically to help cope with the burdens of daily life speak to how the specific dynamics of Gaga/people foster the leap from contained studio practice to a tool for living one’s life.

The voices of Gaga’s “people” are often further mediated through instructors’ representations of their experience. In an interview Danielle Agami describes Gaga for people as a “playground” for personal, emotional experimentation. After a Gaga class, for example, Agami claims:

You’re probably going to forget about the thoughts you had 50 minutes before. They will come back, but I took your brain away from work, from problems, and then you have some strength and positive energy to deal with your issues... So many people talked about [how] they left their job because of Gaga; they left their husband because of Gaga. (quoted in Kourlas 2011)

Gaga in its “low art” manifestation is a practice of personal re-invention: a self-confrontation, catharsis, transformation, or escape. This account reveals Gaga as an opportunity to explore the unknown as a physiological and perhaps psychological oasis formed by and in response to imposing environments. Far from identifying any aesthetic value, Agami frames Gaga as a strategy for working against the dominating hegemonic

structures that cannot fully account for personal needs, to reclaim agency over the individual's opinions, needs, and desires.

A porous structure between high and low art

Gaga/people's relationship to the Batsheva Dance Company is both ubiquitous and obscured. Formerly only associated with Batsheva as Naharin's movement language, Gaga has morphed into its own entity, Gaga Movement Ltd. Once prominently featured on the main page of the Batsheva Dance Company's website, Gaga now has its own website, Facebook page, and Instagram handle which all advertise classes, intensives, and workshops happening all over the world. Information about Gaga as a movement philosophy and practice is still two clicks away from the home page of the Batsheva Dance Company website at the very bottom of the "About" section. The logo in the upper corner on the Gaga website features the phrase "Gaga. people. dancers" suggesting that Gaga offers the opportunity for anyone and everyone to become, or consider themselves dancers. In one sense, the problematic differentiation between "dancers" and "people" positions and categorizes the latter explicitly as non-dancers, reinforcing the binary opposition between these modes of identification and undermining any aesthetic connection between what "people" could do with this language versus what "dancers" will. Thus, Gaga has both high and low art manifestations that are discursively positioned as separate practices. As Dodds classifies, high art typically signals that which is profound, singular, individualized, and that which signals the universal experience of embodiment, time, and place. Low art tends to be viewed as that which is serialized and exists for commercial gain (Dodds 2011, 51). Upon closer examination, these distinctions

are not as discrete as they may seem. Indeed, in terms of Gaga Naharin already blurs these binary distinctions. He states: “I don’t think of it [as] popular, high art, street, stage, classical, modern, flamenco, hip hop- I don’t think about it. For me it’s about abolishing the recognition. I say sometimes I take form and I take content and I put them in a blender” (quoted in Heymann 2007). Therefore, in another, contradictory sense, the dancers/people dual track blurs this stratification in that the class itself is largely identical. Further, even the Gaga/people iteration on its own offers the possibility for anyone to achieve the individualized, transcendent experience while poised to profit from a larger market than dancers and audiences of the Batsheva Dance Company.

In its early years, the Gaga/people website featured a YouTube video of a Gaga “person,” Academy Award-winning actress, Natalie Portman, sharing her reflections on Gaga:

Gaga had a huge impression on me because there was so much about ... finding your own way of moving. That it wasn’t like ‘this is the step and you have to do it, it was ‘what do *you* do with this idea? Take this idea and then make the movement that your body makes.’ And everyone’s movement is different ... people heal their injuries with this language; people express themselves in a very personal way with this language. The language isn’t a set vocabulary that everyone has to learn. It’s like, a vocabulary that you’re asked to create yourself, too. So ... every person who uses this language will have their own dialect.⁶⁵

The irony of an internationally recognizable movie star made popular through mainstream film roles, advocating for a practice of “the people” should not be lost.⁶⁶

⁶⁵This “Production Interview” clip, from the documentary *Mr. Gaga* (2015), used to be available on the Gaga website. Portman’s clip is no longer featured on the website, perhaps speaking to its evolution as an entity unto itself that doesn’t need the association with the Hollywood star to garner attention.

⁶⁶For a list of Portman’s work in film, see <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000204/>

Although Portman's films are mainstream and not necessarily considered high art, she became famous as a theater performer and her status as a known actress seems to elevate her above the layman. She also won the Academy Award for her leading role in Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* (2010) in which she played a professional ballet dancer. She reportedly studied ballet intensively for the role, and although she had a dance double for most of her dance scenes (American Ballet Theatre soloist Sarah Lane), Portman was praised and credited for performing some of the dance scenes herself (Jennings 2011). Even after it was revealed that Portman did not perform to the extent the Academy awarded her for, her affiliation with ballet as a high art form remained powerful validation for her artistic image.⁶⁷ She is not a professional dancer therefore she is a non-dancer and rightly endorsing Gaga/people as a representative "of the people." Yet she is an elite movie star, and therefore not an "everyday" person. And she is perceived as a dancer because of a film role, and therefore not fully in the category of Gaga/people. It is precisely this irony of promotional discourse surrounding Gaga that lies between the dancer/people divide. With Portman as its spokesmodel, Gaga/people signals its mass circulation and its status as a practice for the average person, yet it is validated by its affiliation with celebrity status. Despite advocating for the validity of the individual's voice within Gaga/people, Portman's voice as a celebrity is imbued with cultural and social capital, a soft form of power based on an individual's level of education, social

⁶⁷After working together in *Black Swan*, Portman married her dance partner in the movie, Benjamin Millepied, a ballet dancer and choreographer who was a principal dancer in the prestigious New York City Ballet from 2002-2011, creator and head of the L.A. Dance Project from 2011-2014, and the Director of Dance at the Paris Opera Ballet from 2014-2016 (Benjamin Millepied Wikipedia page). This association undoubtedly reinforced her connection to the high art world of ballet and concert dance.

association and status that serves as a form of social exchange (Bourdieu 1977, 1985).

Cultural capital assumes cultural mastery and indicates social status. This power grants Portman the authority and gravitas to claim this language as significant and powerful.

The contradictions of Portman's positioning go beyond the level of discourse, as well. Portman's statement emphasizes the individuality and originality of expression that Gaga affords as a strategy for destroying externally imposed limitations on the practitioner's own bodily terms. Yet, the practice is not an opportunity to let the imagination run wild: it is contained within Naharin's corporeal grammar and syntax, eliciting specific physical qualities that often generate improvisations with more visible similarities than differences. What purports to be a diversity of voices can be perceived as a homogenous language. Portman's claims about Gaga/people suggest that each person's corporeal voicing is personal and agentic, even though these voices are still highly mediated as dialectical re-articulations of the language that Naharin has designed.

In recent years Gaga has moved beyond dance studios to achieve wider recognition. For a limited time, *Mr. Gaga* (2015) was available for mass viewing on the popular streaming platform Netflix. Naharin is also a subject in the inaugural series on Netflix called *Move* (2020). The fact that he has been featured on two Netflix programs suggests Naharin's notoriety and popularity as a cultural figure. Promoted on a show about figures currently "shaping the art of movement around the world," Naharin is one among a select, geographically and stylistically diverse group of dancemakers that represent and define contemporaneity in dance.⁶⁸ Although Naharin's episode

⁶⁸Other episodes in the series feature American Jookin and street artists Jon Boogz and Lil Buck, Spanish dancer Israel Galván, Jamaican Dancehall figure Kimiko

predominantly features Naharin's own voice and perspective and several casual interviews with current Batsheva Company dancers, it contains segments highlighting Gaga/people and the ways in which it can serve as therapy and rehabilitation.

As Batsheva Company veteran Adi Zlatin mentions in *Move* (2020), although dancers inevitably deal with pain, they are not specifically trained in how to deal with pain. For Zlatin, Gaga provides "tools to keep going with your dance," noting that she feels like she can "dance until I die." Notably, this particular dancer has been with the company for around twenty years and noted that she was considered old for a dance company. She recently returned to performing after pregnancy and childbirth required her to step away from professional performing for three years and stated that her background in Gaga enabled her to come back to performing in a stronger place than when she left. Zlatin's testimony problematically equates dancers in their thirties with being too old for the professional stage and pregnant dancers with being handicapped. This segment positions Gaga as the answer to these "limitations," and points to a moment of blurring between what it means to be a dancer (young, having full functional control over one's body) and what it means to be a person (old, a mother, without total agency over one's body).

Move (2020) culminates with a scene with Naharin teaching a Gaga/people class as a fundraiser for the association for civil rights in Israel in an airplane hangar. As discussed in Chapter 2, Naharin resists claiming the presence of politics in his choreographic work. Yet it is through Gaga/people that Naharin makes his most explicit

Versatile, and Akram Khan, a dancer and choreographer from the U.K. fusing contemporary forms with explicitly Indian kathak.

political statement. Naharin, assisted by Zlatin, stand atop a large elevated platform encircled by a mass of people with a range of ages and movement abilities.⁶⁹ Over a headset microphone, Naharin gives instructions for everyone to “feel silly” and to laugh at themselves, emphasizing how a feeling of “silliness” translates to motion that appears free, loose, and expansive in the body. Naharin is actively smiling, holding his arms out with his chests open and lifted, and noodling his pelvis and lower body. The practitioners imitate his smile and his gestures, though they appear less confident in their ability to move in a “silly” manner. Naharin’s prompt indicates that movement itself is for fun, enjoyable, and not required to be serious: qualities stereotypically associated with popular culture and low art, as opposed to the serious work of high art. Thus, the scene demonstrates the presence of quotidian experience within Gaga, thereby elevating everyday experience to a higher level, while simultaneously making Gaga appear relatable to the untrained layman.

Move (2020) also contains a scene featuring Naharin teaching a Gaga/people class to a circle of elderly people seated in chairs. Naharin sits in a chair among the participants and instructs them to feel a floating sensation without leaving their chairs. The participants lift their arms and lift their chests. He then asks them to release the float without collapsing. Naharin’s mother is one of the participants, speaking further to the insider nature of access to Gaga. Naharin instructs her to fully release her weight into the chair without losing the buoyant quality in her upper body. The scene also contains a moment where Naharin asks the participants to “really slap” their bodies and to take in

⁶⁹There appears to be a participant in a wheelchair among the many able-bodied participants.

the stinging sensation and translate it as feeling alive and resilient. In this segment Naharin uses Gaga as a way to heighten and improve the senses as a way to make them more alive and more sensitized. At the end of the scene Naharin's voiceover addresses Gaga's rehabilitative quality. He claims that Gaga will allow him to continue dancing even as his body ages: "I hope I will continue to dance as long as I live: even if I get sick or handicapped in a wheelchair. I can imagine not choreographing, but I cannot imagine no longer dancing" (*Move* 2020). Naharin's expressed desire to push the limits of anyone at any age indicates that he is also thinking about his own aging body and its implications for his ability to dance and create dances.

Naharin does not base his claim on any specific scientific or medical research, yet he seems to capitalize on a general acceptance that movement contributes to overall wellness and helps to combat the effects of ageing. In my notes from a Gaga/people intensive in New York City at the Mark Morris Dance Center in 2015 I noted the presence of a researcher, who introduced himself only by the first name Amit. When I wrote to the U.S. coordinator Saar Harari of Gaga to follow up on who this was and what, if anything, had come out of his observations I received a brief, dismissive, and defensive reply from Harari: "I must say its [sic] a bit surprising that you write your dissertation about Gaga and you don't know that we don't allow any watching in Gaga? Its [sic] as basic as no mirrors!" (Saar Harari, email message, July 30, 2019). In a subsequent email Harari admitted that Amit had "worked with us for few years [sic], and maybe watched some rep sessions only!" Thus, although it is possible that published scientific research on Gaga exists, I was both unable to locate it and ridiculed for merely inquiring about the possibility that anyone could so much as observe a Gaga class for any reason. Ultimately,

this suggests that Gaga's connection to wellness or anti-ageing is not widely substantiated outside of personal claims, and that Naharin's desire to do so in popular media reveals more about a personal agenda to advocate for Gaga's broad effectiveness for anyone seeking to improve their health bodily wellbeing.

Indeed, beyond cementing Gaga's place outside of choreography, Naharin's sentiment connects Gaga, the foundation of his artistic work, to the potential for a lasting legacy beyond concert dance. By translating Gaga into a popular form by offering it explicitly to non-dancers, Naharin blurs the lines separating high and low art such that his style and "brand" as a choreographer remains elevated while appearing to be more broadly accessible, both physically and aesthetically. This move ensures the popularity of his work as well as the staying power of his relevance beyond both his ability to create choreographic work and perhaps beyond his own life. Gaga/people thus transmutes Naharin's ongoing creative project into the bodies of people outside professional dance circles, while allowing him to retain ownership, and therefore cultural capital, over the aesthetic output and transformative results that Gaga might offer its practitioners.

Authorship/Ownership

The proximity of all versions of Gaga to the Batsheva Dance Company seem contingent upon Naharin as a concert dance choreographer and his connection to the company. In other words, Gaga does not "belong" exclusively to Batsheva. Rather, Gaga is associated with Naharin who happened to be the artistic director of Batsheva until

2018.⁷⁰ Gaga/people, then, is intimately and inextricably tied to Naharin himself and his status as creative genius, raising questions around authorial control, even as a popular form theoretically “for the people.” Issues of authorship and ownership have long plagued dance as an artform that is both ephemeral and easily circulated. In her monograph, *Choreographing Copyright* (2015), Anthea Kraut discusses the many implications and contradictions of individual choreographers earning legal rights of ownership over choreographic works for concert stages as well as the more commercial stage of Broadway. Kraut also deals with collectively generated social dances such as the Black bottom, and how ownership gets complicated along racial lines. Her research reveals that many twentieth century choreographers specifically sought recognition for and within the Broadway realm, a space associated with the common cultural sphere, as opposed to the “high art” space of concert dance. Kraut emphasizes the labor of marginalized individuals whose contributions to the choreographic process and final aesthetic product that were elided in the process of assigning authorship and ownership over dance works.

Kraut’s conclusions about the strategic proximity of high and low art forms rely on David Savran’s *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (2009) which describes an anxiety for theater professionals of the early twentieth century around the influence from other groups, distanced themselves to create “serious theater” resulting in the hierarchizing of cultural practices (168). This history speaks to the tensions around authorship in dance, as well as the slipperiness of whose

⁷⁰Naharin continues to create new works for the Batsheva Company as a house choreographer.

bodies actually contribute to the creative product. While high art has depicted or represented common life experiences or emotions, its format of presentation in more elite institutional spaces accessible by paid ticket as opposed to more widely circulating social or popular venues, reinforces its association with the socially designated highbrow category of artmaking, as opposed to the lowbrow constructions of craftsmanship or social dance.

Kraut asserts that choreographers of Western concert dance have claimed authorship as a way to make artistic claims on and for monetary gain from their work. Naharin exhibits the same kind of gate-keeping with Gaga. As Kraut's work discusses, issues of authorship in the arts in general were complicated by poststructuralist theories put forward by Roland Barthes in *The Death of the Author* (1967) and Michel Foucault in *What is an Author* (1969). Both essays displace the author as ultimate arbiters of meaning, which perhaps contributed to the effort by choreographers to claim their works around this time in the United States. As I have argued in previous chapters, one of the defining characteristics, and one of many contradictions surrounding Naharin and his work, is his resistance to revealing or claiming specific meaning within his choreography. "What is often unusual about Ohad," claimed Jim Vincent, the artistic director of contemporary repertory company Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, "[I]s that he perceives his dancers as deeply human rather than just instruments of dance.... As a result, his choreography can be interpreted on a number of different levels, from the enjoyable to the deeply contemplative" (Josephs 2006). Here again, establishing a contrast between human and dancer serves to elevate dance and the choreographic representation of the human experience, while relegating the "human experience" to a more basic, shallow

level for enjoyment rather than deep meaning. Contradictorily, this reinforces a classic argument that divides high and low art.

Naharin's rejection of meaning in his work would seem to align him with the postmodernist and poststructuralist displacement of ownership of meaning from author to audience. However, as I have argued previously, popular readings of Naharin's choreography, as well as the way Gaga/dancers and Naharin's repertory are taken up by modern dance companies, speak to the persistence of modernist tropes of authorship that remain prevalent when it comes to Naharin's choreographic contributions.

By extension, this would appear to be true for Gaga/people, as well, in that much of Naharin's choreography comes out of Gaga, that Gaga is offered as a toolbox for training dancers regardless of whose choreography they are helping to create or execute, and that Gaga classes are widely available. Yet, Gaga/people is just as complex and contradictory as choreography when it comes to Naharin's authorial presence within the practice as well as around Gaga as a more broadly circulating, marketed product.

Gaga/people provides a site to hold the contradiction of high and low without resolving it. Like the contradictions embedded within the Gaga method that serve to transform the possibilities for movement, the dancers/people and high/low art divisions that announce themselves as binaries effectively hold together for Naharin's benefit.

Conclusion

This chapter engages Gaga's iteration for non-dancers, Gaga/people. Not only does Gaga/people differentiate Gaga from other kinds of somatic and dance practices, but the separate iterations expose a paradoxical vision for Gaga as it circulates among

dancers and non-professional practitioners. The dual tracks reveal the instability of the discrete categories of “dancers” and “people,” as well as Naharin’s ambition to secure Gaga’s longevity outside the dance world, while maintaining his status as its creator.

DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

As Naharin's choreographic aesthetic and movement language are declared quintessential examples of contemporaneity on international stages by dance critics and within public discourse, Gaga serves a compelling lens through which to approach the contentious descriptor of "the contemporary." As an Israeli artist trained in Western dance techniques, creating work in Israel on an international company of dancers in the present day, Naharin occupies a unique position to interrogate the nature of the relationship between time, geographical place, and genre that underpin the slippery classification of the contemporary in dance. This project engages how Naharin articulates the terms of inclusion in this elusive category.

Naharin as a figure, his choreographic work, and his movement method are wrought with paradoxes. In terms of Naharin's relationship to Israel and its politics, I address the significance of Naharin's declared non-positionality, and frame his refusal to make definitive claims about his work in terms of political critique as a critical stance. This illuminates Gaga, and thus the contemporary, as a space for enduring conflict and contradiction without offering solutions.

Gaga's nature as an improvised practice that demands constant motion and produces extreme movement also evidences a (re)turn to motion in dance of the contemporary moment. Gaga's particular physicality engages critiques of the current moment that destabilize an ontological relationship between meaning and movement.

Naharin's positioning of Gaga as a toolbox rather than a set technique allows it to revive of other Western forms such as ballet and modern dance. The mutually beneficial

relationship benefits these older dance forms remain relevant as they adapt to new conditions in the twenty-first century, and Naharin's repertory and reputation continue to be celebrated as these companies perform his work. Gaga's major dynamic and pedagogical principle of availability speaks to a contemporary expression of modernist tenets of authenticity and universality.

Examining Gaga/people reveals the muddiness around the classifications of high art concert dance and practices of the popular. The manner in which Gaga circulates within studios for professionals as well as in spaces for non-dancers speaks to Naharin's desire for Gaga to make an impact beyond concert dance stages. This suggests that Naharin wants to ensure the enduring significance of his legacy beyond his choreographic work which will inevitable become dated as it ages with time. In this way, Gaga's popular iteration reflects the contradictory nature of the contemporary as that which is relevant in the current moment as well as a term that names a specific temporal moment with specific aesthetic qualities.

These issues place the contradictory nature of the contemporary in stark relief. Indeed, this project shows that if the contemporary in dance can be defined at all it is as a fluid space of contradictions: old and new, aesthetically specific and without set form, of specific places and people and for everyone, everywhere. Ultimately, in the same way that Gaga resists being pinned down as a form - in constant motion, morphing between embodied sensory ideas, and holding dynamic contradiction, the contemporary also refuses to be definitively qualified.

In response to the worldwide shutdown in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Gaga classes have proliferated on Zoom, reaching practitioners who would otherwise not have access to local classes. Gaga's mass circulation during the pandemic has cemented it as a practice deeply embedded in everyday home life. While it is too early to determine how and the degree to which Gaga's significance will endure in the wake of this global event, it is clear that Gaga's mass online accessibility will impact the lives of many, as well as Gaga itself as a movement practice. That Gaga so readily and easily capitalized on the pandemic reveals the ambitions of its creator and the institution of Batsheva to reach mass audiences. Gaga's unique position as a form that appears in both the realm of high art and, simultaneously, the mundane space of the home gives it the potential to remain a practice of renewal and that which affirms life and possibilities for bodies in confinement. Future projects would account for the degree to which Gaga remains a popular global practice, as well as the ways its digital manifestation impacts the content of the classes. As Naharin is still alive, choreographing, and expanding Gaga's global reach, there is more research to be done. Like Naharin, the legacy and future of the contemporary is yet to be seen.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2007. "Return to Half-Ruins: Memory, Postmemory, and Living History in Palestine." In *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, edited by Ahmad H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod, 77-104. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Acoccella, Joan. 2019. "Must the Show Go On?" *The New Yorker*, July 1, 2019.
- Agamben, Giorgio. 2009. "What is the Contemporary?" In *What is an Apparatus?* Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ahmed, Sarah. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge.
- Albright, Ann Cooper. 2010. *Encounters With Contact: Dancing Contact Improvisation in College*. Oberlin: Oberlin College Dance and Theater Program
- Aldor, Gaby. 2003. "The Borders of Contemporary Israeli Dance: 'Invisible Unless in Final Pain.'" *Dance Research Journal* 35, no. 1: 81-97.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. "Consumption, Duration and History." In *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Au, Susan. 1988. *Ballet and Modern Dance*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Azoulay, Ariella. 2011. "Declaring the State of Israel: Declaring a State of War." *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 2: 265-285.
- Azoulay, Ariella and Adi Ophir. 2013. *The One-State Condition: Occupation and Democracy in Israel/Palestine*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Banes, Sally. 1987. *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.
- Barba, Fabian. 2017. "Quito-Brussels: A Dancer's Cultural Geography." In *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*, edited by Mark Franko. New York: Oxford University Press. Oxford Handbooks Online.
- Barghouti, Omar. 2011. *BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Barucha, Rustom. 2000. *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking through Theater in the Age of Globalization*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1983. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e).

- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Malden: Polity Press.
- . 2011. "Migration and identities in the globalized world." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37, no. 4: 425–435.
- Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Brin Ingber, Judith. 2011. *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Browning, Barbara. 1995. *Resistance in Motion*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Burke, Siobhan. 2011. "Gaga from the Source." *Dance Magazine*, October 5, 2010.
- Burt, Ramsay. 2004. "Undoing postmodern dance history." *Constructing Contemporary Dance Colloquium*, October 9, 2004. <http://sarma.be/docs/767>.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Chatterjea, Ananya. 2013. "On the Value of Mistranslations and Contaminations: The Category of 'Contemporary Choreography' in Asian Dance." *Dance Research Journal* 45, no.1 (April): 4-21.
- Chazin-Bennahum, Judith. 1994. *The ballets of Antony Tudor: Studies in Psyche and Satire*. New York: Oxford University press.
- Cohen, Selma Jeanne. (1974) 1992. *Dance as a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present*. Second edition. Princeton: Princeton Book Company, Publishers.
- Cohen-Stratynner, Barbara. 2001/02. "Social Dance: Contexts and Definitions." *Dance Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (Winter): 121-124.
- Cooper, Michael. "Cedar Lake Ballet's Closing Reveals the Perils of Relying on a Single Donor." *The New York Times*, March 27, 2015.
- Crompton, Sarah. 2015. "Elevated visions: how William Forsythe changed the face of dance." *The Guardian*, March 7, 2015.
- de Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall.

- Berkeley: University of California Press.
- DeFrantz, Thomas F. 2011. *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- DeFrantz, Thomas F, ed. 2002. *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1998. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Desmond, Jane C., ed. 1997. *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Dixon Gottschild, Brenda. 1996. "Stripping the Emperor: George Balanchine and the Americanization of Ballet" in *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Dodds, Sherril, ed. 2019. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Dance Studies*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- . 2011. *Dancing on the Canon: Embodiments of Value in Popular Dance*. Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave.
- Dunning, Jennifer. 1998. *Alvin Ailey: A Life in Dance*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- Efrat, Zvi. 2002. "Borderlinedisorder" *Anthology for the Israeli Pavilion. 8th international architecture exhibition La Biennale di Venezia*. <http://www.efrat-kowalsky.co.il/texts/borderline-disorder/>.
- Emery, Lynne Fauley. 1988. *Black Dance From 1619 to Today*, second, revised edition. Hightstown: Princeton Book Company, Publishers.
- Eshel, Ruth. 2003. "Concert Dance in Israel." *Dance Research Journal* 35, no. 1: 61-80.
- Fabian, Johannes. 1983. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fisher, Jennifer. 2003. *Nutcracker Nation: How an Old World Ballet Became a Christmas Tradition in the New World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- . 2012. "The Swan Brand: Reframing the Legacy of Anna Pavlova." *Dance Research Journal* 44, no. 1 (Summer): 50-67.
- Foster, Susan Leigh. 1986. *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary*

- American Dance*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- . 1997. "Dancing Bodies," In *Meaning in Motion*, edited by Jane C. Desmond, 235-258. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2015. "Performing Authenticity and the Gendered Labor of Dance." *Fluid States- Performances of Unknowing*, November 30, 2015. www.fluidstates.org.
- Franko, Mark and Alessandra Nicifero. 2018. *Choreographing Discourses: A Mark Franko Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Franko, Mark. 2003. "Majestic Drag: Monarchical Performativity and the King's Body Theatrical." *The Drama Review (1988-)* 47, no. 2 (Summer): 71-87.
- . 1995. *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Galili, Deborah Friedes. 2012. *Contemporary Dance in Israel*. Bubok.
- Galili, Deborah Freides. 2013. "Reframing the Recent Past: Issues of Reconstruction in Israeli Contemporary Dance." In *Dance on Its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*. Melanie Bales and Karen Eliot, Eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2015. "Moving Beyond Technique with Ohad Naharin in the Twenty-First Century." *Dance Chronicle* 32, no. 3: 360-392.
- Genné, Beth. 2000. "Creating a Canon, Creating the 'Classics' in Twentieth-Century British Ballet." *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 18, no. 2 (Winter): 132-162.
- Harman, Mishy. Israel Story Podcast. Episode 21: 68 and Counting Part II. May 30, 2016.
- Herschthal, Eric. 2011. "The Choreography That Binds." *The New York Jewish Week*, December 6, 2011. <https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/the-choreography-that-binds/>.
- Heymannbrothersfilms. 2007. *Out of Focus*. YouTube. Accessed 16 August 2016.
- . 2018. "The full story that did not enter 'Mr. Gaga.' The 'Jubilee bells' (Israel celebrated 50.)" May 2, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGAJIYxtlJg>
- Heymann, Tomer. 2015. *Mr. Gaga: film about Ohad Naharin and Batsheva Dance*

Company.”

- Homans, Jennifer. 2010. *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet*. New York: Random House.
- Horwitz, Jane. 2017. “‘Mr. Gaga’ Review: Intimate Study of Choreographer Ohad Naharin.” *The Washington Post*. March 30, 2017.
- Ingber, Judith Brin, ed. 2011. *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Iyer, Nithya. 2015. “Decadance by the Batsheva Dance Company.” *Peril.com.au*, October 28, 2015.
- Jameson, Fredric and Masao Miyoshi, eds. 1998. *The Cultures of Globalization*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Jennings, Luke. 2011. “Black Swan: does it matter if Natalie Portman didn’t do all the dancing?” *The Guardian*, March 30, 2011.
- Joseph, Artur, Peter Handke and E. B. Ashton. 1970. "Nauseated by Language: From an Interview with Peter Handke." *The Drama Review* 15, No.1, (Autumn): 57-61.
- Josephs, Susan. 2006. “He’s a company man, after all.” *Los Angeles Times*, November 3,
- Jowitt, Deborah. 2009. “Ohad Naharin Brings the Gaga to BAM in Max.” *The Village Voice*, March 11, 2009
- Kaufman, Sarah. 2014. “Batsheva Dance Company’s ‘Sadeh21’: Full force, empty spectacle.” *The Washington Post*, November 19, 2014.
- Kedhar, Anusha. 2014. “Flexibility and Its Bodily Limits: Transnational South Asian Dancers in an Age of Neoliberalism.” *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 1 (April): 23-40.
- Kisselgoff, Anna. 2002. “Dance Review: Ambiguity as Text, A Blackboard as Backdrop.” *The New York Times*, May 2, 2002.
- . 2002. “Mari Kajiwara, 50, Dancer Known for Pure Modern Style.” *The New York Times*, January 12, 2002.
- . 1998. “When Dance and Politics Both Dig Their Heels In.” *The New York Times*, May 5, 1998.
- Kourlas, Gia. 2009. “Conjuring Up a World Where Images Abound.” *The New York*

- Times*, March 5, 2009.
- . 2011. "Twisting Body and Mind." *The New York Times*, August 12, 2011.
- Kraut, Anthea. 2015. *Choreographing Copyright: Race, Gender, and Intellectual Property Rights in American Dance*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kussell, Stacey Menchel. 2016. "Lord Gaga of Batsheva: Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin's new language of modern dance." *Tablet Magazine*, January 22, 2016.
- Kwan, San San. 2017. "When is Contemporary Dance?" *Dance Research Journal* 49, no. 3 (December): 38-52.
- La Rocco, Claudia. 2011. "A Propulsive, Stylized Spectacle, in Which Bodies Lurch Backward." *The New York Times*, December 11, 2011.
- Laermans, Rudi. 2015. *Moving Together: Theorizing and Making Contemporary Dance*. Amsterdam: Valiz.
- Lenihan, Jean. 2013. "Review: Alvin Ailey Dance Theater is spiritually awakened anew." *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 2013.
- Lepecki, André, ed. 2004. *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- . 2006. *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2012. "Introduction: Dance as Practice of Contemporaneity." In *Dance*. André Lepecki, ed. London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press.
- . 2014. "Contemporary Dance" In *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (2nd Edition). Michael Kelly, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Malnig, Julie. 2001. "Introduction." *Dance Research Journal* 33 (Winter): 7-10.
- Manning, Susan. 1988. "Review: Modernist Dogma and Post-modern Rhetoric: A Response to Sally Banes' *Terpsichore in Sneakers*." *The Drama Review* 32, no. 4 (Winter): 32-39.
- Marija, Rose. 2015. "BWW Review: BATSHEVA- The Young Ensemble is Performing at the Joyce Theater." *Broadway World*, October 2, 2015.
<https://www.broadwayworld.com/bwwdance/article/BWW-Review-BATSHEVA-The-Young-Ensemble-is-Performing-at-the-Joyce-Theater-20151002>.

- Martin, Randy. 1998. *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Massumi, Brian. 2015. *Politics of Affect*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mauss, Marcel. (1935) 1992. "Techniques of the Body." In *Incorporations*, edited by Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, 455-477. New York: Zone.
- Morris, Gay. 2006. *A Game for Dancers: Performing Modernism in the Postwar Years 1945-1960*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- . 2009. "Dance Studies/Cultural Studies." *Dance Research Journal* 41, no. 1 (Summer): 82-100.
- Naharin, Ohad. Interview with author, August 2016.
- Naharin, Ohad. 2013. "Why I choreograph: Ohad Naharin" *Dance Magazine*, October 1, 2013.
- Ness, Sally Ann. 2003. *Where Asia Smiles: An Ethnography of Philippine Tourism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Novack, Cynthia J. 1990. *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Osterweis, Ariel. 2013. "The Muse of Virtuosity: Desmond Richardson, Race, and Choreographic Falsetto." *Dance Research Journal* 45, no. 3 (Winter): 53-74.
- Perkovic, Jana. 2014. "Ohad Naharin- going Gaga is the difference between dancer and gymnast." *The Guardian*, March 7, 2014.
- Perpener III, John O. 2001. *African-American Concert Dance: The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Perron, Wendy, 2014. "What Exactly Is Contemporary Dance?" *Dance Magazine*, September 1, 2014.
- Portman Natalie. 2013. "Natalie Portman on Ohad Naharin's movement language Gaga – from Mr. Gaga by Tomer Heymann," YouTube video, 0:58, posted by "Mr.: Gaga: Ohad Naharin documentary by Tomer Heymann," November 25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFPx10T00bw>.
- . <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000204/>
- Quinlan, Meghan Ruth. 2016. "Gaga as Politics: A Case Study of Contemporary Dance

- Training.” PhD diss., University of California Riverside.
- . 2017. “Gaga as Metatechnique: Negotiating Choreography, Improvisation, and Technique in a Neoliberal Dance Market.” *Dance Research Journal* 49, no. 2 (August): 26-43.
- .2018. “Freedom to Compete: Neoliberal Contradictions in Gaga Intensives.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Competition*, edited by Sherril Dodds. New York: Oxford University Press. Oxford Handbooks Online.
- Ram, Uri. 2007. *The Globalization of Israel: McWorld in Tel Aviv, Jihad in Jerusalem*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Reynolds, Nancy and Malcolm McCormick. 2003. *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Rincke, Eva. 2019. *Joseph Pilates: A Biography*. Hightstown: Inner Strength Publishing.
- Rosenthal, Donna. 2003. *The Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Rossen, Rebecca. 2014. *Dancing Jewish: Jewish Identity in American Modern and Postmodern Dance*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rowe, Nicholas. 2009. “Post-Salvagism: Choreography and Its Discontents in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.” *Dance Research Journal* 41, no.1 (Summer): 45-68.
- Savigliano, Marta. 2009. “Worlding Dance and Dancing Out There in the World.” In *Worlding Dance*, edited by Susan Leigh Foster, 163-190. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 1995. *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*.
- Savran, David. 2009. *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Schaefer, Brian. 2017. “The Secret History of the Israeli Choreographer Ohad Naharin.” *The New Yorker*, February 1, 2017.
- Schwab, Kristen. 2015. “Watch the Trailer for the New Ohad Naharin Documentary.” *Dance Magazine*, November 9, 2015.
- Scolieri, Paul A. 2019. *Ted Shawn: His Life, Writings, and Dances*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Seibert, Brian. 2017. "Review: Ohad Naharin's 'Last Work' Isn't." *The New York Times*, February 5, 2017.
- Spiegel, Nina. 2013. *Embodying Hebrew Culture: Aesthetics, Athletics, and Dance in the Jewish Community of Mandate Palestine*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Srinivasan, Priya. 2011. *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Steinberg, Jessica. 2021. "Batsheva brings youth ensemble outside, for Deca Dance." *Times of Israel*, May 12, 2021.
- Subin, Anna Della. 2015. "Going Gaga for Ohad Naharin." *The New York Times Style Magazine*, September 19, 2015.
- Sulcas, Roslyn. "Dancing that Pulls Viewers Right out of their Seats." *The New York Times*, June 12, 2007.
- Tobias, Tobi. 2011. "Balanchine: Black & White." *Arts Journal*, May 15, 2011.
https://www.artsjournal.com/tobias/2011/05/balanchine_black_white.html
- Ulrich, Allan. 2014. "Batsheva Dance Company review: Unforgettable." *SFGate*, November 7, 2014.
- Verghis, Sharon. 2014. "Political Movement: Israeli dance troupe Batsheva stronger than ever." *The Australian*, February 8, 2014.
- Warnecke, Lauren. 2017. "Review: Batsheva Dance rails against convention, per usual, in 'Last Work.'" *Chicago Tribune*, January 29, 2017.
- Wingenroth, Lauren. 2017. "The Most Influential People in Dance Today: Ohad Naharin." *Dance Magazine*, June 19, 2017.
2015. "A toolbox for dancers: Choreographer Ohad Naharin Conveys his technique to Staatsballett Berlin." *Tanzraumberlin Magazine*. September/October 2015.
<https://www.tanzraumberlin.de/en/tanzbuero/trb-magazine/article/download-19/>
2020. *Move*. Season 1. Episode 2, "Ohad Naharin." 2020, Netflix.